Brighton & Hove City Council

Executive Director for Families, Children & Learning
Hove Town Hall,
Norton Road,
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BN3 3BQ

To:
All Parents and Carers
Brighton & Hove.

Date: 18th May 2020

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Dear Parents and Carers

We understand this is a worrying time and that many of you are facing pressures at home and work since the government introduced restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID 19.

Thank you for all you are doing to support your child's learning under such unusual circumstances.

While a small number of pupils have been in schools and early years settings throughout the pandemic, the vast majority have been at home.

Recently the government announcement that schools and early years settings (including nurseries and childminders) should begin to plan for a possible reopening to more children in certain year groups from the 1st June.

The Council's advice is that education provision in Brighton & Hove, should only reopen to more children when education leaders are confident that it is safe for the children and the staff. **This may not fit with the expectations or timescales outlined by the government.**

The timing of reopening schools to more pupils is an issue we take very seriously. We have been working closely with our head teachers, the wider Brighton and Hove Education Partnership and the unions to consider the government's announcement and the implications for our city. We are also working with our early years providers to help them make the best decision for their setting.

We are determined to do the right thing for our children and families in Brighton & Hove and our priority has to be the safety of children, school staff and the wider community.

We want the city's children to return to school and early years settings but only when it is safe to do so. The named year groups where more pupils are being encouraged to attend are nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 6. Pupils in Year 10 and Year 12 are also expected to have face to face contact with teaching staff to progress their learning during the remainder of the term.

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We will continue to prioritise support and provision for key workers' and the most vulnerable children. Any plans to increase the numbers of children in our schools and settings this term will need to take the number of these children into account.

The recent announcements have raised many questions and concerns for schools, education providers and families. We are working with our head teachers, governors and early years providers to resolve these concerns. For example, establishing safe numbers, confirming safe practical arrangements and agreeing timescales for more children to safely return.

This situation is different for each early years provider and school because buildings and availability of staff varies from setting to setting. Schools and providers are currently carrying out the risk assessments needed to put safe practices in place. At the council, we are working to support this important work.

We have asked schools and providers to keep you informed directly of their planning and any developments. Hopefully this will make you as parents and carers feel more assured that planning for safe practices are being put in place.

We appreciate the many different views about what should happen. However, I'm sure we are all agreed that safety must be central to any plans that each school and setting makes.

We are concerned about the educational experiences our children have missed and the impact on some children's emotional health and wellbeing of not being at school. We are also concerned about the number of disadvantaged children who may well have fallen behind. But it's really important that we get this right and that children, school staff and the wider community are kept safe.

We hope you will understand why we have taken this approach. Your school or early years setting and its leaders are doing all they can to make safe decisions.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely,

Deb Austin
Interim Executive Director,
Families, Children & Learning.

Councillor John Allcock,
Chair of Children, Young People & Skills Committee

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