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Children and Young People's Services
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Dear Colleagues

Government guidance on wider opening of schools and colleges

The purpose of my letter is to update you on Calderdale Council's consideration of the latest Government guidance in relation to wider school opening.

The Prime Minister has stated that schools and nurseries across England remain on track to open to more children from 1 June, and that the Government's five tests are met. He has said primary schools can welcome back children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6; and that secondary schools will be able to offer face-to-face support for a quarter of Year 10 and 12 pupils at any one time from 15 June. This is in addition to the current provision for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers in all year groups.

On 28th May, the national NHS Test and Trace programme was launched. Our Director of Public Health will produce a local outbreak management plan and establish a Councillor led Health Protection Board in the next month, as part of the local mobilisation of the Test and Trace programme. The plan will set out how local outbreaks, including those associated with schools will be managed. The Board will make local decisions about tightening restrictions in order to contain any outbreaks. This may include decisions about recommending school closures, in discussion with Headteachers, governing bodies and trusts.

The Council Leader, Lead Member for Children and the Cabinet have taken advice from the Director of Public Health, the Director of Children's Services and considered the Interdisciplinary Task and Finish Group on the Role of Children in Transmission:

Modelling and behavioural science responses to scenarios for relaxing school closures. This is known as the SAGE advice (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies).

The Government have written an explanatory note on this paper by SAGE assessing the potential impact of more children returning to school on the transmission of coronavirus. The explanatory note and the SAGE modelling paper can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-explanatory-note-on-sage-modelling>

Yesterday the Prime Minister in the daily briefing set out the government's progress in meeting the five tests, which are now:

1. *“Protect the NHS’s ability to cope. We must be confident that we are able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment right across the UK*
2. *See a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates from COVID-19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak*
3. *Reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the board*
4. *Be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand*
5. *Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS”*

As stated in my previous letter the first two tests have been met: the NHS is able to cope and the death rate is coming down. The Council's view regarding the next three tests is:

The third test is *‘we need reliable data that shows the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels’*. The Director of Public Health has advised that the number of coronavirus cases in Calderdale residents continues to fall, although we do not yet know the impact of the lifting of lockdown restrictions on transmission in Calderdale. The national transmission rate (the R number) is now between 0.7 and 0.9. Data on the Yorkshire & Humber regional transmission rate has not been published since my last letter. Due to the way that it is calculated and the Covid-19 incubation period, the R number published on 28th May, is unlikely to fully reflect the impact of the relaxation of lockdown restrictions on 13th May.

Test four is *‘we need to be confident that testing capacity and PPE is being managed, with supply able to meet, not just today's demand, but future demand’*. The Government's announcement yesterday on the Test and Trace programme gives us confidence that testing capacity will increase in the coming weeks. The Director of Public Health is not currently provided with information on the number of Calderdale residents who have been tested or the results of these tests, but will be once this is in place. The Director of Public Health has agreed that a review of Calderdale schools needs for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will take place. This will be a joint piece of work led by the Public Health team with input from Headteachers in the Borough.

Test five is *‘and perhaps most crucially, we need to be confident that any changes we do make will not risk a second peak of infections’*. The SAGE advice highlights that any return to school will increase the ‘R’ factor. Implementation of safe social distancing in schools and in the wider community will have a significant impact on reducing transmission rates.

We have carefully considered the latest evidence and there is no change to the Council's advice to schools in respect of wider opening. Our position will be reviewed next week. There are planned improvements nationally to testing that we will discuss with Headteachers when they return to school after half-term.

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

The council has issued a draft proforma for the completion of risk assessments. This will support you in assessing your individual circumstances and whether it is safe to open. This must be completed before you implement wider opening. We have also issued an ‘Individual Return to Work Plan’ to assess the health and safety of your staff.

The schools 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;
- Implement and maintain the control measures identified in the risk assessment and keep 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.
- Ensure you risk assess vulnerable staff and vulnerable children with underlying health conditions and you advise parents accordingly.
- Consult with your staff;
- Reports and investigates suspected cases as required and reviews risk assessments as required.

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

We will communicate with you again next week. Thank you for your feedback, partnership work with the Council and commitment to return the children and young people of Calderdale to school when it is safe for them to do so.

Yours sincerely



Julie Jenkins
Director – Children and Young People's Services

