



Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

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Dear Parents/Carers

I am writing to you with information about September 2020 opening of Schools within the Midsomer Norton Schools' Partnership, following guidance issued last week by the Government. Firstly, I intend that all schools will be fully open from September and that the curriculum being taught will be as close as possible to that we would normally deliver. Of course, some arrangements to ensure the safety of pupils and staff may make the school day feel a little different, but we are confident it is possible to minimise the risk to all those on schools sites, whilst also delivering an excellent education. The remainder of this letter details some of the principles of our planning for September and expectations of children. I will also be writing to staff with similar guidance and information.

Bubbles

Schools will be arranging classes or groups of children in what are called 'bubbles'. These are contained groups of children in a class, year group or key stage. We will endeavour to prevent these bubbles from mixing, particularly in the primary schools. Classes or year groups of children will be the bubbles in primary schools and in secondary schools, we are planning to have year group bubbles. In order to prevent casual mixing of bubbles, children in secondary schools will not be moving as frequently from classroom to classroom, as would normally be the case. At Key Stage 3, it is likely that staff will move to children and only where there are specialist rooms required, will children themselves move around the site. Clearly, the less mixing of children across age groups, the less likely it is that any infection is spread.

Classroom layouts and equipment

Social distancing is still important to prevent the spread of Covid-19. However, the Government has said that social distancing in schools is now required less than previously, as there are far fewer people with the Covid-19 virus in communities. We have been told that classrooms can now be used with the normal number of children. Adults must endeavour to be two metres away from children and therefore teachers will largely be at the front of classrooms. Teaching Assistants are also expected to maintain a two metre distance, although this will not always be possible if children need support that requires closer supervision. Classrooms will have tables and chairs in rows and we will aim to have all children facing forward to reduce the risk of any infections being passed between individual children. In Nurseries and Reception Classes however, we will continue to teach in the usual manner, where children have the opportunity to move freely around rooms and interact in groups. Excess furniture will be removed from classrooms to allow children to be seated away from one another as much as possible.

Hand cleaning

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important ways of preventing the spread of Covid-19. Children and adults will be expected to wash their hands or use sanitiser on entry to school in the morning and at other regular points during the day – break times and lunchtimes for example. The Trust has purchased further supplies of hand sanitiser and will be constructing more dispensers before September to meet the demand of some of the larger schools. Clearly, sanitiser will be used a lot, as there are limited numbers of wash basins in schools.

Staggered start and end to the school day

Schools, particularly those with large numbers, may decide to have a staggered start to the school day and indeed a staggered finish. This will prevent cross-bubble mixing as much as possible and





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help reduce the numbers of people congregating on or near school premises. Your child's school will write to you before the end of term with details of any arrangements.

Break times, lunchtime and school dinners

Break times and the lunch period are likely to be staggered. Again, this is to reduce mixing of pupils across bubbles and to avoid cross-contamination. Children may be asked to eat in their classrooms or in defined areas of the school.

Hot meals and other food will be available as normal across the schools in the Trust. In some schools, particularly primaries, these will be delivered to classrooms to avoid queuing. In secondary schools, pupils will be able to access canteens and any queuing required will be managed in bubbles and social distancing will be observed.

Transport and PPE

Pupils will be able to use transport provided by the Local Authority, ourselves or public transport. If using public transport, all children will need to have face coverings which they must wear to and from school. I would advise that children using Local Authority transport or that provided by the MNSP Trust, also wear face coverings. Parents/Carers will need to supply face coverings for each journey. Alternatively, you may prefer to bring your children to school by car or if possible, allow children to walk or cycle.

Cleaning in schools

We are arranging for adults in schools to have access to cleaning materials throughout the school day to ensure surfaces are kept as clean as possible. We are arranging for cleaners to be in school during school times to support with cleaning procedures, but see the cleanliness of sites as the responsibility of us all whilst we deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Cleaning staff have received additional training to support them in the important role they are undertaking.

Parent consultation events and open evenings in primary and secondary schools

We have taken the decision to hold secondary school open evening events virtually this year. In all schools we have also decided that any parental consultation events between September and December will also be held virtually. We will review this decision in December for the events in 2021.

School Trips

There will be no trips in the Autumn term of school between September and December. This is because additional staffing required for health and safety ratios on trips would result in an increase in pressure on staffing left at school. Given that there may be staff that become ill as well, schools will not be able to maintain the required bubbles if too many are out of school supervising trips. Again, we will review this decision at Christmas in preparation for the New Year.

If your child was due to take part in a trip in the Autumn term of the new academic year, you will either receive a refund for any payments you have made, or we will hold payments if the trip is being rearranged for a later stage in the academic year.

Wrap around Care

Primary schools in the Trust will offer wrap around care from September. Clearly, this will be difficult given the demands of containing bubbles. We will ensure that cross contamination of teaching bubbles is kept to a minimum, by ensuring social distancing is observed in wrap around care environments.





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Behaviour management in school

Those children that have returned to schools in the Summer Term have been extremely well behaved, despite the challenges faced. Given the constraints we are now working within, there may be some alterations required to behaviour policies in schools. The adjustments will be minor and will include some different stages in our responses to poor behaviour. For example, we cannot move children between classes to help resolve issues and neither can we use exit rooms, as this will cause bubbles to be compromised. Could I ask all parents to speak with their children about the need now, more than ever, to follow instructions and avoid silliness. We know the vast majority of children behave well all of the time, but I have told Headteachers in Trust schools to be strict with those that put the health and safety of others at risk by refusing to following instructions or behaving in an inappropriate manner.

Attendance

Children will be expected in school as normal from September. I understand that some children and parents will be anxious and I would ask that you contact school as soon as possible so that we can find ways to provide support. However, the Government has been clear in its guidance and has asked us as school leaders to enforce attendance of children in the manner we would normally. Attendance of children across the schools in the Trust is considerably above national rates generally and therefore, I am not expecting there to be significant issues relating to attendance overall.

Free School Meals

Vouchers for those in receipt of free school meals will be available over the Summer break. Instructions detailing how these can be accessed will be sent out by each school before the Summer holiday.

Visitors to School Sites

The Government has said it is acceptable to have visitors on school premises if they are professionals supporting children in their well-being or education. For example, social workers, educational psychologists, school nurse service, play therapy, etc. However, we are aiming to reduce the number of non-essential visitors. Therefore, can I please ask that all parents/carers avoid dropping in at school sites. Please ring or email with any queries or issues you might have.

Risk Assessments

All schools have Covid-19 focussed risk assessments in place already. These will now be updated and shared with parents/carers and staff. Any suggestions about how these can be made more effective are always gratefully received.

Thank you for your continued support in these difficult times. I know having children at home for many months has been far from ideal. I am delighted that the government has said that all staff and children can return to school in September, so that we can begin to establish something resembling normality. Naturally, we have planned in each school to undertake some focussed work with children on securing positive mental health and as I have said before, please tell us if you are concerned about how your child has responded to lockdown. We do have access to services and expertise in and outside of schools that can provide support.

Kind regards

Alun Williams
CEO

