

**Position Statement – Manchester City Council
May 15th 2020**

Last Sunday the Prime Minister announced that from week commencing 1 June at the earliest the Government is aiming to increase the numbers of children attending primary schools through the return of children in Nursery, Reception and Years 1 and 6.

He also asked that secondary schools provide some face to face contact with staff for students in Years 10 and 12 before the end of the summer term, and that special schools work towards a phased return of more children, without a focus on more specific year groups.

This is of course all dependent on the rate of infection for COVID-19 from now until then.

This announcement from the Prime Minister and subsequent guidance from the Government has answered some questions, but it is clear there are many things which still need clarification before schools and colleges can substantially increase the numbers attending.

There are many practical questions which we currently do not have answers to and which we are working together with schools, settings, colleges and the DFE to resolve.

In Manchester, during the COVID-19 lockdown period, the majority of schools have remained open to vulnerable pupils and children of key workers - including throughout what should have been school holidays and Bank Holidays - and all schools and colleges have retained contact and an overview of all their pupils.

Throughout this time, officers from the council have been working with education leaders to support them with their current offers both for vulnerable and key workers' children who are still attending, and for the many more who are learning from home. These offers will continue as we move forward from June 1.

As we move forward into this next phase the council will continue to support settings, schools and colleges to plan a response to the announcement and begin to gradually increase the numbers of children and young people attending in a way that is safe for everyone.

There are many specific considerations unique to individual schools, settings, and colleges, which they themselves are best placed to understand and plan for. This includes the different needs of their cohorts of children or young people and local communities, the size and shape of buildings, and the numbers of staff that are available to work.

This means there cannot be a uniform approach across the city in response to the government announcement, and settings, schools and colleges will have to develop their own flexible plans and work at their own pace from 1 June in order to start to safely and gradually increase the number of children attending at any one time. We're very clear also that in any plan the safety of pupils and staff must be absolutely paramount.

For this reason, in our primary schools it is highly unlikely that children in the government identified priority year groups will be able to attend school full-time from June 1, and may also mean that some schools have to prioritise certain year groups, and not make an offer to them all. Your school will of course be in touch with you to provide you with more information about their plan for a phased return of additional children.

It is also clear that any return for children and young people will not look the same as before COVID19. The pandemic has changed things for all of us and there will need to be consideration of how we best support our children and young people at this time with a focus on their mental health and emotional wellbeing as well as their learning.

This pandemic has brought with it stress, uncertainty, and anxiety for all of us including our children and young people. We all want to get our children and young people back into education as soon as safely possible where they can be with their friends, their teachers, and their support workers. We want to reassure you that everyone in Manchester's education community is working together as hard as they can during this time to ensure the wellbeing and safety of our children and plan for this first phase of wider opening.

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