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Dear Parents and Carers,

As always, I want to thank you all for your continued support during these unprecedented times. The coverage regarding the wider opening of schools continues to be at the forefront of all news stories, with many questions raised regarding how school's will implement these changes. I feel it is helpful to share with you the local perspective, which can be found below. This is not my weekly newsletter – this will follow shortly and outline the school's provisional plans.

Many thanks,

Leila Rothenburg

The Leeds City Council position to the re-opening of primary schools

Statement from Councillor Jonathan Pryor, Executive Member for Learning, Skills & Employment and Sal Tariq, Director of Children and Families

Last week the Government declared which year group cohorts (Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6) will be eligible to return to school from June 1st at the earliest, joining those pupils who have been eligible to attend school throughout the past two months (vulnerable children and children of key workers). The Government have stated that when pupils return, they should be in school full time and that the rotation of year groups should be avoided.

As Leeds City Council, we believe that it is important for children to resume their education so they can learn and interact with their peers. However this needs to be done in such a way that the risks to pupils, staff and parents is minimised as much as possible.

Due to a variety of factors, it would be impossible for all schools to operate to the Government's timetable of opening Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 from June 1st. While some schools will begin to gradually expand their intake from this date, Leeds will not be expecting all our schools to be open to all those pupils from day one.

In deciding what is feasible, schools are being asked to carry out an initial comprehensive risk assessment so that leaders can evaluate potential solutions on how they could safely and effectively accommodate eligible pupils. We would ask schools,

in the first instance, to take a phased approach to how many pupils they take back and from when schools are ready.

Every school has a different number of vulnerable and key worker children, every school has a different number of staff who will not be able to attend school in person because they or a family member are in a vulnerable category and therefore shielding, and every school has a different layout and therefore has differing abilities to implement social distancing measures for its staff and pupils.

It can be expected, therefore, that there will not be one city-wide model for the initial phased re-opening of schools. However, Leeds City Council will support schools to work towards gradually increasing the number of pupils they receive at the pace that their individual circumstances will allow.

It is clear that there are a number of clarifications and actions are still needed from the Government before numbers returning to school can substantially increase. We have been consistently asking for

the scientific advice that has informed the Government's position, we are demanding that this be published immediately.

There must be clarification around the appropriate levels of social distancing that will need to be implemented, and schools must have flexibility as each school will have a different layout and therefore will have differing abilities to implement social distancing.

There must be comprehensive and regular testing made available for school staff, as well as for the children and young people attending school, linking into a local tracing programme

Staff who are social distancing because they, or those they live with, are in vulnerable categories must be given national guarantees that they can continue to work from home and not be expected to physically come into school.

We support the Local Government Association's call that local authorities be given the power to close any school where there is an outbreak of cases. Given the disparate rates of R across the country, it is right that this power should sit locally and be done in consultation with Directors of Public Health.

And finally the new case count must be much lower than it is currently, with a sustained downward trend.

We are working in consultation with schools and the Department for Education to gain answers to questions which still remain.

It is important to note that schools have been open throughout the past two months, providing education in person for vulnerable children and the children of key worker children - in addition to providing education and pastoral care to those children at home. This has been a phenomenal task and we thank everyone involved.

We understand that this is a difficult time for parents and Leeds recognises the urgency in returning children to education. This urgency should not overlook local level factors, nor should it be done until these points have been addressed. Safety of staff and pupils should be at the heart of all decision making and decisions should be kept under constant review.