

Dear Parent/Carer

This is a message about school attendance from September 2020.

Derby City Council are working in partnership with all schools across the City to welcome all children back to school in September following several very difficult months for parents, children and schools. We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to parents for the work you have done in ensuring your child/ren have received education during this period. We have heard of many cases of parents often in very difficult circumstances who have done their very best to support their child's learning whilst schools have been closed to all but specific groups of pupils.

We are sure parents are delighted that schools are re-opening to all pupils in September 2020 and children can return to their usual routines and benefit from and enjoy all that is on offer to them at school.

In March when the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak was increasing, the government made it clear that no parent would be penalised or sanctioned for their child's non-attendance at school as schools were then closed to all but those specific groups of pupils.

Now the circumstances have changed, and the measures taken by the government have meant that children can safely return to school. It is vital for all children to return to school to minimise as far as possible the longer-term impact of the pandemic on their education, well-being and wider development. We know that children have not only missed out on learning but also missed being with their friends and the wider social aspects of school.

Missing out on more time in the classroom risks pupils falling further behind. Those with higher levels of absence tend to achieve less well in both primary and secondary school. Therefore, the Department for Education have confirmed that school attendance is compulsory again from the beginning of September 2020 when schools re-open after the summer break.

This means from 1st September 2020, the usual rules on school attendance apply, including:

- It is a parents' duty to send their child to school regularly if they are of compulsory school age;
- It is schools' responsibility to record attendance and follow up absence
- The local authority is able to resume the use of legal sanctions, including penalty notices and processes that may lead to prosecution in court for persistent absence.

If you are worried about your child returning to school, you should discuss your concerns with the school directly. The school will be able to offer reassurance about the protective measures they have in place, and all schools work closely with health and other agencies who may also be able to help if needed.

In addition, this is not the time to take your child out of school for a family holiday or other term time leave. It is unlikely that any leave will be authorised by the Headteacher after so much enforced absence from school. The more your child is in school, the more they will catch up.

No school or local authority wants to take legal action, and every attempt to resolve parents' concerns and improve a child's attendance will be made before any formal action is considered.

After so much disruption to your child/ren's education over recent months, the most important thing is that the school and parents work together to get children back into school. The school is ready to listen so please contact them if you have any worries and they will try to help you.

Schools and colleges fully appreciate that some children and young people may be experiencing feelings such as anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

There are online resources available to help you and your child with mental health, including:

- MindEd (<https://www.minded.org.uk/>), a free educational resource from Health Education England on children and young people's mental health
- Every Mind Matters (<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>), which includes an online tool and email journey to support everyone to feel more confident in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- Bereavement UK (<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>) and the Childhood Bereavement Network (<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/covid-19.aspx>), provide information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff

It is also vital to report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000 or Barnardo's support service (<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/see-hear-respond>) The most recent Department for Education guidance is also available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-in-the-autumn-term>

We wish you and your child all the best for the coming academic year.

Kind regards

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