

Open Letter from Warrington Borough Council - September 2021

Schools and colleges across Warrington are looking forward to welcoming pupils and students back for the new school year.

Since last term, we've seen a new phase in the government's response to the pandemic. We have moved away from stringent restrictions, towards offering advice and guidance to people on how to protect themselves and others, aided by the national vaccination programme being rolled out in earnest.

As schools and colleges open in September, it is imperative that we continue to do all we can, like we did in the previous academic year, to reduce disruption to the education of our young people. The risk of transmission of coronavirus in education settings and the risk of severe illness in children and young people is low. We also know that there are significant harms associated with missed education. This is why it's so important we work together to keep educational settings as safe as possible, acknowledging we are all learning to live with the virus.

It is a local and national priority that we deliver face-to-face, high-quality education to all pupils, something we steadfastly support here in Warrington. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, and mental and physical health.

Ensuring Warrington Schools and Nurseries are as safe as they can be

The vaccine rollout has been a success in Warrington and the region, with huge numbers of colleagues and education staff taking up the vaccine. Alongside this, in September, and following Government guidance, Warrington schools will also ensure the following safety measures are in place:

- Continuing the good hygiene practices we have all been following these past months
- Maintaining appropriate building cleaning regimes
- Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated
- Following public health advice on testing, self-isolation and management of confirmed cases of COVID-19

It is no longer a requirement for 'bubbles' or the need for schools and colleges to contact trace, but they remain a measure which could be reintroduced in some situations. And, whilst the government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law - meaning that face coverings are no longer advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas - they are still recommended in enclosed and crowded spaces where there may be contact with people you don't normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college.

Contingency planning

Schools and colleges in Warrington will have contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) outlining what they would do if children, pupils, students or staff test positive for COVID-19, and how they would operate if they were advised to take extra measures to help break chains of transmission. You will be familiar with much of what these plans entail - for example, self-isolating if you test positive for the virus, but now without the need for all classmates to isolate.

Importantly, if you are displaying any COVID-19 symptoms, however mild, you should remain at home and seek a PCR test. It's important to use lateral flow tests routinely – twice a week – in case

you have the virus but do not display any symptoms. About 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not have symptoms, so the continued use of LFTs are strongly recommended for staff in all settings and students in high schools and colleges.

Warrington's educational settings will continue to work closely with our local public health and education teams to ensure they are fully briefed on local and national policy and advice.

Given the clear difficulties that restrictions on education can have on children and young people, any additional measures in schools would only be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of schools or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible. However, we acknowledge that the safety of our staff and students is a priority, so if any measures are required, they will be proportionate and will ensure that people are kept as protected as possible from the virus.

What you can do to help ensure the safe, smooth return of [children to educational settings].

1. Administering regular Lateral Flow Tests

warrington.gov.uk/symptom-free-testing

2. Vaccination

Everyone who is eligible for the vaccination and is offered it should take up the offer. Details of open vaccination sites in Warrington are available at warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus-vaccinations