



Children's Services

Gail Hopper,
Director

Children's Services

**Number One Riverside, Smith Street,
Rochdale OL16 1XU**

Phone: 01706 925000

www.rochdale.gov.uk

Our ref: GH/JC
Enquiries to: Jane Cooke
Extension: 5064
Date: 22nd May 2020

Dear Parent / Carer / Guardian,

We are writing to you about the recent government announcement about the re-opening of secondary schools for students in years ten and twelve.

We are aware that the last nine weeks have been very difficult for many families. Along with the loss of routine, families had to get used to home learning, with many parents and carers working from home too, whilst others have been furloughed or have lost their only form of income. Many of us have experienced the loss of direct contact with friends and relatives. This has had an impact on us, along with the uncertainty about what the future brings. Many people hoped that the Prime Minister's speech on 10th May would provide some clarity and certainty, but it appears to have created more questions and concerns. This is the reason we are writing to you.

We have been in touch with the Department of Education and have emphasised that in Rochdale we are determined to do the right thing for our children, families and schools. This may not fit with the expectations or timescale of government. We want the borough's children to return to school, but only when it is safe for them and for the staff in schools. Our schools are working with us to establish what safe numbers will be in years ten and twelve and this will differ in each school, because the buildings are all different. Schools will communicate their individual plans directly with you.

With safety as their priority, there is no school or college in the borough planning to open any earlier than 8th June. As part of those safety arrangements, many schools will have adjusted start and finish times for those students, so that groups of students will be arriving and leaving at different times to those in nearby schools and other students in the same school. No Rochdale secondary school will initially have all year 10 or 12 in together, so each student will have a timetable to follow of which days they are in school and which days they are not. All schools are also planning amended uniform expectations to enable freshly laundered clothing to be worn each day.

Schools are planning a curriculum for year 10 and 12 that enables teaching in small groups and as little movement around buildings as possible. In many schools this will mean that there will not be practical work in subjects such as Science and Technology, and that the school day will be timed to avoid students eating lunch in school.

Schools will communicate their plans to you after the half term break.

On government advice, secondary schools in Rochdale will remain closed for other year groups, except for those students whose parents or guardians are critical workers or who have a social worker. Remote learning will continue for all other students.

For those of you with a child in year 11 and 13, we understand that this will be a particularly difficult period, as it can be for these students even in the best of times. We are pleased to be able to confirm that Rochdale's post-16 providers have made the commitment that there will be a year 12 place for every year 11 student in the borough. Schools, Positive Steps and the council are working together to support every student through to college or apprenticeship, whether their chosen destination is within Rochdale or beyond. Schools are working with examination boards to ensure students receive GCSE & A-level grades in August as usual, but have been told by those examination boards that any discussion with students or their parents or guardians about those grades could be considered malpractice. We would ask you to support schools and students by recognising this and not seeking any discussion about grades with schools until they are released by examination boards.

Our schools have worked incredibly hard over the last eight weeks, doing their best to support children at home as well as over 1100 children of key workers and those deemed to be vulnerable, who have continued to attend school each week. Plans to increase the numbers of children in our schools for the rest of this term have had to take these continuing numbers into account.

Finally, we know that many people will have their own views about what will and won't work. This is a challenge that we will manage, with safety as our first priority. We know that we won't be able to satisfy everyone. We will however, work together and do our best to meet the needs of as many children as possible.

We would ask you not to direct any of the inevitable frustrations you may experience in the coming weeks at your child's school or its staff. None of them are responsible for the position in which we all find ourselves. By working together we are confident we can make progress.

Thank you for taking the trouble to read this letter.

Yours faithfully



Gail Hopper
Director of Children's Services



Councillor Kieran Heakin
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services