

Reply to Dr Mac Heath
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07 September 2020

Dear early years colleagues,

Welcome back to the new academic year. 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 staff made a significant difference to the lives of children and their families last year.

Please don't forget that since March you:

- remained open for vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers;
- kept in touch with children and families to ensure their mental health and wellbeing needs were met;
- planned and prepared for the safe return of children in June;
- worked with parents to enable them to trust that your setting was a safe place in which their children can develop both their wellbeing and learning;
- helped children to understand that things weren't 'normal' and to manage and cope with the changes around them;
- supported families in relation to children starting school for the first time;
- prepared children 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 provision for children remains paramount and I'm therefore confident that you and your staff are well placed to face the challenges ahead. Some of these are likely to include:

- Recognising that many children will not have received their full early years entitlement which will have impacted on their personal, social, emotional (PSE) and communication, language and literacy development (CLL)
- Continuing to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and staff – especially knowing that some of them have not had positive home experiences during the pandemic which will have impacted on their social development, behaviour and communication language and literacy development

- Supporting children to re-engage and re-connect with learning – helping them to re-establish their emerging learning habits and get used to routines in your setting
- Ensuring that the return to education is a positive experience within the context of the constraints involved in managing health and safety risks
- 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. Early Years Essential (EYE) will continue to be issued regularly to help you, as busy leaders, focus on the most important aspects of national guidance and to understand local and national priorities and initiatives. In addition, support, advice and signposting to guidance will be provided (via Early Years Enquiries) from the Improvement Partner for Early Years (Belinda Woodcock).

Finally, you can contact me directly as needed. However, to support the timeliness of responses, I would remind you that you can always contact [Belinda Woodcock](#) or [Jenny Bargrove](#). They 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 of Milton Keynes,



Dr Mac Heath
Director of Children's Services