

Date 27/05/2020



City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

**Children and Family Services**  
Civic Centre  
Glebe Street  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST4 1HH

Dear Parent/Carer/Guardian

### **Re-opening of schools in Stoke-on-Trent**

I am writing to update you on the city council's position with regards to the reopening of schools in the city from 1 June.

### **Reflections on lockdown**

The last nine weeks since schools shut have been difficult for many families. Along with the loss of routine, parents have had to get used to home schooling while many are working from home, others are furloughed or have lost their income and that's before we consider the impact of not seeing other friends and family members who play a huge part in people's daily lives. Many have also suffered loss or ill health as a result of coronavirus. As a full-time working mum with five children, I can empathise with the challenges that many parents have faced and how tough family life has been during lockdown.

At the city council I want to reassure you that children and young people continue to be our number one priority. I know that many schools have gone above and beyond in helping families through this; working incredibly hard to provide ongoing support throughout the coronavirus period and I send my sincere thanks to them all at this time. What is also clear is that any return to school for children and young people will not look the same as before Covid-19, as the pandemic has changed things for us all both in the short and longer-term.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the vast majority of schools have remained open during the coronavirus outbreak, supporting families of key workers and vulnerable children. A total of 81 of the 92 nursery, primary, secondary and special schools have been open. Eleven schools have been closed, but in these instances, the schools are part of multi-academy trusts and pupils have had access to other schools in the trust that are closest to their homes.

### **Preparing for phased return**

I know as parents you will be concerned about what happens next. We have been speaking to all Headteachers weekly since March about phased opening. The government has set plans for a phased return of some children to school from 1 June, a position we have been broadly supportive of, but taking account of the most up-to-date local evidence.

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The council has been contacted in recent weeks by a number of concerned teachers and parents about Coronavirus infection rates in Stoke-on-Trent. After experiencing a faster rate of increase in new cases in April than surrounding areas, we are now showing a 'clear downward trend'. The number of new cases every day is now half the level it was 14 days ago, when cases in the city were experiencing a significant increase. The city now has 275.6 coronavirus cases per 100,000 people, which is higher than the England average of 260.5 and a West Midlands average of 272.7, but lower than a number of other major urban areas in the region. The direction from our public health lead is that provided we all follow government guidance, maintain social distancing where possible and wash our hands often, the prevailing rate of infection or incidence of new cases should not be a barrier to children returning to school on 1 June. We continue to track very carefully the progress of the infection rate and will keep you up to date on this.

We will continue to work tirelessly with all education settings to plan for a safe, phased wider opening, taking account of national guidance, and ensuring schools have the right support. This work has been underway for a number of weeks, with input from Headteachers across the city. Each of our schools has an accountable body with the final legal responsibility to decide whether the school is ready to open. Every school is different, and the numbers of children they can safely accommodate will vary so we are working with schools on their own plans and risk assessments. We know that preparing for a broader reopening takes time and planning, hence our support for schools to reopen when the time is right for them. We also continue to liaise closely with the Department for Education, trade unions and other agencies on a range of areas including PPE, logistics and staffing. We continue to provide additional public health expertise to schools if required and have made an extended offer to schools to contact us if they need more support.

### **Reassurance for parents**

We know that many parents have their own concerns and individual circumstances to take into account, and are already speaking to schools about their plans. We are clear that, in line with government guidance, parents should not be put under pressure to send their children to school at this time and so I want to be clear that no fines will be applied to parents who decide to not send their children to school. However, we are encouraging parents to consider now how their children may start their return to school.

I want to close by assuring you that our overriding priority is and always will be the safety of our children and residents. Whatever the 'new normal' looks like, I am keen to ensure we continue to build on the many positives that have come out of the last nine weeks. You are always welcome to get in touch with me directly should you need to. Alternatively you can contact [education2020@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:education2020@stoke.gov.uk).

In the meantime, please stay safe.

Yours sincerely



**Sarah Parker**  
**Director – Children and Family Services**  
**Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

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