



Doncaster Council

11 June 2020

Statement

Following advice from Doncaster's Director of Public Health, Dr Rupert Suckling, Doncaster Mayor Ros Jones is today recommending that schools across the borough can start to implement their wider reopening plans from next Monday (June 15).

Three weeks ago, Mayor Ros told schools across Doncaster that her recommendation was for them to not reopen wider on 1 June. Primary schools unanimously supported this recommendation and have remained open only for key worker and vulnerable children to date.

This latest update from Mayor Ros means that primary and secondary schools can now look at opening their doors to some pupils and special schools can start to extend their offer. Schools will need to adhere to Government guidelines on physical distancing as part of these plans, which will mean that schools' plans will differ based on their available capacity.

The reason Mayor Ros and Dr Suckling feel that now is the right time to start bringing more children back into school is that the three key areas of concern that were initially outlined have progressed as follows:

1. **Access to data about community transmission at a local level** – the introduction of the Track and Trace system has significantly improved the access to data at a local level. This in turn has increased the understanding around the rate and whereabouts of the virus across Doncaster
2. **Availability of PPE and hygiene products** - schools have confirmed that they have the necessary PPE equipment
3. **A proper understanding of capacity** – all schools now have a full understanding of how many additional children they will be able to invite back to school. The numbers vary between schools and mean that each setting will take a different approach to which children will be asked to return and when

Mayor Ros Jones said: "Schools have been working tremendously hard to get their premises ready to offer places to their children and have been planning for accepting more pupils where they can. This has been a significant undertaking whilst offering support for key worker and vulnerable children and I would like to thank them for their commitment.

"Part of this planning includes looking at the risk of infection transmission and how to mitigate against this so they keep children and staff safe. I am also assured that the three key points that we needed to ensure were satisfied have been and it is now time for schools to consider their next steps.

“Of course it is a matter for schools as to how and when they open to more children, but I would recommend, based upon the Public Health advice given to me, that they do so in a phased way and not to all of the year groups. A phased, well managed approach will offer parents and carers more assurance and confidence that the safety and well-being of everyone in schools is at the heart of the decisions made.”

The bioalert level for the UK remains at level 4 which indicates that a Coronavirus epidemic is in general circulation and that there is high transmission.

However, both the number of new hospital admissions from COVID-19 and the number of deaths from the virus have fallen to pre-lockdown levels. More local information is being received to enable a better local assessment for Doncaster.

Dr Suckling said: “I can confirm that the launch of the new track and trace system means that I am now able to get a better understanding of the number of new cases at a local level. Although the number of cases has not steadied yet, the risk of catching COVID-19 in Doncaster is reducing. Encouragingly, there have not been any Coronavirus outbreaks in schools. Therefore, I am confident we are now at a stage where schools can consider how and when they reopen to a wider cohort of pupils, if they are able to do so, meeting all of the Government’s safety guidance.”

Dr Suckling wrote to all schools across Doncaster yesterday to inform them of the current position and of his advice. You can view this letter here <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/schools/director-of-public-health-letter-to-schools-10-june-2020>.

The earliest schools can start to reopen to more children is next Monday (June 15) however it is a matter for school headteachers and governing bodies to determine their own individual timescales depending on their circumstances. Parents ultimately have the choice as to whether they send their children back to school and there will be no penalty fines imposed for non-attendance.

Ends