

Reply to Dr Mac Heath
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07 September 2020

Dear primary school colleagues,

Welcome back to the new academic year. I hope that you all enjoyed a happy and restful break over the summer and that this first full week back goes well for you and your school communities.

I've no doubt that the usual 'back to school buzz' is still evident around school but appreciate that it's probably tinged with an underlying sense of apprehension this year. After all, we continue to work in what I called 'extraordinary' circumstances back in March.

What a long way we've come since then. The strength of your leadership and the passion and commitment of your senior leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and wider support staff made a significant difference to the lives of young people and their families last year.

Please don't forget that since March you:

- remained open for vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers – working creatively to personalise provision for specific groups and individuals;
- ensured that meals were available for the pupils and families who needed them;
- planned and delivered home learning for the pupils who couldn't attend school – providing work in a variety of formats to meet a wide range of learning needs;
- kept in touch with pupils and families to ensure that their mental health and wellbeing needs were met;
- planned and prepared for the safe return of pupils in the eligible year groups in June, and all pupils in September;
- helped children to understand things aren't 'normal' and to manage and cope with the changes around them;
- supported pupils and their families in relation to starting school for the first time and transition to junior and secondary schools;
- managed the exchange of information between reception teachers and Year 1 teachers in the absence of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment;
- prepared all pupils (but especially those in Reception, Year 2 and Year 6) for their next steps in education;
- communicated with parents and carers throughout to ensure that they remained well-informed.

These remain unprecedented times. I know that your commitment to providing the very best quality of education for your pupils remains paramount and I'm confident that you and your team are well placed to face the challenges ahead. Some of these are likely to include:

- Continuing to support the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff – especially knowing that some needs are as yet unknown or hidden
- Supporting pupils to re-engage and re-connect with learning –helping them to re-establish good learning habits and get used to school routines and expectations
- Ensuring that the return to school is a positive experience within the context of the constraints involved in managing health and safety risks
- Recognising that many nursery and reception children did not receive their full early years entitlement which will have impacted on their personal, social, emotional (PSE) and communication, language and literacy development (CLL)
- Preparing for and managing the possibility of a phonic screening check for Year 2 pupils in Autumn 2020.
- Preparing for and managing national assessments in 2021
- Reassuring parents about health and safety as well as learning and progress

Myself and the extended Children's Services team will of course continue to support you and look forward to working with you again this academic year. The Schools update will continue to be issued weekly to help you, as busy leaders, focus on the most important aspects of national guidance and understand local and national priorities and initiatives. In addition, the covid19forschools webpages remain in place.

Finally, you can contact me directly as needed. However, to support the timeliness of responses, I would remind you that maintained schools can always contact their named Improvement Partner (IP) and academies can contact [Marie Denny](#). These colleagues will ensure that any queries or support needs you have are directed to the most suitable person.

With best wishes for the term ahead and in continued appreciation of all that you do for the children and young people of Milton Keynes.



Dr Mac Heath
Director of Children's Services