Essex County Council
**Education**
PO Box 11
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Essex CM1 1LX

15th July 2020

Dear Parent / Carer,

Firstly, may we take this opportunity to thank you for all of your support during the COVID-19 period. We do not underestimate the challenges that parents have faced during these last few months. Throughout the lockdown period, school leaders and settings managers have shared with us the difference that your help with home learning has made. We appreciate that the home learning experience will have been different for many families depending on your circumstances and that at times it may have been very difficult for you. The engagement that you have had with your child's school during this time will make it easier for teachers and staff teams to help all children to catch up and keep up, with their work when school starts again, for all, in September 2020, as recently announced by the Secretary of State for Education. This letter outlines the preparations that are taking place to prepare for all children and young people to return to school.

## Opening over the Summer Break

The government is not asking schools and settings to remain open over the summer holidays. Schools and settings therefore will not be expected to open for vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers over this period. Some school leaders and settings managers may continue to offer summer holiday activities over this period and we have given them details of the latest guidance for opening. Providers offering paid childcare or holiday activities will be able to operate over the summer holiday period. Parents should make arrangements with such providers directly. There is guidance available from the department for education to support parents, carers and children to access community activities, holiday or after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school settings safely.

## Full return to school and settings in the Autumn Term

The government has issued schools and settings with advice about how they can open in September at minimal risk to pupils and to staff, now that the prevalence of COVID-19 has decreased within the community. Current restrictions on class sizes will be lifted, but schools and settings will keep children in class or year group 'bubbles' to minimise the number of daily contacts with others that each pupil has. Protective measures, such as regular cleaning and handwashing, will, of course, continue as will social distancing where possible.

Schools and settings, supported by the Local Authority, are putting rigorous procedures in place to minimise the likelihood of viral transmission, and respond to any positive COVID-19 cases. Testing will be widely available, and schools and settings will alert parents should concerns arise. It is vitally important that if your child has any of the COVID-19 symptoms they do not attend their school or setting and schools will ask parents to collect their children straight away if they become symptomatic during the school day. It is also important that your child is tested as soon as symptoms start to occur. The majority of tests are being

returned as negative, and therefore your child can return to school at this time. If your child tests positive, your household will be asked to self-isolate as per the NHS guidance. Appropriate actions will be taken in the case of any outbreak, and remote education will be made available to any pupils who might have to self-isolate.

As throughout this period, every school and setting's approach will be different and will reflect local context and circumstances. Schools and settings will work with the local authority to update their risk assessments and consider carefully their arrangements. This will reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. The majority of our schools have remained open throughout this period, so we have already seen that our protective measures and bubbles work. The schools and settings are now ready to scale this up. Your child's school or setting will advise you about any changes to routines, including dropping pupils off and collecting them at the end of the day. If individual schools or settings need to operate phased returns, or to alter the times of the day temporarily, the details of this and the reasons for it will be made clear in advance. The safety of children, parents and staff is, and always will be, our number one priority.

**Education, Health and Care Plans**

Particular consideration will be given to pupils who have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's). The government has put in place interim arrangements to the legislation that has allowed the Local Authority to implement easements on the duty to provide aspects of an EHCP and make reasonable endeavours to provide as much support as possible. This was put in place to support schools, social care and health services focus on addressing the COVID pandemic. It is expected that this legislation will return to normal expectations and that the requirements of EHCP's will be returned to normal as quickly as possible. However, some services will still need to be retained to support the pandemic, so there may still be a restriction on face to face support provided by health, therapy and other services. All services are working hard to continue to offer as much support as possible and where appropriate offer remote support and interventions. We would like to thank parents of children with EHCP's for their resilience and support. Please make contact with your child's school for their specific details on their return to school arrangements.

**Attendance from September**

The risk to children of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low and we know there are negative, and sometimes lasting, health and educational impacts for pupils who are out of schools and settings for long periods of time. It is with this in mind that the government's guidance states that pupils will be expected to attend their school / setting, as normal, at the start of the Autumn Term 2020. From September it will therefore be compulsory for you to send your children to school.

A small number of pupils will still be unable to attend because they are self-isolating and have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves, or because they are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19.

Shielding advice will pause on 1 August, subject to a continued decline in the rates of COVID-19 transmission. This means that those pupils who remain on the shielded patient list can also return to their school or setting, as can those who have family members who are shielding. Some pupils who are not required to shield but who remain under the care of a specialist medical professional may need to discuss their care with that professional before returning to their school or setting. Please advise the school or setting if the guidance you receive is that your child should remain at home. Other than in these exceptional cases, or where a pupil's absence is otherwise authorised, it will be the schools or settings expectation that pupils attend as normal. It is important that you discuss any concerns on attendance

that you may have about attendance with your school as soon as possible to avoid further escalation.

## Transport

One of the areas which may be different when your child returns to school is how they travel there.

We are developing a 'Getting Your Child to School' information service that will bring together all the options and guidance on travel, whether it's how to cycle or walk to school or what the rules are on wearing face coverings on transport. This will be available from early August and you will find it here **www.stopswapgo.co.uk**. We will let you know what it is launched.

It will contain the information you need to help get your child to school. We ask you to look at this in advance once it is available because some things will be different, and you'll want to talk to your child about that so they are prepared for the start of term. If you use social media please follow Stop. Swap. Go! on
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/stopswapgo
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/stopswapgo/
Twitter: https://twitter.com/stopswapgoessex
where you'll find the service publicised, stories from residents on their sustainable travel journeys, essential advice and top tips!

For children entitled to transport to school, Essex County Council will send out transport allocation letters at the beginning of August which shows the contact details for your provider – please contact them in the first instance if you have any concerns.

## Catch-Up Funding

You may have heard that the government will be providing funding so that schools and settings can provide additional tuition and other support to pupils so that any who have fallen behind can be helped to catch up. At the time of writing, detailed guidance has not been released about this. As soon as it has, we will work with schools to consider the best ways forward. Please note this is an allocation of funding for the school to determine how best it is used for all pupils.

Together with colleagues in the Local Authority and Academy Trusts, we will continue to do all we can to support schools and settings and those who lead them to prepare for September – and beyond. Thank you, again, for everything you are doing to help prepare your children to make a strong and safe start. We hope you and your children feel confident about returning in September and we look forward to welcoming Essex pupils back to school in the new academic year.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Kershaw

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Director of Education

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