

Whitefield Primary School - Returning to School

Care, connection, confidence

Following the extended lock-down we recognise that returning to school will be exciting, but it will also be difficult. Transition back to school will focus on the children and their needs and our fundamental mission remains:

“We value each child for who they are and prepare them for who they can be.”

What will this mean for school return?

When children come back to school they will have had a wide range of experience during lockdown. We acknowledge that our children will need a holistic school experience which focuses on wellbeing and re-connects them to other adults, children, learning and the curriculum.

We will start with reassurance and a focus on reconnecting and rebuilding relationships

We will take time to listen and play and meet our children where they are. We will provide a nurturing environment, following 4 key principles of: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy to support children to come back to school in an unfamiliar world and thrive successfully.

Play

Learning happens for all children through play. Play provides joyful, actively engaging, meaningful, explorative and socially interactive experiences which are fundamental to learning and well-being. All staff will be trained in how to develop play.

In school we will create an intentional atmosphere of **playfulness** - of lightness, fun, joy and interest. We will use children's interests as a springboard for learning and develop playful experiences with them as a way of reconnecting and reassuring.

Acceptance

Our children will be met with acceptance, welcomed without judgement and encouraged to understand and verbalise their feelings.

We will provide opportunities for staff and children to work together in low demand situations. We will enable children to share stories and experiences together and as a community acknowledge those and come together to help children recover and build resilience.

Curiosity

Curiosity in this context is about helping the child to make sense of their feelings and behaviours. This will happen through re-connecting with strong relationships with staff and peers, providing spaces to think and reflect, and explicitly modelling and teaching ways to process their experiences. Children will be supported to manage their feelings and behaviours through taught strategies such as mindfulness. Children will also work with staff to co-regulate and self-regulate using social thinking. This is in line with the school's Attachment and trauma centred approach.

Empathy

This will mean that as we allow our children to share their experiences, we won't try to make things better straight away, we will listen, and through our strong connections, let them know that we have heard, and that we are sorry. Our Mental Health lead will be available to support this, but all staff are trained to understand and practice empathy, in recognition that a child will choose the relationship key to them and will gain support from the adults they seek it from.

Practically this means that as children come back, in whatever way that is framed, Whitefield will focus on a play-based curriculum based on the PACE principles and focussed on children's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH).

Keeping demand low, but expectations high will mean that children trust and access learning, and are supported to re-socialise with peers and staff. We also know that there will have been academic losses and catch up is important for our children, and initially our focus will be on developing children's core skills of English and Maths.

The likelihood is that for some time children will be experiencing a mix of home school learning and school based learning. We will seek to teach children how to access as much of their home learning as effectively as possible, and understand more of the barriers individuals face and how we can overcome those.

Over time our aim is that children will be able to transition to our fuller curriculum, supported by tightly defined gap filling for all, and specific support for those who need it.