



Children's Services

**Gail Hopper,
Director**

Children's Services

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Our ref: GH/JC
Enquiries to: Jane Cooke
Extension: 5064
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Dear Parent / Carer / Guardian,

We are writing to you about the recent government announcement about the re-opening of primary schools.

We are aware that the last 8 weeks have been very difficult for many families.

Along with the loss of routine, families had to get used to home schooling, with many working from home, whilst others have been furloughed or have lost their only form of income. Many of us have experienced the loss of direct contact with friends and relatives. This has had an impact on us, along with the uncertainty about what the future brings. Many people hoped that the Prime Minister's speech on 10th May would provide some clarity and certainty, but it appears to have created more questions and concerns. This is the reason we are writing to you.

We have been in touch with the Department of Education and have emphasised that in Rochdale we are determined to do the right thing for our children, families and schools. This may not fit with the expectations or timescale of government. We want the borough's children to return to school, but only when it is safe for them and for the staff in schools. We are asking our schools to work with us to establish what safe numbers will be and this will differ in each school, because the buildings are all different. We do not want parents to rely on a date suggested by government, that schools may be unable to meet. That is why we are sharing our approach, that is based on doing the right thing in the right way at the right time. We will ask schools to keep you all informed about developments and hope this will also make you as parents feel more confident.

We won't be able to answer some of your questions, because we are all in a place none of us have been in before. However, we hope that the work we are undertaking with all schools in Rochdale might help you understand and support the approach we are taking.

We have been in regular contact with Head teachers and are planning together for the future. We have working groups of primary and secondary heads that are addressing those issues that will help us plan for a safe return of more children to our schools, within an achievable time frame. Our schools have worked incredibly hard over the last 8 weeks, doing their best to support children at home as well as over 1100 children of key workers and those deemed to be vulnerable, who have continued to attend school each week. Any plans to increase the numbers of children in our schools for the rest of this term will also have to take these continuing numbers into account.

Finally, we know that many people will have their own views about what will and won't work. This is a challenge that we will manage, with safety as our first priority. We know that we won't be able to satisfy everyone. We will however, work together and do our best to meet the needs of as many children as possible.

We would ask you not to direct any of the inevitable frustrations you may experience in the coming weeks, at your child's school or its staff. None of them are responsible for the position in which we all find ourselves. By working together we are confident we can make progress.

Thank you for taking the trouble to read this letter.

Yours faithfully



Gail Hopper
Director of Children's Services
Children's Services



Councillor Kieran Heakin
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services