



**Contact:** Mayor Ros Jones  
**Email:** ros.jones@doncaster.gov.uk  
**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

Dear Headteacher,

## **Re: Safe opening of Doncaster Schools**

Firstly I would like to start by thanking you for all the hard work you and your staff have done over the past nine weeks, not only keeping your schools open for children of key workers and vulnerable children, but continuing to support those children at home with their learning and welfare checks. I have been so proud to see our schools really go over and above to support the families of Doncaster at this uncertain time.

As you will be aware, earlier this week I launched a survey asking parents their opinions regarding the proposed school openings from June 1<sup>st</sup>. The reason I did this is I felt it was important that parents and carers were given an opportunity to input into the debate and have their views considered alongside those of schools and trade unions. I have also had extensive discussions with Doncaster Council's Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Director of Public Health as well as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, Cllr Nuala Fennelly.

I have now digested all of the information at my disposal and feel I am able to make an informed recommendation as to what our Doncaster-specific approach should be.

**I am strongly recommending that schools across Doncaster should NOT be opening to a wider cohort of children on June 1<sup>st</sup>.**

This position is based on three key areas that have been consistently brought up as concerns by schools, trade unions, parents and carers. My advice is that until we can confidently respond to these three areas of concern we are not in a position to extend the opening of our schools.

These areas are as follows:

1. **There is currently no access to data about community transmission at a local level.** You will be aware that earlier this week I wrote to the Prime Minister about this very issue. This is something that I know you are concerned about, as are your staff who are discussing this with their trade unions in some depth. The results of our survey also show this is a concern that parents share, with 74 per cent of the 9,500 plus respondents saying they would need reassurance on this issue before they would consider sending their child back to school.

2. **Proper access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for teachers and sanitising equipment for both staff and children.** I know my officers have been working closely with schools to support you to source all of the relevant PPE needed, and although we are confident that we can get this to schools by June 1<sup>st</sup>, the more bespoke sanitising equipment – such as hand washing stations – will take longer. I know that many schools are being incredibly resourceful in sourcing this equipment as well but it makes sense to give ourselves some more time to ensure we have everything we need. This has been a very key point in discussions with trade unions and the parent survey also told us it was an important issue for families, with 46 per cent citing PPE access as something they are concerned about and 48 per cent wanting more information on the measures being taken to keep schools clean and disinfected.
  
3. **A proper understanding of capacity within schools** I know you have been working incredibly hard at a school level on your numbers and understanding your specific capacity challenges. However, I am concerned that the number of key worker and vulnerable children attending school is still rising on a weekly basis and want to understand what this really means for our capacity calculations across the borough. It is imperative that we are still able to prioritise these children over coming months so I have asked my officers to do some further work in this area to make sure we don't get ourselves into a position where we have to turn these children away.

Although my stance is very clear, I am aware that the ultimate decision on when and how you re-open your school does of course lie with you. However, I am asking you to support my recommendation and agree not to reopen your school on June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Like you, I am keen to get children back to school as soon as it is safe to do so, which is why I am saying that I will review my recommendation on a regular basis, this will be done in full consultation with yourselves and trade unions.

I would be grateful if you could share this letter with your parents, staff members and governing bodies after 3.30pm today when I make the formal announcement. I am aware that many of you have started making plans, based on risk assessment, for wider opening. I advise that you continue to do this, in preparation for eventual opening, whenever that is.

Thank you for your continued support and for the support you are giving to our young people and families in Doncaster.

Yours faithfully,



**Ros Jones**

**Mayor of Doncaster**

Supported by Cllr Nuala Fennelly - Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools