



St Mary's
Catholic Primary School and Nursery

BACK TO SCHOOL – A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR THE RETURN TO SCHOOL

Please find some suggestions to help you prepare your child for the transition back to school, following the easing of some of the Government's Covid-19 lockdown measures.

We know it might be challenging for some SEND children to go back to school after such a long break from routine.



Why do SEND pupils find change difficult?

Lots of SEND children and young people find unexpected change hard, and prefer familiar routines. Although some children may have found [home schooling](#) difficult, they may have become used to being at home, where they feel safe. They may feel anxious and distressed at the prospect of returning to the social and sensory world of school and also have fears about the coronavirus. We have set out some key things you can do to help your child with going back to school.

Start with the familiar

Anxiety can be linked to the unknown. If at all possible, visit school before it officially reopens. That way, your child can familiarise themselves with our environment again, see their teacher and get used to the layout of the school again. Your child may feel reassured to know that some things have not changed. If a visit does not work, you could ask for a meeting (virtual or face-to-face) with your child's teacher or the school's SENCO Mrs Hemming. Mrs Hemming can be contacted via email: l.hemming@stmarysrc.cheshire.sch.uk If this is not practical, we could take a few photos of key places in the school.

Introduce the changes in school

As well as reminding your child of the things about school that have not changed, you should also introduce changes that have happened to keep children safe. Some SEND children are likely to take longer to adjust to the new social distancing rules in school. If possible, rather than waiting for the return to school to learn about these changes, you may want to explain the [new protective measures](#) that will be in place to your child. You

will find photos of places in the school where new measures have been implemented, such as one-way corridors on our website.

Your child may need explicit [visual instructions](#) and/or the use of [Social Stories™](#), which are short descriptions of a particular situation and include specific information about what to expect and why.

Some changes that we have made are included in the table below.

When your child returns to school, they may have the same class teacher but as most classes are being split to help with social distancing, they may have a new teacher, or be in a group being led by a teaching or classroom assistant.

Sharing information about your child

We know how vital it is that your child's teacher has a good understanding of your child's special educational needs (SEN) and how they affect your child, and know what their individual needs are. If your child is changing class, information about your child will be shared by Mrs Hemming and your child's current class teacher with the new teacher. This will be a one page profile or essential information sheet (EIS). However, we also appreciate that you may want to share your unique knowledge of your child. We can arrange this for you.

It might be helpful to create a pupil passport that you can use to outline key facts about your child, including their interests, needs, likes and dislikes and how they would like to be supported in school. There are two examples in the guide [Working together with your child's school](#). You might like to suggest a list of '[reasonable adjustments](#)'. These are changes to the way a school usually does things so that disabled pupils can fully participate in all aspects of school life. Schools need to think in advance about what reasonable adjustments your child might require and have those ready before they return to school, so plenty of notice is really helpful.

How can I prepare my child for the changes when they return to school?

The table below lists some of the protective measure we have put in place to reduce the transmission of COVID 19 in our school. There is more information on our website.

As every SEND child is different, what might be considered positives about these changes for one child, could be seen as negatives by another. The reason for all of these changes is to reduce the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus, but, in the right hand column of the table, we have suggested a more specific explanation for each measure. You can adapt this table for your own use and communicate it to your child in a way that they will understand (e.g. by using [visual instructions](#) or [Social Stories™](#)).

Changes that schools might make (protective measures to reduce risks)	Potential positives (+) and negatives (-) about the changes	Questions	Reasons for the changes to be communicated with your child
Classes split into smaller groups of up to 9 children	+ less social interaction - your child may be in a group away from friend(s); may be in a group led by a teacher or assistant, with whom your child is unfamiliar	Could my child be placed in their own teacher's group or in a group with a friend?	To help with social distancing – to stop the virus from spreading
Small class groups (bubbles of no more than 8/9 pupils) will not mix with other children throughout the day	+ less social interaction - may be in a group away from friend(s);	Can virtual chats be arranged with a special friend in another group?	To avoid larger groups of children mixing
One-way system around the school, or corridors divided in half (two-way 'traffic')	+ your child may like the social distancing: other children not entering their personal space - may have little awareness of personal space, so may unconsciously approach others; may be frustrated if there is a more direct route to where they want to go	Are there arrows to show direction to walk? Are there lines down the middle of the corridor or a divider? Will the school consider a reasonable adjustment of allowing my child to leave class first?	To keep children apart as they move through the school
Break and lunch-times staggered, and children	+ less social interaction; less noise	If my child needs time-out of the room at lunchtime, is there a safe space or alternative room they can go?	All children are not in one place or moving around the school at

