



The Prime Minister  
Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
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**Contact:** Mayor Ros Jones  
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**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

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

It has been six months since your last visit to South Yorkshire at a time of emergency during the floods – one that has lasting effects for many parts of Doncaster and its residents and businesses.

You recognised the need to see for yourself firsthand the hardship and devastation this caused to help inform national policy on flooding relief and resilience. This in turn enabled your Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to consider a raft of measures to support such communities including a policy review and financial support – both of these developments I welcome.

Your recent statement on easing the lockdown to the media at a press briefing on May 10 underlined the Government's view that under the three step model, step two into step three is dependent on successfully meeting your five tests before any restrictions were lifted. It is clear to me from my assessment in Doncaster that even the first test is not absolute and there are still many challenges to meet in the coming weeks and months. Indeed the World Health Organization (WHO) has not altered its risk assessment of the severity of COVID-19.

And this is one of a number of concerns in the light of the national and local picture that has led to me writing to you.

As you have stated several times, you want the country to be levelled up, giving opportunity and equality to communities across the UK. Nowhere more pertinent to that is the access and opportunity to learn, particularly in areas of low social mobility.

Education and learning opportunities offers young people greater opportunities and aspiration and is a foundation of our collective future. This current pandemic is swiftly impacting upon young people and families, and widening inequity, which concerns me greatly.

However these opportunities should be made available in safe, well managed environments so children, staff and families have confidence.

The phased opening of schools is likely to remain a priority for councils and the Government over the next fortnight and we will continue to plan appropriately for our young people to return to school safely – their safety, and the safety of school staff is a top priority.

So in Doncaster, we have been working collaboratively with schools and head teachers. From mid-March before lockdown my officers established an enhanced communication and consultation arrangement with all school leaders and trade unions. This has allowed us to not only prepare for and maintain the opening of schools for both the children of key workers and our vulnerable children, but it also has provided a mechanism to engage with schools on planning for recovery and reopening.

As you will know, there is a range of actions that schools need to complete before they can safely reopen for nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 children. These actions include capacity planning and carrying out capital works, completing risk assessments, training staff on any additional needs for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), ensuring staff wellbeing, redesigning the curricula, restarting school meals services and ensuring safe transport for children to and from school where needed. My officers are also looking at the potential for additional emotional health and wellbeing support for children impacted by the lockdown.

To aid our recovery planning and reopening, we have agreed a set of 'Recovery Principles' which we are using to guide our activities:

- The safety of staff, children and families is paramount
- Schools and settings need sufficient time and resources to prepare to reopen and operate safely
- Reopening of schools and settings will be a gradual process in full consultation with all stakeholders
- Every school faces a unique set of challenges and this will be taken into consideration when planning to reopen
- The emotional health and wellbeing of staff and children must be the focus once schools reopen

I am confident that our schools, unions, parents and my officers can address all these practical concerns but I will require your help to address one persistent issue. That critical issue is the need to have a real-time understanding of the presence and transmission rate of COVID-19 in Doncaster.

I need, and my officers need, this data on a range of specific indicators that give me (and them) credible evidence on which to base any judgement I make about whether it is safe or not for Doncaster schools to return from June 1 2020. This data needs to be at a more local level than the data that will be used to support national decision making about the Bioalert levels. In particular, I will need:

- The total number of COVID-19 PCR antigen tests carried out on Doncaster residents
- The number of positive COVID-19 PCR antigen tests on Doncaster residents by age and postcode
- The results of the care home testing programme
- NHS 111 usage by age and postcode for Doncaster residents

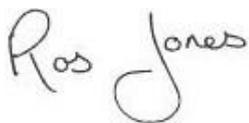
Currently, this data is either partially available or unavailable.

Feedback from parents/carers from some schools in Doncaster suggest that they have legitimate concerns about sending their children back to school without the assurance that such data would give them. This concern I share, so I have asked for parents' and carers' views on schools/nursery phased re-openings to take a view on their feelings on this matter ahead of June 1. This will help inform my advice and recommendation as the directly elected mayor regarding re-openings here locally. Perhaps this is something you, and your Government would wish to do to canvass similar opinion and inform your position further.

I hope you, and your officials can expedite this request in order to speed up the safe return of Doncaster children to Doncaster schools and put the minds of local parents/carers to rest.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely



**Ros Jones**

**Mayor of Doncaster**

***Supported by***

Cllr Andy Pickering – Leader of Mexborough First

Cllr John Healy – Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

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**COPY TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE, THE RT  
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