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1 January 2021

Dear Parent / Carer,

Re: Return to school

By now you will be aware of the changes to Cumbria's Covid 19 tier (Tier 4) and to the changes to plans for a return to school in the new year, following the announcement this week from the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson.

To summarise the arrangements for schools in Cumbria, we can confirm that all primary schools should be opening as planned in the first week back (week commencing 4th January). Secondary schools will not open in that week, apart from for vulnerable children and children of key workers. Secondary school exam groups will return to school the following week (week commencing 11th January), and all secondary pupils will return the week after that (week commencing 18th January). Schools will be expected to put in place arrangements for online learning as in previous lockdown or semi-lockdown situations.

In addition to these arrangements, schools across the country will be beginning to test all of their pupils and staff over this two-week period, and then on an ongoing basis in order to keep children in school as much as possible.

You will appreciate that the task of preparing to run testing on this scale, at the same time as providing online learning, will be a very significant challenge for our schools. As ever, there will continue to be a variety of ways in which schools provide online learning and in which they set up their individual sites for testing. This may mean that the availability of face to face learning for children of key workers happens gradually over the first week. We would ask for your continued support for our dedicated Head Teachers and all school staff at this very challenging time.

For Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units, where most students are considered to be 'vulnerable', and whose needs are particularly complex, the first week will present a particular challenge. Since it will not be possible to develop plans and train staff for running a testing operation at the same time as delivering lessons, we have asked leaders in these settings to carry on with online learning for as long as is necessary in the first week in order to plan safely, before bringing children in. In all likelihood, some individuals and groups of children will begin to come to school, on a risk assessed basis, from the middle of the week onwards.

Your individual schools will be in touch with you over the coming days to explain any changes to existing arrangements and how they will work for you and your families.

Yours sincerely



Dan Barton
Assistant Director - Education and Skills



Colin Cox
Director of Public Health