

Advice to schools on reopening to more pupils

Summary

Lancashire County Council is advising schools in the county not to open to more pupils from 1 June, but instead to continue with the current arrangements. This is because, in our assessment, we do not currently meet all five of the government's tests in Lancashire which would allow this decision to be taken safely.

We will regularly review the situation and provide further advice so that we can advise schools to open to more pupils as soon as we judge it safe to do so.

We are actively encouraging schools to follow this advice.

Government advice for schools and parents

The government has released the following direction under scientific guidance regarding the re-opening of schools on 1 June:

- Nurseries and other early year providers, including childminders, are to begin welcoming back all children.
- Primary schools are to welcome back children in nursery (where they have them), reception, year 1 and year 6.
- Secondary schools, sixth form, and further education colleges are to begin some face to face support with year 10 and 12 pupils. We do not expect these pupils to return on a full-time basis at this stage.

Local assessment

The government's five tests are outlined below:

- 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.
- 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
- See that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable **levels** across the board, although we don't see the results of all tests in a timely manner. In addition, we are starting to see social distancing not being followed everywhere across the county which poses the risk of new cases to rise.
- Be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand.
- Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS.

Locally, we are currently able to meet the requirements of the first three tests; however, we do not meet the requirements for the final two tests. The test and trace programme is not at a state of readiness to respond to Covid-19 community setting outbreaks in a timely manner, which poses a risk to school environments.

Furthermore, we are not confident that adjustments to the current measures of the lockdown policy will not risk a second peak of infections locally.

Consequently, our advice to schools is to not re-open to more pupils on June 1st, but to continue with their current support systems that are in place. The safety and wellbeing of children, their families, and school staff outweigh the benefits of opening schools of 1st June.

The key information supporting this advice is that:

- The current support system in schools for children of key workers and valuable children, which is how we describe our vulnerable children, is sufficient at this time. Additionally, safeguards are in place in Lancashire to support those children who are at risk in the community, and this support will continue.
- There has been no evidence of education outcomes worsening due to the effects of government lockdown policy.
- It is not going to be possible to implement social distancing in early years school settings.
- There is currently no evidence of widespread immunity in community settings.
- There is a significant risk that should outbreaks occur in school settings, the current system will not allow for tests to be conducted in a timely manner and therefore, the virus will continue to spread.

Schools will be kept well informed on a regular basis from the Director for Public Health in Lancashire and Lancashire County Council. We will regularly review the situation and provide further advice so that schools can re-open as soon as it is safe to do so.

In this challenging time, we recommend that everyone continue to follow the government advice of staying alert by:

- Staying at home as much as possible.
- Working from home if you can.
- Limit contact with other people.
- Keep a 2m distance from other people.
- Wash your hands regularly.

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