eating lunch in their classrooms	- sensory issues: the smell of food lingering in classroom; not able to play with friend(s)		the same time to reduce the risk of the virus spreading
Some lessons may be outside	+ may prefer learning outside, not confined in classroom with sensory overload - unfamiliar with outdoor lessons; risk of less structure to lessons and may find it difficult to differentiate between lesson time and break time	Alert teacher if your child is likely to find this difficult and suggest reasonable adjustments (e.g. a pop-up tent for their use – a safe place)	The virus is less likely to spread in the open air
Stagger drop-off and collection times for parents at the start and end of day	+ may reduce feeling of chaos and bewilderment as crowds of adults and children arrive and disperse - may have to wait to collect older/younger sibling	Can I collect both my children at the same time? Can I stand at a particular place to collect my child?	To minimise adult-to-adult and child-to-child contact
Increased cleaning around the school and classrooms less cluttered	+ may prefer a tidier, cleaner environment - sensory issues : smell of cleaning products	Can my child wear a mask? (NB The Government's guidance: Face coverings should not be worn in any circumstance by those who may not be able to handle them as directed (for example, young children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities) as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.)	Cleaning gets rid of the virus; fewer things in the classroom means less chance of touching something with the virus on
Classroom layout different – increased spaces between desks	+ less social interaction; may not be familiar with layout from practice tests/exams - may be sitting in a different part of the classroom causing anxiety	Can my child's desk be in the same place in the classroom as before lockdown?	Less chance of children touching each other and spreading the virus
No more whole school assemblies	+ may prefer no assemblies - may no longer feel a part of a school community; may find sitting in any assembly difficult		To reduce the number of children in the hall in close proximity

Play equipment will not be shared	+ may prefer having one object to play with and not have to share it; - may want to play with something another child has	Can my child be allocated a particular piece of play equipment for their own use?	The virus can be spread by touching the same toy that someone else, who has the virus, has touched
No soft toys and furnishings and toys with intricate parts	+ may prefer a less cluttered environment - may miss a favourite toy	As above	Hard to clean soft toys and toys with intricate parts
A group of children use the same classroom or area throughout the day; sitting at same desk all day	+ may prefer the familiarity of being in the same place - may need movement breaks	Can my child have (extra) movement breaks?	To stop the spread of the virus by children sharing classrooms and desks
Classroom doors propped open, where safe to do so (bearing in mind fire safety and safeguarding)	+ may reduce sensory overload - may prefer doors and windows closed	Can my child sit away/near the door (depending on preference)?	To limit use of door handles and aid ventilation
More frequent washing of hands	+ may find it reassuring that they are keeping the virus away; may enjoy the sensory stimuli of water - may not like wet/soapy hands or the smell of the soap	Can my child use a particular hand sanitiser instead?	Clean hands don't have the virus on
Limiting the number of children or young people who use the toilet facilities at one time	+ less social interaction - may need to suddenly go to the toilet	If you child has particular toileting needs, ask if they can have priority when visiting the toilet	To ensure that toilets do not become crowded
There may be a new timetable – fewer subjects being taught	+ fewer demands - may not be learning favourite subject	Can my child have a visual timetable?	Some of the new measures (above) to reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19 are likely to use more of the school day –

			less time available for the curriculum; Teachers may not be available due to self-isolation etc.
--	--	--	--

Reassure your child that all these measures make it much safer for them to return to school.

What if my child doesn't want to go back to school?

Despite your best efforts to prepare your child for the transition back to school and to reassure them that it is safe, some SEND children may find the prospect almost unbearable, which can lead to 'school refusal'. This may not be a case of your child simply being unwilling to go in to school, but actually feeling unable to tolerate school. See [What can I do if my child won't go to school?](#)

What if it is not possible for my child to return to school?

Every school must carry out a risk assessment before it reopens to show that it has done all that it reasonably can be expected to do to minimise the spread of the coronavirus.

The Department for Education (England) guidance says:

“Risk assessments may prove useful when planning how best to support the return of individual children”

However, a risk assessment will be used primarily as a tool to overcome barriers, but given the current situation, it may be that the risks and expected limitations you're your child's or others' safety and well-being.

“Settings may need to carry out a risk assessment, if it is deemed that a child or young person may not be able to follow instructions, to determine what mitigations need to be put in place and whether, in rare circumstances, they should stay at home.”

Our SENDCO Mrs Hemming and yourselves as parents may feel that your child is likely to face difficulties in following the new protective measures and rules and consider that the risk of allowing your child back into school would be too high. However, safety issues must not be used inappropriately to avoid making reasonable adjustments. As we will be working

in partnership with you, we hope to avoid making uninformed assumptions about the risks that your child's presence in the school could have.

The Cheshire East livewell website, has lots of useful resources for parents in supporting your SEND children. Links are below:

Useful Resources

<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/local-offer-for-children-with-sen-and-disabilities/education/supporting-send-in-education/pupils-with-asc/resources-for-parents-parents-and-family.aspx>

[Social Stories™](#) - The National Autistic Society

['School is opening' Social Stories™](#) - London Grid for Learning

[Social story: My name is coronavirus \(in multiple languages\)](#) - Mindheart

[Successful Social Stories™ for Young Children with Autism: Growing Up with Social Stories™](#) - Dr Siobhan Timmins. Foreword by Carol Gray (Jessica Kingsley publishers)

[What can I do if my child won't go to school?](#) - The National Autistic Society

[Starting or changing school](#) - The National Autistic Society

Department for Education (England) guidance:

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings.](#)

[Supporting children and young people with SEND as schools and colleges prepare for wider opening](#)

