Dear Sandwell Councillor,

As you are aware Trade Unions representing school staff in Sandwell wrote to you on May 20th expressing our concern about the safety of extending school provision on June 1st.

We are very disappointed that our concerns have been ignored and that Sandwell has left the decision to individual Head Teachers.

We have been pleased that some Sandwell schools and Academies have been sensible and have postponed the decision until it is safe to do so.

Several high-profile scientific advisers have spoken out, expressing their safety concerns over wider school opening.

This is what has been said;

SAGE members Professor Peter Horby, who is chair of the Government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG); Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Institute; John Edmunds, professor of infectious disease modelling at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Calum Semple, professor in Child Health and Outbreak Medicine have all expressed fears about the easing of lockdown.

On the BBC Radio 4 Today programme, Professor Horby agreed with Professors Edmunds' and Farrar’s concerns, saying that SAGE has always been very clear that test, trace, isolate must be fully running **BEFORE** lockdown is relaxed. The system needs to be tracking most new cases, he said, following them up within 48 hours.

Professor Horby added that SAGE does not have a good handle on the role of children and schools in transmission and stated that returning to another lockdown would be much worse than delaying another two or three weeks until contact tracing is fully up and running.

Professor Edmunds said “There are still 8,000 new infections every day in England without counting those in hospitals and care homes… If you look at it internationally, it’s a very high level of incidence.

“I think many of us would prefer to see the incidence driven down to lower levels because that then means that we have fewer cases occurring before we relax the measures.”

Professor Farrar tweeted: “Covid-19 spreading too fast to lift lockdown in England. TTI [test, trace and isolate] has to be in place, fully working, capable [of dealing with] any surge immediately.”

Professor Semple said: “Essentially, we’re lifting the lid on a boiling pan and it’s just going to bubble over… We need to get it down to simmer before we take the lid off, and it’s too early.”

He also said that levels of transmission and hospital admissions are still too high. "I think a political decision has been made to tie in with when school was due to start, were everything normal, but it’s not normal."

These statements support our view that the suggestions made by Government are ill-considered and have little or no scientific evidence to support them. The government has not published any evidence or modelling to prove the suggestions are safe and are yet to meet their own five tests to allow lockdown to be eased, let alone those laid down by some Unions to ensure schools are safe.

We have heard this week that issues with testing are not providing the accurate information that we need to even begin to implement the Track, Trace and Isolate system both the Government and Unions agreed was necessary before schools would be safe to extend provision.

An increasing number of councils across England have advised their schools not to implement the wider opening of their schools until it safe to do so. Furthermore, a number of academy schools are not opening this week.

As we have said throughout this crisis, we will welcome the opportunity to discuss schools extending their provision at a time when the situation improves, and risk assessments demonstrate that the situation in schools is safe. We know that is not currently the case.

We are therefore contacting you again to ask you to review the situation and direct our schools to stay closed to all but our key worker and vulnerable children**,** until things are much safer and the key tests are properly met.

As an elected councillor in Sandwell, we respectfully request a response to this email.

Jenny Ermoyenous & Darren Barton

Sandwell NEU Joint District Secretaries

On behalf of Trade Unions representing school staff in Sandwell

   