

## **Q&A - Reopening of schools in Wales**

Many constituents have made contact with me about the possible reopening of schools. Here I have set out some answers to the most commonly asked questions. I will stress that guidance published so far applied to England only. We are yet to hear the Welsh Government's proposals and so will update this advice accordingly once we do so.

### **Q. I have heard that schools are to reopen in June. I don't want my child to return yet.**

**A.** The first thing I would stress is that the announcement made by the UK Government, that schools could reopen in June, applies to England only. Schools in Wales are run by the Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff and so it will be down to them when schools in Wales reopen.

Secondly, it is also worth mentioning that while schools in England *may* reopen in June, it will be a decision for parents whether or not their child attends at this point. Schools in England are now contacting parents asking them whether they would like their child to return when the school reopens, and parents can reply yes, no or request more information.

### **Q. Why are we considering reopening schools?**

**A.** The reason that schools were closed in the first place was that, back in mid-March, the rate of transmission of Coronavirus was around 3. That meant that every person infected was spreading the disease to around 3 other people. Determined to drive this rate down, schools were closed in order to stop parents having to mingle with other parents at drop off and collection times, alongside businesses closing so that community transmission could be reduced. The rate of transmission is now just under 1, meaning that there is less Coronavirus out there and it is spreading at a lower rate.

While there have been many deaths associated with this terrible disease, children seem not to be affected by it, meaning that there is not the same risk for children as there is for adults. If your child has specific health issues, such as serious asthma for example, you may decide that you do not feel comfortable sending your child to school. That is absolutely a decision for you.

Ultimately, the UK Government also has to consider the damage done to children by not attending school. There have been reports of childhood depression linked to staying at home for prolonged periods. Social isolation can lead to developmental problems and not receiving an education will lead to lower life chances, which is linked to life expectancy.

### **Q. Why are reception, year 1 and year 6 being prioritised?**

**A.** Reception and year 1 are important years for children developmentally. This is the age at which children learn social interaction, often for the first time, and these are skills which will remain with them for the rest of their lives. For year 6, it is a concern that spending six

months off school and then to be moved into a brand-new school environment could be damaging for children. Therefore the option to return before the summer holidays is being considered.

Again, though, these are decisions for parents if and when schools do open up.

**Q. But surely 4-5 year olds can't practice safe social distancing?**

**A.** No, they can't. And we don't expect them to. The plan at the moment is that when schools reopen, children will be segregated into smaller groups of maybe 10-15 students. They will spend all their time with this one group and the teacher, so although contact within the group will be high, interaction with other groups will be extremely low and so transmission between groups will be limited. If one person in a group gets poorly, the entire group will have to go home.

**Q. Shouldn't we wait for Coronavirus to go completely before opening schools?**

**A.** There is a realistic prospect that Coronavirus will not go away completely. Although we are working on a vaccine, one does not yet exist. If the virus is never eliminated, we cannot wait forever for life to restart. Many diseases exist among us – measles, mumps, rubella, polio, tuberculosis – but eventually we have to get back to normal. It is right that easing the lockdown should be a gradual process and this, to me, seems a sensible part of that process.