

Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Dept for Children, Schools & Families
Sanctuary Buildings,
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Please reply to: Cllr Rick Jewell
Cabinet Member for Children's
Services
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Date: 18 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State

Prospective plans for limited reopening of primary schools on 1 June 2020

I am writing to you on behalf of Enfield Council to express our concern regarding the Government proposals to reopen primary schools for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils from 1 June 2020.

We believe that to take this action in the current context would be extremely ill advised and could have potentially highly damaging repercussions. If the Government cannot present definitive evidence that it safe to reopen schools, nor published fully funded guidance to schools on how to manage the return safely, then the decision itself from Government should be paused.

Taking this arbitrary date off the table could then allow a full and inclusive discussion with teaching unions and the wider profession to prepare properly for any partial return. All sides should be content that the risks involved are mitigated to the degree that could warrant reopening. This would also give the public confidence that it was the correct measure at the right time and prevent parents keeping their children at home.

Schools staff in Enfield are already doing a brave and fantastic job during the crisis, keeping their doors open during this time for keyworker families and vulnerable children. It is to their immense credit that they have done so with little Government support and have received relatively little recognition for their amazing efforts.

The Government should not risk exposing people to harm by rushing towards further reopening measures without the necessary scientific evidence and supporting guidance that can ensure the safety of our teaching staff, their pupil and families. Teachers and teaching unions have pointed out that the lack of clear direction and guidance from Government thus far, the lack of shared data to support the proposed

action and the absence of firm plans to provide the necessary resources to facilitate reopening mean it is very difficult to plan for partial reopening with any confidence.

During this time, it is crucial that the Government provide absolute clarity when announcement any easing of the lock down measures. Instead, the Government's fall-back position of referring to 'conditions being met' as a precursor to partial reopening appear to be lacking robustness and transparency. We urge the Government to further reflect their directive that schools must open on the 1st June 2020 and positively engagement with those on the front line in our schools.

As it stands, the Government has decided not to pause, not to engage constructively with our teaching unions and ignore the anxieties of many parents across the country by pressing ahead with plans to force schools to reopen. This does not seem like the best strategy to adopt given the risks you are asking our schools staff, pupils and their families to take.

Many of our families are not comfortable with the Government's plans and may opt to keep their children out of school until they receive the assurances they need from the Government. Enfield Council is unwilling not fine those parents who are unwilling to send their children to school given the huge uncertainties of the present time.

Already, according to the Government's official figures, over 34,000 people have lost their lives to Covid-19 and we know the real toll is likely to be significantly higher. The Government's desire to 'get back to normal' cannot be at the cost of exposing our front-line workers, children and our residents to unnecessary risk by pressing ahead with plans that are not fully worked through.

On behalf of Enfield Council, we ask that you to reconsider the Government's decision to press ahead with the directive to reopen schools on 1 June 2020.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'R. Jewell'.

Cllr Rick Jewell
Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Enfield Council