



Dear Families

### **Supporting your children back to school**

For some of our pupils this will be the first time they return to school since before lockdown and I am sure they will have many questions about what school will look like:

Here's what they can expect:

- Social distancing
- Different outside areas for use by different classes for lunch and break times
- Lunches will be eaten in their classrooms
- The school will provide dinner as normal and children can bring in packed lunches
- Desks facing the front
- Reduced movement in the classroom and around school
- Their own equipment trays and equipment
- New routines in the classrooms
- New ways of entering their classrooms
- No whole school assemblies as a group gathering

These can all be causes of anxiety and worry for children of any age.

So what can you do to help them return to school successfully?

Here are some ideas to use that will help your children feel ready to go back to school.

1. Explain that there will be new routines and rules (don't worry the teachers will explain these in detail to the children)

It's important our children don't go into school expecting everything to look like normal.

Explain things will look different - but tell your child not to worry, because the teachers have been thinking about how to make the school safe and they will help you get used to the new layouts and routines.

And it can also be reassuring to talk about the things that haven't changed.

For instance:

- They'll see the same adults around school
- They'll be wearing the same uniform
- You'll be taking the same route to school
- It will be the same food at lunchtime
- Their friends will be there

- They will be studying the same subjects
- The adults in school are there to help and support them

And remember to tell them who will drop them off and who will pick them up. Even if this seems obvious to us as adults, it helps give children reassurance and a sense of security.

## 2. Talk about worries or fears

In the run-up to returning, make time for little conversations about how they're feeling about going back to school.

Be careful how you do this - the aim is to see if they do have concerns, not to plant new ones! Rather than saying 'Are you worried about going to school?' say 'I bet you are excited about going back to school?'.

If your child does have worries, acknowledge their concerns first before offering reassurance.

For example:

- It's normal to feel worried, but here's what you can do to stay safe in school
- I bet other children will feel worried too. That's why your teacher will spend lots of time explaining how everything will work.

And a good way of turning a negative into a positive is using the phrase, "At least..."

As in:

- I know we can't spend all day together today, but at least we can have some time straight after school
- I know you're in a different class from your best friend, but at least the teachers are going to make sure everyone makes new friends

And don't be surprised if children want to talk about the same issue a number of times. Children often need to (repeatedly!) revisit an idea with an adult to get reassurance nothing has changed.

## 3. Convey calm

It's natural for you to have some level of anxiety about returning your child to school.

But however you feel on the inside, it's important to convey calm to your child.

Children pick up on lots of little clues about how their parents are feeling - and they use this information to inform how they should be feeling. If we look worried, they pick up on this and start worrying too!

So, if you do have concerns, however you feel on the inside, aim to convey calm on the outside so that you can reassure your child/ren.

## 4. Routines for sleep

In most families, especially with the summer break, routines around children's sleep may have become more... flexible!

Bedtimes have drifted until later in the evening... and children are getting up later in the morning as a result.

To move immediately from these routines to 'normal running' and getting into school for 9am could be jarring.

So start moving your child's bedtime back towards normality now. Do this gradually, before they get back to school.

Because if we leave it to the last minute, it's likely our children won't have time to adjust, and won't be able to get to sleep at the earlier time. And then your child won't only have to cope with going back to school on the first day back - they'll be managing exhaustion too.

## 5. Be kind to yourself

Everyone has been through an emotional rollercoaster over the last few months - that includes **you** and your child.

And if you've felt overwhelmed or worried about sending your child back to school, that's okay. It's entirely normal.

So be kind to yourself.

Lockdown was a massive change for all of us - including our children. And now they're going back to school, we need to help them prepare.

So:

- Talk through what school will be like - and what will happen during the day - so your child knows what to expect
- Make time to talk about any worries they may have
- Let them see you looking calm and in control (even if you feel differently on the inside)
- Ease them back towards normal bedtimes (so they're not exhausted on their first day back)
- Take care of yourself (so you can take care of your child)

If you would like further support, please visit the Suffolk County Council Website at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/pts/if/five-tips/>