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19 May 2020

Dear Lewisham Headteacher/Governor,

### **Supporting you to plan a safe return for more children and staff**

As they have done throughout the whole of this difficult pandemic period, Lewisham's schools remain open to support the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. As during the Easter holidays, this support will remain in place during May half term, where families need it. Teachers and school staff have also worked continuously to support children to learn at home, adapting virtual and digital teaching resources to best meet pupils' needs. I think I speak for our whole community when I say how hugely grateful we are to our teachers and staff, who continue to work as critical workers through such difficult and challenging times.

The government has asked primary schools to begin to welcome back more children in phases starting with nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 6 – from 1 June at the earliest, if Coronavirus infections decline sufficiently. The government has indicated that they will make a final decision on this date by 28 May.

I know that everyone wants children to be back in schools and learning as soon as is practical, with measures in place to ensure children and adults are as safe as possible. There is no doubt that a long absence from school can exacerbate inequalities in learning as well as having a detrimental impact on children's health and wellbeing.

Any decision to increase numbers in school and the timing of a phased return of year groups will be taken by individual schools, based on careful planning and risk assessment in the context of their school, taking into account the welfare of both children and adults. I am determined that Lewisham Council should continue to support your school in undertaking these risk assessments and the development of measures to control risks for children and staff. These decisions should not be rushed - important concerns have been raised, by education unions and parents, which need to be properly addressed.

This means that no one should yet assume that their child will be able to return to school on 1 June. Parents, children, teachers and staff should be reassured that schools will only invite pupils back when a risk assessment has been undertaken and a full plan has been put in place. For some schools, depending on circumstances,

this may be earlier than others. We will advise parents to expect their child's school to be in touch in the coming weeks and to follow the guidance that the school gives. There will inevitably be anxieties around a phased return to school, but there is no pressure to send children back to school before they are ready. The Council will continue to work with schools and other partners to build confidence through a careful and well-planned return to school, when it is safe to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CBarnham', written over a light blue rectangular background.

**Cllr Chris Barnham**

Cabinet Member for School Performance and Children's Services