

Knowsley Joint statement:

Knowsley Council and our local trade unions are committed to working with schools, parents and carers to ensure that the reopening of schools to more pupils is achieved safely and gives confidence and reassurance to all those involved. We are clear that schools should consult with all relevant parties, including parents and all teaching and school-based staff to achieve this.

The safety of staff and children in our schools must be paramount in our decision making. We believe that this over-rides meeting any arbitrary “target date” which might be set by the Government or anybody else. Before schools can open we believe that it is critical that schools have comprehensive advice and guidance from government issued in a timely and coherent manner. Schools must be given sufficient time to source the advice and resources they need to protect children and staff and Trade Unions must be allowed sufficient time to plan for and prepare their response.

We have welcomed the introduction of testing for children aged 5 and above and for school based staff, but we also recognise the significance of track and trace systems and endorse the notion that the establishment of such systems are critical to the safe re-opening of schools. We support the Local Government Association’s call for local authorities to be given the powers to close any school where there is a COVID-19 outbreak.

Due to a variety of factors it has proven impossible for all schools to re-open in line with the government timeline of the 1st June. It is also not possible or appropriate for Knowsley to re-open all of its schools at the same time. Schools are unique communities; they have different numbers of vulnerable and key worker children; different numbers of staff and different physical resources available to them. It is because of this that we cannot and should not expect a borough wide model for the re-opening of schools.

To decide what is achievable and realistic, we have asked our schools to work with all relevant professionals to conduct comprehensive risk assessments so that school leadership teams can evaluate potential solutions on the safe reopening of schools. We want our schools to take a phased approach to how many pupils they welcome back and from when so that all stakeholders can be fully assured that the steps taken are safe.