



Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

27th August 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

Given that we are now approaching the end of the Summer holiday period, I thought I would write to you to remind you about arrangements for the re-opening of schools in the Midsomer Norton Schools' Partnership Trust.

Despite some rises in Coronavirus cases locally, largely focussed in Midsomer Norton and Radstock, I am still confident that all schools will be fully open from September. Numbers of cases are still relatively low in the area compared to spikes seen in other parts of the country. We have not received any guidance or notification that because of the rise in cases, we should not proceed with the planned full opening of all schools in the Trust.

We have made some adjustments to the curriculum offer across schools to improve safety, but the offer will be close to that we would normally have in place in both the primary and secondary schools. As I said in July, 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 school sites, whilst also delivering an excellent education. The remainder of this letter serves as a reminder to parents/carers about our planning for the re-opening of all schools this September and our expectations of the children. I will also be writing to staff with similar guidance and information.

Face coverings in school

At the time of writing, we have not been told that it is mandatory for secondary age pupils over the age of 12 to wear a face covering in school. Recent guidance from the government suggests that in most cases it is still not necessary for face coverings to be worn in school environments. I think it would be sensible however, for Parents/Carers to prepare for this possibility by ensuring you have a suitable supply of washable face coverings or disposable masks. **As a Trust, we are happy for children to wear face coverings/masks if this will make them feel less anxious about their return to school. If children choose to wear face coverings, can I please ask that these are either plain material or disposable. We would not expect children in a primary school setting to wear face coverings because of the risks associated with putting on, removing and storing of masks/face coverings. Children over the age of 12 will need to follow the guidance on how to put on, remove and dispose of face coverings. Please click on the following link for government instructions on the safe use of masks and face coverings** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own#maintaining-and-disposing-of-face-coverings>

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, year groups or key stages 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 these 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. 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





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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 has constructed in excess of 400 hand sanitiser stations ready for September. Most rooms will also have a supply of hand sanitiser for staff and children to use as required.

Staggered start and end to the school day

Schools, particularly those with large numbers, have in many cases opted for a staggered start to the school day and indeed a staggered finish. This will prevent cross-bubble mixing as much as possible and help reduce the numbers of people congregating on or near school premises. Your child's school will have written to you separately with details of any arrangements regarding staggered timings of the school day. If you are unsure about these arrangements, they can be found in the risk assessment for your child's school, which should be on the school web site.

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. It will be unlikely that any games can be played in the lunch period, although some clubs and extra-curricular activity may be able to take place with the required social distancing in place.

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. The Local Authority is also asking that children wear face coverings on their buses and we would expect this also on the buses provided by the Trust. 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 have arranged for all schools to have additional cleaning during the school day, and 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.





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www.midsomernortonschoolspartnership.com

Executive Headteacher/CEO: Alun Williams

Registered Address: Norton Hill School, Charlton Road, Midsomer Norton, BA3 4AD

Company No: 7365778

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 implementing social distancing in the wrap around care environments.

Behaviour management in school

Those children that 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.

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

Risk Assessment for the re-opening of schools are now largely completed. These should be available on individual school web sites. Any suggestions about how these can be made more effective are always gratefully received.

Uniform

Children should wear their uniform from September as normal. Each School have made decisions on uniform/PE kit within their own settings and this should have been communicated directly to you.





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Procedures when a positive test result is received

Where a pupil or member of staff tests positive for Coronavirus, we will inform all parents/carers of pupils in the relevant bubble and ask them to isolate for 14 days. During this time, you should endeavour to get your child tested. Schools will then revert to setting work remotely for those youngsters not in school and begin to plan how children in the bubble will return.

Thank you for your continued support in these difficult times. 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

