

In Leicester, I do not expect all schools to extend their opening on 1st June or on any other particular date - nor will I be pressing them to do so. I believe schools should only extend their opening when school leaders and governors are convinced that all that is possible has been done to make them safe for children, families and staff. Council officers are helping to advise and support this process.

My colleagues and I are immensely grateful for all the hard work that has gone into the response to the Coronavirus pandemic across the City's schools.

Many have remained partially open throughout lockdown, including over the Easter holidays, helping families with home learning, continuing provision of free school meals and, perhaps most vitally, supporting families and children under pressure in what are the most testing of times.

The Government's announcement that it wishes more children to return to schools from 1st June has caused understandable concern and unreasonable pressure on schools. The risks had not been fully assessed by the Government and the many unanswered questions were not discussed with school leadership, staff, unions or Councils. My colleagues and I share these legitimate concerns. For this reason, I would like to make it clear that there is no pressure from the Council for opening to a wider intake on June 1st or on any other particular date.

My colleagues and I believe that the safety and well-being of children, their families and staff should be the overwhelming concerns.

Although Councils are not able to decide whether individual schools open or close, prior to a decision to further reopen I would urge all involved in Leicester as school leaders to issue full risk assessments that have been considered and approved by their Governing Bodies. We are supporting schools with this process. These assessments should be shared with parents, teaching and non-teaching staff and their unions and broad agreement to mitigation of risk in those assessments should be an essential prerequisite to opening more fully. I would expect that these shared risk assessments will be kept under frequent review.

As I have already stated, recognising that in the immediate future there may be many legitimate reasons why a particular child is not sent to school, in Leicester the Council will not be taking enforcement action to ensure attendance.

We recognise that this is an incredibly difficult time for everyone involved and that there are likely to be more challenges ahead. I want to assure you that the Council is doing everything within its power to support schools, staff, parents and governors through this challenging time.

Peter Soulsby
City Mayor