

Letter from the Director of Education Stockport Council

Returning to School in March 2021

Dear Parent/Carers,

Firstly, I want to acknowledge the huge amount of support we have seen across the borough over the past few weeks. There has been a huge collective effort to ensure the education of children across Stockport has continued in the best manner possible both in our schools and by families through home learning

Secondly, I want to tell you about the arrangements for returning to school from Monday (8th March 2021).

We are working with settings and families to ensure that the right offer is in place for your child in these challenging circumstances.

Government statement on access to schools

The government's message is that all children and students should return to school or college from 8 March 2021. This includes special schools, special post-16 provider or alternative provision settings, unless they receive a positive test result or have to self-isolate. Attendance will be mandatory from this date. Secondary aged pupils should participate in asymptomatic (showing no symptoms) testing during the week of 8th March and can return to school or college following their first negative test result.

Some secondary schools are beginning to test young people before the 8th March. Your child's school will notify you of this. Please find out from your child's school about their testing arrangements and when your child/young person is expected to attend.

To support any queries you may have, please consider the questions below.

My child won't be tested until later in the week, will that affect their attendance record?

If your child cannot attend due to the school's testing programme. This will not be counted as an unauthorised absence.

My child is classed as vulnerable, should they still attend?

Your child should continue to attend school unless they receive a positive test result.

Some children and young people may be unable to attend as they have to self-isolate or shield. They should not attend school or college if they:

- have symptoms or live in a household with someone who has symptoms
- have tested positive themselves, even if they do not have symptoms
- live in a household with someone who has tested positive, even if that person does not have symptoms
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)
- are required to self-isolate for travel-related reasons

More detailed information is available on the [gov.uk website](#).

If my child has been shielding should they be returning to school?

We know that many children identified at the start of the pandemic as clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) are not at increased risk of serious outcomes from coronavirus (COVID-19). Children are gradually being removed from the shielding patient list (SPL) as appropriate, following review with a clinician.

The advice for pupils who have been confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable is to shield and stay at home as much as possible until further notice. They are advised not to attend school while shielding advice applies nationally.

All 16 to 18 year olds with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality will be offered a vaccine in priority group 6 of the vaccination programme. At present, these children should continue to shield, and self-isolate if they have symptoms or are identified as a close contact of a positive case, even if they have been vaccinated.

What is happening about self-testing?

Stockport is developing a local response to the self-testing that has been discussed in the media. There will be more details to follow. In the meantime, families may wish to order tests on-line using this link <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

Is it compulsory for my child to have a test?

Testing is voluntary. Your child will not be tested unless consent has been given either by them (if they are over 18) or by you (or another parent/carer). Your child will not be stopped from returning to school or college if you or they choose not to be tested or they are not able to undertake a test.

Although the testing is voluntary, it is important to remember that asymptomatic testing is a key part of the government's strategy to protect us all from Covid-19 and for us being able to keep schools open for face to face learning. If you have any concerns about your child taking part in the testing programme, please contact your school to discuss this.

Does my child have to wear a face covering in school?

Students in year 7 and above should wear face coverings, unless they are exempt, when moving around the premises, in classrooms and during activities unless social

distancing can be maintained. This guidance will apply at least until Easter when it will be reviewed.

Please encourage your child/young person to take the wearing of face coverings seriously. We recognise that it may be difficult for young people to maintain this throughout the day, but it is an essential part of the government's strategy to prevent the spreading of the virus in schools.

This advice does not apply to children in nurseries, childminders and primary schools. Further guidance about wearing face coverings in schools is available on the [Gov.uk website](#).

Does my child have to wear a face covering whilst using transport?

It is the law that children and young people aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on public transport. Public Health England advises that children and young people aged 11 and over must also wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated transport to secondary school or college. This does not apply to [those who are exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport](#).

More information about transport to school is available on the [Government's website](#).

Do we need to continue to maintain social distancing and handwashing?

Yes.

The measures that we have all taken (keeping our distance from other people, making sure we are in well ventilated spaces and our regular handwashing) have helped to reduce the spread of the virus.

We MUST continue to do these things, even though our children and young people are returning to face to face learning.

Will my school actually open in full on the 8th March?

All Stockport primary, nursery and special schools are hoping to be open in full on March 8th. High schools will welcome their young people back gradually during the week of the 8th March once they have taken their first voluntary asymptomatic test.

However it is important to note that 'bubble' will still need to close if a positive case is identified within a school community. As a result your child/young person may be asked to self-isolate as a contact, as has been the case since September 2020. This also means that there may be times when your school does not have enough staff to open safely. Your school will keep you informed if this happens.

I'm worried about sending my child back to school - what support is available?

In the first instance, you should contact your child's setting, school or college to discuss any concerns and how they will be managing safely.

We know that the current situation has created a level of uncertainty and anxiety for all. We want to reassure you that there is support available. Please see some of the support available on our [Local Offer website](#).

For anyone having to self-isolate, help and support with food and medical supplies can be found by calling the Stockport Coronavirus Helpline on 0161 217 6046 from Monday to Thursday from 9am to 5pm and Friday from 9am to 4:30pm.

Updates and useful Contacts

In most cases, you should direct any queries to your child's school.

We have also put together a leaflet about emotional support, getting back into a routine and feeling safe about going to back to school. This leaflet can be accessed on our SEND Local Offer website.

However, you may find updated information on:

- Individual school websites
- PACTS website www.pactstockport.co.uk
- LA Facebook and Twitter pages
- For admission and school place queries: school.enquiries@stockport.gov.uk
- Current Public Health advice – www.stockport.gov.uk/coronavirus

Please help our nurseries, childminders, schools, and colleges create the safest possible environments by following advice and guidance about social distancing. It is important to remember that restrictions have not been lifted at this stage.

We understand that supporting home learning is challenging, especially if you are also working from home. We want to take this opportunity to thank you for all your support and understanding during this very challenging time.

Yours faithfully
Steve Nyakatawa
Director of Education