

Should the schools open?

Some are writing to me to support the Prime Minister and the Chief Inspector of schools in wanting the schools to open today. Others are contacting me urging closure in line with the ideas of the main teaching Union and the Opposition parties. I invite more views.

The government case is based on several propositions. Children get very mild versions of the disease and the younger ones often show no symptoms so they are not much at risk. There will be testing systems to ensure early isolation of anyone with the disease. Teachers will be protected by social distancing with bubbles , limits on numbers in confined spaces to reduce the risk of any infection spreading and regular cleaning.

If children are barred from school they will lack social contacts with their friends and will miss the benefit of a class teacher. There will be more cases of depression and other mental illnesses. Exams ,ay be disrupted leading to another year with a likely different basis for assessing a student's level of achievement for qualifications.

Closing schools will force many more parents into home working or not working leading to income loss and further strains on other important activities that need the workforce to turn up to work in person.

The Union case argues that with the advent of a strain of the virus which is more infectious there is a danger that school children will spread the virus to others at home. Teachers need more protection than the testing and social distancing regimes adopted so far. They think seeking to limit any additional spread of the virus should take precedence over any other consideration of people's mental health, educational progress or ability to go to work.

The government counters by saying it advises families with elderly and at risk members who do not live with them to avoid any contact with the children until those at risk have been vaccinated.