

Birmingham school leaders' feedback on the return to school

- Meetings took place on Wednesday 29th and Thursday 30th April with representatives from primary forum and a group of school leaders from schools across the city.
- The below is a summary of the main points that were discussed at those meetings.

Preparation for reopening

- Heads felt that any decision to open schools must follow medical evidence otherwise staff, parents and children will feel vulnerable.
- Heads asked whether the initial reopening would be for education or for childcare.
- Heads expressed concern about how much notice schools would receive before schools reopened. It was felt that a week would be the absolute minimum.
- Managing the expectations of children and families before schools reopened was discussed and it was suggested that Birmingham could arrange for communications that prepared children for schools not being the same as before.
- A request was made for a Birmingham agreement for schools not to open during the summer holidays.
- It was felt that some schools opening during the holidays would increase the pressure on others.

Wellbeing/mental health

- The wellbeing of pupils and staff was discussed at length.
- As staff will be working in a very different way, it was felt that they will need support for their wellbeing and be able to access psychologist / counselling to allow for continued resilience.
- Schools felt that children's emotional wellbeing and mental health need to be prioritised and they will need the time to process what has happened.
- Bereavement support will be needed for children who have suffered loss.
- Schools were concerned about the implications on their budgets of the cost of this additional support for their staff.

Ofsted

- A delay to inspections restarting was discussed as it was felt that supporting children should be schools' priority for the immediate future.
- A suggestion was made that all OFSTED visits are postponed until schools have had at least a term to get back to normal for children, staff and parents.
- There was some feeling that the current Ofsted framework is not fit for purpose.

Assessments

- Primary heads raised concerns about the impact on Year 5s and postponing the 2021 SATs was suggested.

Free school meals

- Heads asked about whether FSM vouchers would continue to be available during a phased return to school.

Arrangements when schools reopen

- Staggering the school day was discussed.
- Suggestions included a 10am – 2pm day to avoid children and staff travelling during peak time, particularly given the issues public transport will present.
- Other suggestions about staggering return for particular year groups/family groups were discussed, with key workers and vulnerable children continuing to be prioritised. The staffing implications of these options were discussed.
- Each child having their own stationery was discussed as necessary for primary schools.
- Also discussed was the need for updated school risk assessments that included frequency of cleaning.

Social distancing

- Heads were concerned about how social distancing could be implemented, particularly in primary schools and nurseries.
- Some attendees felt that only half a school could be in at one time if social distancing was to be observed.
- Children having lunch in classrooms was suggested as a way to maintain social distancing.

PPE

- Many schools raised concerns about PPE, how it will be ordered/provided and the impact on school budgets.

Attendance

- Concerns were expressed re attendance on return to school given continued levels of parental anxiety