

## Returning to School *Care, connection, confidence*

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- 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

# PACES Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy

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- We will take time to listen and play and meet our children where they are.
- We will provide a nurturing environment 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.

**In practice** this means that as children come back, in whatever way that happens, Whitefield will focus on a play-based curriculum based on the PACE principles and focussed on children’s social, emotional and mental health (SEMH).

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- 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 this is significant for our children, initially our focus will be on developing children's core skills of English and Maths.
- In contrast to the notion of catching up, we may have to repeat and reinforce previous concepts and skills that have been disrupted by trauma. This might involve revisiting past topics and reminding children of their success. We need to ensure that the building blocks are secure before expecting children to leap ahead to unfamiliar and novel learning experiences. (Dr Chris Moore)
- For new learning activities, we should aim to provide meaningful, practical and multi-sensory experiences. Tasks may need to be initially broken down into smaller steps, with clear and simple instructions and active modelling from key adults.
- 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.
- 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 to understand more of the barriers individuals face and how we can overcome those.

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We may need to initially focus on providing positive and fulfilling experiences. One of the most enriching is play. Children young and old thrive when they smile, laugh and engage in games and activities that help them to recognise and appreciate their personal strengths. First and foremost, the return to school should be fun.

Having lofty academic expectations too soon will undoubtedly add to children's stress.

By Dr Chris Moore



*More about play <https://wke.lt/w/s/w4xkle>*