



Office of the Leader

Cllr Jas Athwal

Leader of Redbridge Council

Redbridge Town Hall,
High Road,
Ilford,
IG1 1DD,

28th May 2020

Following this evening's announcement by the Prime Minister I understand that many people are worried about the proposals to open up schools to more children from Monday, 1 June.

Whilst the decision over when and how a school is opened up lies with the Headteacher and school Governing Body our council has taken a proactive approach, providing risk assessments, advice, guidance and PPE to local schools.

Many local parents and carers have reached out to me over the past few weeks to share their concerns over sending their children back to school and as a parent I empathise. My position has not changed on this issue. The health and wellbeing of local people is my top priority and so in Redbridge our council will only support schools opening once they have clearly demonstrated that proper measures have been taken to keep children and staff safe and reassured.

In order to ensure local people are kept safe, our council has been working closely with schools and unions to facilitate detailed risk assessments at every school considering opening.

I have made it clear that I believe parents and carers should be free to choose whether or not to send their children to school during this difficult time.

It has been well-documented that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. As Redbridge is a diverse borough I recognise that some families may choose to keep their children at home. I also appreciate that many local families live with grandparents or other older relatives who are more vulnerable to COVID-19, these families may also choose not to send their children to school.

There will be no penalty for families who choose not to send their children to school, regardless of whether they are eligible to return.

Last week, I attended a very helpful virtual meeting with local parents' groups, teachers, unions, and school staff. I know that there is a genuine concern at the prospect of children returning to school. At the same time, there is also a collective desire to see children get back to receiving a formal education as soon as possible. We all agree the welfare and safety of children, staff, and families is paramount.

We have advised local schools to only provide spaces for more students, in addition to the children of key workers, if they are certain the numbers can be managed safely. A number of local primary

schools have made the decision to delay expanding pupil numbers until Monday, 15 June, at the earliest, following the independent Scientific Advisory Group of Experts' report that was published last Friday.

We understand that the vast majority of schools have made the decision to make spaces for some Year 6 pupils, though some schools have prioritised places for Nursery, Reception or Year 1 instead. However, it's highly unlikely that many schools will open for all four year groups suggested by the Government. This is to ensure social distancing measures can be followed.

We will continue do our utmost to support schools in making the school environment as safe as possible for children and staff. As part of the discussions with schools and our Public Health Team, we've advised that the class intake should be limited to no more than ten pupils, five less than the Government recommendation. We've also advised schools on what PPE equipment they might need to have available for staff and what other safety measures we suggest they implement.

Below is a list of some of safety measures we have provided guidance on:

- Implementing staggered school start and finish times to reduce the number of parents and children entering and leaving school grounds at any one time.
- Developing specific timetables for cleaning, hand-washing and hygiene breaks as part of the school day.
- Continuing to prioritise key worker pupils and vulnerable pupils with either an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or a Social Worker, before considering which year groups might return and how the school can prioritise among those year groups.
- Using some 'non-pupil days' for additional preparation and vital staff training where necessary, before opening up to more pupils.
- Implementing daily deep cleaning programmes after pupils leave school grounds.

In Redbridge, we believe in the importance of education. We want to see our children and young people receiving the best possible education and preparing for the bright futures ahead of them. However, their health will always be the top priority. That is why we are supporting schools to make sure they can provide a quality education for children while maintaining their safety and the safety of school staff.

On a final note, I'd like to say a huge thank you to all of the fantastic headteachers and school staff for the incredible work that they are doing to keep schools open for the children of key workers throughout this pandemic. It is this type of selfless attitude and public service that has kept the country running.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Jas Athwal
Leader, London Borough of Redbridge