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Dear Parent / Carer,

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Update – Phased Return to Schools

Firstly, I want to thank you for your contribution to our town's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. For very many of you, being at home with your children and supporting their continued learning, alongside your own work will have been a significant challenge. These are unprecedented and uncertain times that none of us has experienced before and I want to assure you that our absolute priority throughout this crisis has and will continue to be the safety and well-being of our children, our families and our staff.

You will have heard that the government has an ambition for more children to return to school in the coming weeks. This will be in addition to the steadily increasing numbers of children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils that have continued to access schools over the 'closure period'. In primary phase schools the proposal is for a phased increase in pupil numbers from 1st June at the earliest, starting with pupils in nurseries, reception, year one and year six. In special schools, the government is asking that they increase the number of children and young people on site, again from the 1st June at the earliest. Secondary schools have been advised to plan to begin some face-to-face contact with individual Year 10 and Year 12 students (or small groups) to support them with their remote learning. At this stage, it is not expected that these pupils will return on a full-time basis and there are no plans to fully reopen secondary schools before the end of the summer term.

These proposals are conditional and we are advised that they will remain under regular review. A number of conditions have to be met before the government announces whether or not it will proceed with its proposals and it is likely that the decision will be forthcoming on around the 28th May.

There has been a great deal of media attention focused on the return to school proposals and also the response to those proposals. I understand this must be very confusing for parents/carers so I wanted to take this opportunity to clarify the position that Luton Local Authority is taking.

Although we recognise and share some of the concerns expressed locally and nationally we do not believe blanket advice to all Local Authority schools not to open on the 1st June would be wise. We do however believe that schools should only extend their opening once robust Health and Safety risk assessments indicate that inviting more children to return to school is safe for all children, their families and for the staff in the school.

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Each of our schools is unique and we expect the timing of that invite to year groups to return and the scale of that invite to vary from school to school. We are working with schools to support their plans for a gradual and phased return taking in to account the physical capacity of the school site and available staffing levels.

Whilst all schools are working hard to respond to the guidance provided by the Department for Education, depending on each individual school context, some primary, infant and junior schools will not be able to offer full time provision for the relevant year groups, and any new arrangements may not be introduced from the 1st June. Schools will be writing to parents/ carers to outline their initial offer and keeping you up to date as and when that offer changes.

It is very important to emphasise that guidance issued to schools makes it clear that it is not compulsory for parents/ carers to send their children to school at this time and there will be no penalties if you choose to keep your children at home.

All schools will endeavour to continue to provide a home learning offer to all pupils not accessing support on site and to keep in regular touch with the families of pupils, whether or not they are attending school.

Finally, I would like to reassure you once again that the health and safety of children and staff remains everyone's first priority during this period.

Thank you for your continued co-operation and support at this time.



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