

Our ref: JJ/MT
Your ref:
Please contact: Julie Jenkins
E-mail: julie.jenkins@calderdale.gov.uk
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Children and Young People's Services

Town Hall
Crossley Street
Halifax
HX1 1UJ

Dear Colleagues,

It was good to meet with representatives of the Primary Clusters, the Chair of Calderdale Association of Secondary Heads and the Chief Executives of several Academy Trusts last week, and listen to their views.

The Council Leader, Lead Member for Children and the Cabinet have taken advice from the Director of Public Health and I am writing to update you on Calderdale Council's position in relation to wider school opening which also takes account of the Secretary of State for Education's statement earlier today.

In my two previous letters I outlined that although the first two of the Government's tests were met, evidence from the Director of Public Health demonstrated that in Calderdale the last three tests were unmet. Recent evidence and advice from the Director of Public Health provides greater confidence that the remaining three of the Government's five tests are now being met.

The third of the five tests relates to the reliability of data that shows the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels. Data from a number of sources now consistently indicates that Calderdale has low incidence compared to other area and the number of reported coronavirus cases in Calderdale continues to fall. Whilst Directors of Public Health recommend that the R number is not looked at in isolation but is considered in the context of the number of cases, the R number in the North East and Yorkshire published on 5 June was estimated to be 0.89 which is the lowest of all the English regions.

Test four relates to our confidence in testing capacity and the expectation that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is being managed effectively with supply able to meet demand. The national element of the Test and Trace programme has been implemented and the Local Outbreak Plan will be implemented from the end of June. A review of PPE for Calderdale schools has been undertaken and provisional guidance will be discussed with representatives from the Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and Special sectors on 10 June to ensure that it reflects the reality of experience in educational settings.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the fifth test relates to the need for us to be confident that any changes we do make will not risk a second peak of infections. SAGE stated that increasing the number of children in schools will increase transmission of the virus. The implementation of safe social distancing and a range of protective measures in schools will have an impact on reducing transmission. Procedures for dealing with an outbreak in a school have been developed. School nurses will provide support with the implementation of these procedures, should this be needed.

Having considered the latest evidence available, the Council is able to support a cautious extension of the opening of schools from 15 June.

Headteachers, governing bodies and Academy Trusts can consider the Council's advice, but ultimately it is your decision whether you extend opening or not.

In order for you to be confident that there is a properly risk-managed approach which supports and leads to a safe environment, the Council has provided practical assistance by drafting risk assessment guidance to support schools. The Council has also shared an 'Individual Return to Work Plan' to assess the health needs and vulnerabilities of all staff members. Both of these documents will support you in assessing your individual circumstances and need to be completed before final arrangements for wider opening are agreed and communicated to parents.

As I advised in my last letter, a school's position is unlikely to contravene health and safety statutes if the school:

- Complies, as a minimum, with the prevailing, specific government guidance on operating schools during the COVID pandemic;
- Produces a school specific risk assessment which follows this national guidance;
- Implements and maintains the protective control measures identified in the risk assessment and keeps these under review;
- Seeks competent Health & Safety advice when required;
- Seeks competent advice on infection control from the coronavirus from the Council's Public Health Team when required;
- Ensures that vulnerable staff and vulnerable children with underlying health conditions are risk assessed and parents are advised accordingly;
- Consults with staff on arrangements;
- Reports and investigates suspected cases as required;
- Reviews risk assessments regularly.

On the basis of the comprehensive risk assessment that you are undertaking, you will come to a professional judgement on how and when you can meet the Government's ambitions in the best interests of your children and staff. You know your school, the buildings, the staff and the children better than anyone. Each school is different, with individual health and safety risks, and each school will determine its own arrangements.

I understand that some parents may decide to exercise their own judgement and will continue to keep their children at home. The Council will continue to consider the scientific evidence available to the Director of Public Health and review its advice as necessary.

Finally, I appreciate your commitment and dedication in recent months. I recognise how hard everyone continues to work, whilst also balancing the needs and safety of your children, families and staff, to ensure that more children will once again thrive in your schools.

I would be grateful if you could share this letter with your parents, staff members and governing bodies soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



Julie Jenkins, Director – Children and Young People's Services

