



June 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for taking the time to contact me about the phased reopening of schools.

As your local MP, I am happy to endorse the Government's guidance that schools should reopen for selected year groups from 1st June 2020. I believe that it is right for this to happen for a myriad of well-publicised scientific, medical, educational and social reasons. I am also not convinced that this should come as a surprise to anyone working in the sector as our schools were always going to reopen at the earliest opportunity. It is of course vital that formative education returns and we owe this to our children after many weeks of lockdown.

Since 23rd March 2020, you will know that education and childcare settings have been open to priority groups, notably to vulnerable children and those of critical workers. Now that measurable progress has been made in reducing the transmission of the virus, the Prime Minister has rightly set out plans for a phased reopening of schools and educational settings.

After half-term, primary schools in England will be able to welcome back children in crucial transition years – Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. As the Prime Minister has said, all decisions will be carefully monitored and schools will only reopen if the five key tests set by the Government are satisfactorily met. These pre-conditions continue to drive the policy.

Keeping our children, teachers and staff safe in the workplace remains of the utmost importance to Ministers, but I appreciate that concerns may be prevalent. The latest scientific overview is therefore linked below and I would urge you to consult further if not already. Whilst the advice makes it clear that more children will be able to return from 1st June, it will still be important to limit the overall numbers in school and introduce protective measures to prevent further transmission. I am pleased too that guidance has been published to help schools to prepare. This provides details of what educational settings need to do, including advice on implementing social distancing and protective measures, and can be found linked below as well.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/885631/Overview_of_scientific_advice_and_information_on_coronavirus_COVID19.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>

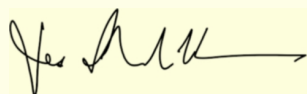
In respect of the five tests set by the National Education Union as prerequisites for reopening schools, I note that the overall rates of infection and mortality thankfully continue to fall across the UK. Ministers have confirmed that when educational settings reopen, all children who are eligible to attend (including members of their household), will have access to testing if they display symptoms of coronavirus. The guidance also includes the actions to take should anyone develop symptoms or test positive, as well as advice for shielded and clinically vulnerable pupils and staff, and for those living with a shielded or critically vulnerable person.

To provide a personal perspective, I would ask that all school governors, teachers and staff are pragmatic in their interpretation of this guidance as we are all feeling our way with an unprecedented global pandemic and nothing can be definitive. These are difficult times for us all and many will be feeling apprehensive. But I am reassured that the current scientific and medical advice can be relied upon by staff and the fact that it remains entirely conditions-based should provide some solace for those who might not otherwise wish to return to work.

In summary, I am clear that schools must reopen at the earliest opportunity in a manner which both minimises the risk and is sustainable for the future. As a parent myself, I also know how important education is for our children. If we cannot embrace the need to open schools as soon as it is safe or even look for reasons not to, then this will present a detrimental risk to their ongoing education. I also fear that any failure to do so will have an exponential effect on our more vulnerable or disadvantaged children who may then be placed at even greater risk.

So it remains my humble view that we all have a collective responsibility to get our children back to the classroom and to get our country back up and running as quickly as possible. Reopening our schools is a vital part of this process and our children deserve nothing less.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me and for all your efforts in mitigating the impact of this awful virus. It will be beaten, but in the meantime, please stay safe and well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Sunderland', written on a light yellow background.

James Sunderland MP
Member of Parliament for the Bracknell Constituency
Bracknell, Crowthorne, Finchampstead, Sandhurst and Wokingham Without