

Statement from Tom Usher, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education

On 10 May the Prime Minister announced that childcare providers, schools, and colleges should reopen from 1 June.

Following this statement, Wirral Council started a consultation with all stakeholders, including trade unions, professional bodies and parents of children with reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children in order to assess the best way to support the safe return of more children to school.

In a statement made at the weekend Education, Secretary Gavin Williamson, apologised to students and thanked them for their 'sacrifices' during the coronavirus pandemic. He went on to say that schools "will only return if five tests have been met" – these being:

- Much lower cases of coronavirus among the population
- A national plan for social distancing in schools
- Tests available for staff and pupils
- A whole-school strategy for safety
- A plan to protect vulnerable teachers

With the above in mind and after taking into account the outcome of the consultation and guidance published by the Department for Education and Public Health England, Wirral Council does not expect parents or carers to send their children to school from the 1 June. We therefore do not expect childcare providers or schools to adhere to government guidance in terms of timescales or the suggested year groups if they judge this not to be in the best interest of children.

Throughout this crisis the council has given support to childcare providers, schools, and parents to make decisions about how best to support and educate children in their care. We see no reason to change this approach.

We fully appreciate this is a complex situation, which is why we believe that decisions of this nature should be made at a local level by people who know their communities and their children best.

Councillor Pat Hackett, Leader of Wirral Council said, "Whilst we recognise the importance of schools supporting more children, we want to be absolutely clear that we are taking a measured and cautious approach to this. Our priority is the safety of the people we represent, and we therefore do not expect schools to support more pupils until they are assured it is safe to do so."

In the next few weeks all childcare providers and schools will be considering how best to operate. This requires consideration of how to keep children safe, the size of classes, the optimal building layout, transport arrangements, hygiene control, and the activities needed to ensure children remain engaged in education and learning. They will also need to consider how to best support teachers, teaching assistants, childcare workers, and support staff to stay safe.

All childcare providers and schools will put in place a plan and share this with parents and carers before the beginning of the next half term.

Wirral council is very proud of the work our childcare providers and schools have done throughout the coronavirus outbreak and we will continue to support them in the best way we can until the virus has been contained.