

17 July 2020

An open letter to the communities of East Sussex on behalf of secondary schools

We wish to thank the teachers, parents and students who have collectively kept our school communities strong over the last four months. We are very grateful for the hard work and support which has come from all corners of our schools' communities.

It is a universal truth that schools want their students back and teachers want to teach. Many have been teaching, continuing to deliver learning to young people under very difficult circumstances. This has been maintained both for the children of key workers and for other groups as schools have widened opening on school site but also simultaneously for a range of remote learning experiences. We understand that supporting teenagers in their learning at home will not always have been easy, we are grateful for everything parents have done to support their child's continued education. However, most agree now that they need to return to routine and learning with known and trusted educational specialists

Headteachers understand that some will feel apprehensive about this return. There is an acknowledgement from all schools that positive mental health is the foundation for effective learning as well as being vital for healthy growth and development. This is a factor in the recovery planning that all schools are currently undertaking. It is a reality that students will need to be in school to access the support they need to be able to re-establish. We have all risk assessed our schools and introduced protective measures where we can. Therefore, whilst families with specific health conditions will wish to discuss their individual positions with their school, parents can feel secure to accept the Department for Education's position that attendance at school from September 2020 return to being mandatory.

It is important to reflect on the fact that there are 26 secondary schools across East Sussex. They are all different and all sit in different contexts: urban or rural, large or small among other factors. Therefore, the way in which schools will approach the recovery phase will be different. Context will drive the choices each school will be making. For example, staggering starts will not always be possible dependent on transport, phased returns of different year groups may be applicable in one school but not in another, staggered breaks and lunches or the use of zoned social spaces will depend on each school's space, size and circulation routes. Year group bubbles may be most common, but siblings will arrive often arrive and go home together. The guidance from the Department for Education is not always statutory in most cases it stresses "where possible" and leaves Heads to the autonomy of decisions in their context, placing the students' best interests at the forefront of those decisions.

Therefore, as always local community support will be vital in this recovery phase for all of us. Local businesses need economic support, local health networks will need us all to act carefully and the backing of each community for its schools and its young people is a vital part of our region's recovery. Comparisons and competition between schools will be unhelpful. What is essential is whole-hearted support and positivity for our young people and their schools as they begin the very complex task of re-establishing the ethos and industry needed to ensure these young people have the futures that they deserve.

We can guarantee you that as Headteachers and as an authority we will work relentlessly to ensure our schools are ready to support our young people in September. We thank you for the support you have given throughout this period and we look forward to working closely with you next academic year as we all come together to rebuild our community and ensure our collective future success.

Your sincerely



Stuart Gallimore
Director of Children's Services



Caroline Barlow
Chair of 11-19 headteacher/principals' group



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Area Group 1 chair

Beacon Academy
Chailey School
Heathfield CC
Kings Academy Ringmer
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