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To: Headteachers, Principals, Chairs of Governing Boards, FE Colleges and Multi-Academy Chief Executives

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Our ref IP/VB

Your ref

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Dear colleague

Schools Planning Together for a Return to Learning

I hope you all had a good weekend and managed to stay safe whilst also enjoying some of the sunny weather.

You will have seen the speculation in the media over the last week or so about the Government setting a date for when some more young people will be able to return to classroom-based learning. Over the last six weeks, Derbyshire's schools and learning providers have done an amazing job to welcome vulnerable children, key worker children and also to keep in contact with all of the county's other children and young people to check on their welfare and support their learning. On 30 April, 2.5% of the county's young people attended school and is likely to be just above the national average.

We know that many headteachers and governing bodies have already started to consider the steps to reopen their schools. To help this process, a group called 'Future shape: education' has been developed between Derbyshire County Council (DCC) and some headteachers. It is designed to bring together system leaders from across the county to make sense of the changed landscape, capture and combine the best thinking from school leaders to help provide a framework over the next few months. The 'new normal' won't be business as usual but will be a new way of doing things.

So, who are members of 'Future shape: education' and how were they selected? The group is approximately 20 - 25 in size and the largest membership are headteachers and leaders from all education phases and come from maintained schools, academies, MATs, church schools and the PVI sector. We recognise that we are acting swiftly and, therefore, have had to approach some representatives rather than follow a process of electing members. However, all school leaders will be able to provide input to the group. The Chair of Schools Forum is a member as are two school/academy finance representatives. DCC has four representatives from Children's Services and the council's education human resources team. The Department for Education (DfE) has one representative in order to be able to advise on any national policy developments when they can be announced and also to listen to other members and take back key issues for consideration. Members were selected by a variety of means. I have identified key council officer involvement and headteachers have been identified by the sector planning groups.

We anticipate the group to operate for up to a year and possibly longer. It's likely to be dynamic with changing agenda items and its membership may also change too. We also need to be cognisant of other groups whether these are Schools Forum, locality groups, MATs TSAs, DEIBP etc. and also the accountability systems that exist. Therefore, the group won't try to mandate approaches but instead try and make sense of the landscape and set out ideas for the new normal. Undoubtedly, it will need working groups to be formed from the wider school system and to focus on key issues; their thoughts and ideas can then be fed back to all schools across the county.

There's lots of questions still to answer regarding young people and staff returning to classroom-based learning. A sample of these include which year groups will return first, when they will return, how to build confidence with staff/young people and parents/carers and of course the issue of safety. As we move in to 'Future shape: education' we need to recognise that some answers will come from the DfE, some DCC, some from individual MATs but the overwhelming majority will come from schools. No ideas are bad ideas, no questions are silly questions and we all must respect that. No one school, MAT or stakeholder has all of the answers, but by working together we have many answers.

Before we can start planning in detail for the return of young people and staff back in to schools, we need to recognise that it is the Government which will be the organisation that sets the national pathway and current media speculation suggests that this will be announced on Sunday 10th May 2020. Already, I have encountered a small number of headteachers looking to DCC to name a date and year groups that will return to learning; DCC cannot do so since it will be the Government which mandates the date and year groups. Similarly, a small number of headteachers have asked DCC to undertake risk assessments on their staff to determine whether they are fit to work. Again, DCC cannot do so, but by working together we can start considering some issues.

The first meeting of this group is later this week. I will be in contact with you again around how the group will operate, its membership and how it will work alongside you to capture your contributions and thoughts once the group has properly formed and elected a chair.

Yours sincerely

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