

29 May 2020

Dear Colleague

I am writing this to you at the end of half term break with the hope that you have been able to have at least some time for yourselves. I know that you have been working hard over the last few weeks to support your schools to make sure they are ready to welcome back a greater number of pupils after the break. I also know that the vast majority of schools have been open throughout, providing crucial support to key workers and in ensuring the needs of vulnerable children are prioritised, at the same time as supporting children's learning at home. Thank you for all of your efforts in respect of this.

The contribution that academy trusts have made to support local areas above and beyond their immediate communities has been significant. In many cases this has led to even greater understanding of the value that trusts bring not only to their own schools but also to the sector more generally. Your role collectively as a group and the embodiment of civic leadership has been one of the positive aspects to emerge from this terrible pandemic. I know that you have not done this in isolation and also wanted to take this opportunity to extend this appreciation and thanks to your trust boards and to the governing bodies of each of your schools. Trusts could not operate without their challenge and support – we recognise that they are all volunteers and their contribution has been immense. This is the very embodiment of public service.

As we approach the second half of this summer term, there is still much that is uncertain. What is certain however, is, where it is safe to do so, the importance of enabling more children to return to school and to benefit from the great education that your trusts can provide. The government has shared its conditional plan, which would see more children returning to Early Years settings, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 and some face to face contact in Year 10 and 12. Those plans embrace special schools and alternative provision. The ability of each of your schools to respond to this will of course look different and I have been very grateful to those of you who have taken some of your precious time to talk to me and my team about your plans. It is another pivotal moment in demonstrating the capability, commitment and capacity of the trust network across the region.

I have heard your concerns about the significant amount of guidance from the Department and from others and I am sorry that there has been a huge amount to take in. Knowing the rationale behind the guidance has been important to you and I would like to make sure I can set that out for one piece of very important guidance,

attendance reporting. The role played by the attendance data that you submit through the Daily Portal cannot be underestimated as the information captured through this process forms a vital part of the government's Covid-19 response. It will be used by the Department for Education, SAGE and across government to support decision making and to ensure that children are safe.

From 1 June the 'educational setting status' form is being updated to ask about staff and pupil numbers, reasons for absence, educational provision being made for the children attending, and free school meals. This information will be used to inform the wider scientific understanding and is just yet another way in which you are playing a vital role in our response to the pandemic. The online form can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings>

Thinking about recovery and vulnerable schools, we have now opened a new School to School Support offer to be focused on schools (academy and maintained) who are already especially vulnerable or who have become so during this crisis and are isolated or not part of a trust or local cluster. We have worked with Local Authorities, Dioceses and other partners including trusts to identify schools that might be open to an offer of support from a strong supporting school or trust working alongside them. We can provide for up to five days of funding to either NLEs or trust leaders. If you know of a school that might benefit from this offer, please do get in touch with my team RSC.EASTNELONDON@education.gov.uk

I also wanted to take the opportunity to share information about the Trust Capacity Fund, which is live at the moment and can provide one off funding for Trusts who have approved plans to grow or establish new hubs in areas where there is low capacity. Members of my team, will also be able to provide further information. The next few weeks will undoubtedly be an anxious time for many, whether that be a school leader, a child or a parent. It will take some time to adjust once again to another new normal. I know that you and your teams will be doing everything to support, to protect and to build confidence. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything further that we might do to support you.

Please do pass on my thanks to your teams and your trustees and share my appreciation of all that you are doing. Thank you so much for everything that you do and the difference that it makes.

With very best wishes

Yours sincerely,



Sue Baldwin
Regional Schools Commissioner
East of England and North East London