

Letter to all Headteachers/MAT CEOs

Please ask for: Your Link Officer

Date: 28 August 2020

Dear Colleague

Return to School

I hope that you have been able to find some time over the summer to have a break after the intensity and stresses of the lockdown period, followed by the recent turmoil about exams which has affected schools, teachers and leaders as well as colleagues whose own children's grades were cast in doubt.

I know that you and your colleagues in your schools have been working hard to ensure that you are ready to welcome pupils back at the beginning of term. In the final days of preparation, I would like to draw your attention to some key points:

- All schools should be in receipt of **briefings from SSE** which remain our main way of alerting you to important information including continuing changes in relation to government guidance. If you wish to add colleagues to this distribution list please contact SSE (SSE@somerset.gov.uk)
- We will also be continuing our **regular contact with the schools' associations**, SAPH, SASH and SEN.se, and they will continue to cascade information to their membership. This has worked so well that we will be adopting this as a way of working for general communications and not just for Covid-related information.
- **Wellbeing for Education Return**-The DfE announced on the 12th August funding to all Local Authorities to deliver a package of training for education staff to support wellbeing in relation to the return to school.
 - The Educational Psychology Service is coordinating this initiative and will be working with partners across the county. This training will be free, virtual and delivered as two twilights, and we anticipate all schools and settings will send at least one representative to the sessions.
 - The DfE are preparing a central programme, however we are keen to build on local initiatives that school/college staff have found helpful and we would like to hear from you so we can collate these, please email HStanley@somerset.gov.uk with this information.
 - Further information on a wellbeing advice Helpline for school staff will be distributed via School Association representatives and the SSE Bulletin
- **Better communications and partnerships** - While we have all been through testing times, we have also benefitted from some things that we want to keep. We will be coming out to you early in the new term to share our thoughts about better communications and partnerships as part of our contribution to 'build back better' while retaining those things about joint working that are strong.

- **Link Officers** - During the initial Covid period we established a system of 'link officers' so that schools had a named point of contact for support and queries. These will remain in place until such a time as we jointly determine that the need is reduced. However, we recognise that knowing who to contact in the local authority in 'normal' times can sometimes be difficult. We are reviewing how we keep in touch with all our schools and education leaders and will consider how we can provide all schools with a named contact for the longer-term.
- **Outbreak Planning** - A number of colleagues from Somerset schools took part in scenario testing on the 18 August. This was an opportunity to test out the systems and processes that have been put in place to make us alert to Covid-related issues and prepared to react in the event of any new emergency. I am very grateful to all who contributed. As a result of their contributions we have identified some areas where process could be tightened. The details of changes to emergency processes will be shared in the SSE briefing.

The government is clear that they expect pupils, especially those who are vulnerable (children known to social care and those with SEND) to be attending school full time from the beginning of term. I understand that initially there will be a need for some flexibility to meet the needs of pupils, but it is important that any issues are resolved well before the Autumn half-term. DfE/Ofsted will continue to monitor attendance and offering support to local areas where issues arise.

Finally, I appreciate that for some schools there will be a need for staggered start and finish times at the beginning and end of the school day. It is important that the need for safety does not significantly impact on the ability of parents, particularly key workers – including colleagues in other schools – to undertake essential roles. I would therefore be grateful if school leaders kept such arrangements under regular review in terms of their wider impact.

We are entering uncharted territory and it is essential that we keep the lines of communication open so that we can support you in navigating our way through often contradictory duties/expectations. Please do not hesitate to contact us either directly or through your phase associations or link officers, if you do have any concerns.

With best wishes for the beginning of the new academic year.

Yours sincerely



Julian Wooster
Director of Children's Services