

The Virtual School for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 0–25



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Dear parents and carers,

We hope you had a positive half term without the pressure of managing home learning and for some families this new term is the start of a return to school for some of their children. Schools have been planning for the wider opening and have looking in detail at all the guidance to ensure that staff and pupils are kept safe and that risks are minimised as far as possible. Most primary schools have welcomed back nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 children and from the 15th June secondary schools will offer some face to face sessions for year 10s and 12s. If your child has any alternative provision, these settings are working to welcome back year 10s and 11s.

It is going to be important to create a strong bridge back to school life. Lockdown has presented a variety of challenges and for children in care and previously in care, these challenges may have been greater given their experiences of loss in their lives. There have also been lots of gains for many children; enjoying the time at home, developing deeper bonds with their carers, enjoying the quieter pace of online learning, and having 1-1 support from adults. Some children have experienced success in their learning for the first time. For many children it has been a space where they have not had to manage the social anxiety related to being with large groups of peers. Even though it will be positive for school staff to see colleagues and children and for pupils to see their friends, we can acknowledge that returning to school also comes with a degree of loss for staff and pupils alike.

The DFE has provided guidance for schools and your child's school will be communicating their plans with you, and surveyed families to see how many children will return to school. Schools have risk assessments in place to manage the wider return of pupils and staff.

The full DfE guidance is [here](#) if you would like to read it. The key points are summarised below:

- Hygiene procedures in place such as hand washing, sanitiser.
- Soft furnishings and non-wipeable toys removed from classes.
- Additional cleaning e.g. cleaning materials in classroom to wipe down surfaces, cleaners contracted to do extra deep cleans of the school on regular basis.
- Pupils allocated to 'bubbles'- smaller groupings in which they spend all their time in school. Staff allocated to each bubble and this group does not socialise with other bubbles in school.
- Reducing number of potential contacts by staggering lunchtime and breaks, drop off at different times or entrances, teachers staying in bubbles and not using staff rooms.
- Self-isolation procedures of anyone has symptoms of Covid19.
- Children, families and school staff all eligible for testing.
- Self-isolation procedures of whole class/bubble if anyone tests positive.
- Public Health England can assess whole school quickly and advise of needed.
- Encouragement to walk or cycle to school and avoid public transport if possible.

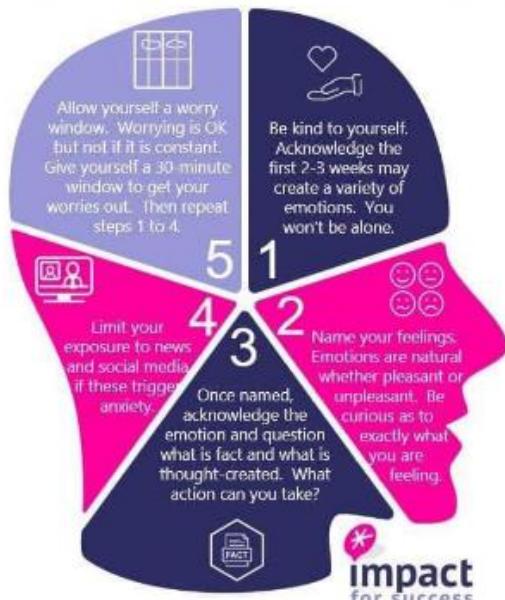
In terms of attendance to schools, families of eligible children are strongly encouraged to send their children to school. For vulnerable children such as children in care - it is still the case that social workers can discuss with the family what is best in each individual case. The Virtual School caseworkers can support any families and social workers with decisions about attendance.

Some children and families will be anxious about returning even if they are keen to attend. This is not surprising when you think about it as we have all been told to stay at home because of the potential dangers of the virus. Now that restrictions have been partially lifted, we all may be nervous about leaving the security of our homes. All of us may be excited to have more freedom but also be aware that the virus has not gone away. Anxious thoughts can produce fight, flight, or freeze responses in children. If your child is feeling anxious about returning to school, they may be showing this by being reluctant to leave the house, having tummy aches, not sleeping well, not concentrating as well as usual or being angry or more withdrawn. Adults may also be feeling anxious. Recognising our own responses can be useful. Perhaps we are not as patient as usual because we are worrying about

something? We can accept that being anxious in these times is quite understandable. We can accept that although we cannot make promises that everything will be OK, we can acknowledge that things are different and difficult and that it's OK to feel sad or angry at times. We can model a calm approach. We can take time to explain how school is set up and what it might be like and who in school is working hard to keep everyone safe. Communicate closely with school and explain to staff how your child feels. Together you can come up with a plan to support them to build their confidence over the next few weeks.

Young minds have some useful resources to support parents and carers. Find their leaflet about anxiety [here](#).

Take care and best wishes from the Virtual School team



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