



20 May 2020

Dear Councillor

REOPENING SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA

As you are aware there is much confusion following on from the Government's announcement about schools potentially reopening from 1 June 2020. The joint Education Unions are concerned that schools should reopen as soon as safely possible and only where it is safe to do so, this means safe for pupils and staff. I set out below the recent DfE guidance and will come back to the Unions position later in this note.

I set out the 3 relevant sets of DfE guidance including the DfE planning guide for reopening schools below:

1. DfE planning guide for primary schools on wider opening:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools>

However, please note that the DfE have now said that 1 June is an 'aspiration' and that the guidance is 'non-statutory', so there is no requirement for schools to follow it, they can use elements of it or produce their own individual plan(s). As previously indicated the Unions concerns are the safety and welfare of pupils and staff.

2. DfE guide: Safe working in education, childcare and children's social care:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care>

This above guidance is focused on preventing and controlling infection, including the use of PPE, in education, childcare and children's social care settings during the coronavirus outbreak.

3. The DfE have also recently updated the following guidance:

Children of critical workers are encouraged to attend schools or educational settings and further information defining vulnerable children, in line with existing guidance, for the purpose of continued education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision>

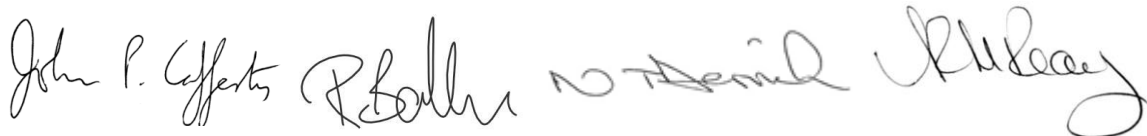
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It is therefore the case as established from the Government guidance that the 1 June is an aspirational date and the guidance is non statutory. It is also a fact that Yorkshire and the Humber, like other areas in the North of England, have significant numbers of Covid-19 confirmed cases. In these circumstances we are concerned that any decision should take into account the local circumstances as well as the national guidance before any attempt is made to reopen schools.

A new Planning Guide for Schools produced by UNISON, NEU, GMB and Unite, was published on 18 May 2020. The guide is a way of putting forward arguments as to why the fuller reopening may not be feasible at this stage, unless your Council are able to satisfy all the questions that are being asked, we cannot and will not agree to a school opening. We understand and accept that schools will have to reopen at some stage, we are however jointly in full agreement that this should only be done where the safety of pupils and staff can be guaranteed.

We would therefore ask that you commit your Council and its schools to working with us on this basis and reopening your schools only when it is safe for pupils and staff, taking account of the re-infection rate and the number of Covid-19 cases in the local area, rather than to an arbitrary and unachievable date. We note recent reports from France of 70 Covid-19 cases directly linked to their phased reopening, leading to 7 schools being closed immediately in northern France. We also note that France are operating a zonal system for wider reopening, based on local infection rates. To be explicitly clear, given the local circumstances with Covid-19 cases in local areas in Yorkshire and the Humber we are not of the view that it will be safe to do so on the 1 June 2020. We are, as indicated, more than willing to work with you to reopen schools as soon as possible and when it is safe to do so. We would therefore appreciate any undertaking you can give to allay the fears of our members, pupils and parents in relation to 1 June return, whilst engaging with us on realistic plans for a phased wider reopening of schools.

Yours sincerely



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