

The Key Principles of the process of reopening schools post the COVID-19 closures.

The principles outlined below have been agreed by members of The Federation of Small Schools (FOSS), The Primary Executive Board (PEB) and the Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Headteachers (BASH).

The principles are a guide to how schools could start their planning and thinking in relation to the reopening of schools following the COVID-19 closures. These Key Principles are designed as a thinkpiece to stimulate the process of discussion and debate at local school levels. We feel that this is a key area for school leaders to begin a discussion as there are a number of concerns that await us when we reopen, not least that we may be given little time or warning to reopen by the Department of Education.

All of the bodies involved fully appreciate the school's ability to choose their own guiding principles, however, we hope that these Key Principles are supportive for Headteachers at this time.

Key Principles

The Key Principles cover three groups:

1. Pupils

2. Staff

3. Parents

The Key Principles are underpinned by three key areas:

1. Supporting Our Communities

2. Staff Training

3. Wellbeing Awareness

Community Support.

All schools will need to think about the best scenarios that they may employ to reopen their school and to manage the need to maintain social distancing protocols in an educational setting. These may include a staggered return of year groups, rotation of pupils across different days and reduced timetables. We would encourage from all sectors to engage in sharing their ideas on these processes. We believe this will provide the best support for our communities.

The health and safety of our staff must play a key role in our considerations of how to open our schools. There is no doubt that as we grow closer to opening, our Union colleagues will have a

number of key issues for us to consider and Joint Union Advice is expected soon on the matter. There has also been a comprehensive list of undertakings for schools circulated by the DfE in relation to preparing a school site for reopening. Please note that these Health and Safety compliance requirements must be complete before reopening. There will be a lot of pressure on our systems and the contractors that we all work with. We believe that there will need to be a patient and pragmatic approach to this phase of reopening.

Staff, Parents' and Pupils' anxiety about returning to school will be real and school leaders must be emotionally aware of this. Many of our staff pupils and parents will be lockdown weary and struggling with lockdown fatigue. We will not be returning to "normal" when we reopen. We will not have a normal summer term nor will the start of the new year in September, be normal. We must start to prepare our communities for the coming of the "New Normal". We have a responsibility to begin the education of staff, pupils and parents about fact that their expectations and the new reality that we will face, will not be aligned We also must always remember that the changes that these unknown changes we will face in the future, will cause further anxiety to our communities and will require all of the strength of our emotional intelligence.

It is reasonable to assume that any member of our school communities may return to school and disclose issues relating to abuse, domestic violence, depression, suicidal thoughts. It is important that the potential for disclosure is prepared for as part of the school reopening process. We must assume that some of our colleagues will have lost loved ones and that their partners may have lost their livelihood. Pupils who return to school, may have lost parents or other family members and their economic situations may have also altered drastically. Please ensure your teams are prepared to support these new circumstances.

Staff Workload in a staggered return environment will be a key area of planning as teachers must not be overburdened with tasks that are not realistically achievable. This will be a fast changing issue and will be complicated by the numbers who may be ill or shielding at anyone time. Our teachers are incredibly willing, but we must protect them and their welfare by ensuring their workload is suitably measured.

We believe that, where possible, all pupils (who are returning e.g. staggered return) should be on the school site at least once a week.

We believe that pupils in years 2 and 6 are entitled to have the opportunity to visit their old school where possible to celebrate their time at their school and to be able to begin the transition process.

Schools should administer a virtual transition process during the closure period to make contact with pupils and their teachers who are moving to your school for Reception, Year 3 and 7.

We believe Year 3 and 7 require a transition day. This may still be possible in July, but this may look very different to previous years and may take place over many days. Schools should plan

for a staggered start in September to facilitate a discrete Year 7 transition day or days. Schools must also consider that not all year groups will return in September.

Staff Training

We believe that teaching, support and administrative staff at school will require additional safeguarding training to enable them to be prepared for the emotional impact on children of being in Lockdown for an extended period of time. The Pandemic has redefined many of the protocols of our safeguarding process and has also introduced new levels of safeguarding issues for schools to deal with. We believe that this additional training and support is essential.

We believe that the Buckinghamshire Council Education Psychology team in association with Connectingbuckschools.com should be enabled to provide appropriate training for DSLs and other school safeguarding professionals to ensure training for staff can be of the highest quality and beneficial for our pupils and parents.

School leaders may also require additional training to ensure they are prepared to support staff who are returning to school after the lockdown. Schools that do not have supervision for staff in place should begin to consider access to a counsellor for support during the transition back to school life. Chairs of Governors may also require support and training to ensure they are supporting Headteachers and school leaders at this time.

Schools are working hard to provide care and support for our pupils who are in need, it would be highly supportive if schools could share what they are doing to support their staff through liaison groups and our representative bodies in the County

Wellbeing

All of the Key Principles mentioned cover the wellbeing of our communities. However the importance of prioritising the wellbeing of staff, pupils and parents can not be underestimated.

School leaders should be already conducting welfare checks on staff as well as pupils during the closure period and recoding any key concerns so that school leaders are prepared to support staff on their return to school.

All school leaders should direct staff to the Connectingbucksschools.com in advance of reopening and where possible provide counselling support to staff who require it. It is important to remember that there will be significant anxiety both leading up to a reopening and when we reopen. We must be prepared to support the wellbeing of our staff.

School Leaders must also recognise the importance of their health and wellbeing. Senior members must be aware of their own health, well being, and mental health. School leaders will need to adopt a buddy mentality to support each other. Chairs of Governors will have a specific duty to consider the wellbeing of the Headteacher. The Connectingbucks website is a simple

gate way to accessing support, but BASH and PEB Execs are also available for if colleagues want to discuss ideas, to unload something or just to talk.