

PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 8 March 2021

Good afternoon

this has been a big day and an emotional day for millions of families up and down the country

as children see – and play with – their friends for the first time in months.

And although I know that some will have been anxious

as pupils always are on the first day of term –

I also know that the overwhelming feeling is one of relief.

And we all know that the education of our children is so important that the greater risk now is keeping them out of school for a day longer.

I want to thank all the teachers who have got their schools ready

and who have been teaching throughout the whole period

– whether that's remotely or in person –

your work has been astonishing.

And I want to thank the parents and all those who have been teaching at home

who have had to master Zoom

who've had to communicate every detail of the syllabus from fronted adverbials to quadratic equations.

And we all know that the burden has disproportionately fallen on women, often holding down jobs and providing childcare at the same time.

So our job now as government is to build on your efforts so that from now on our school children not only catch up on lost learning

but take the biggest possible step forwards with a concerted national programme for educational recovery.

It is thanks to all of you

parents, teachers, pupils –

thanks to this huge national effort to keep kids at home

that we have been able significantly to reduce the spread of the virus.

And so today we have been able to take that crucial first step on what we hope is our cautious but irreversible roadmap to freedom

Today allowing people to meet one-on-one outside for the first time in months,

allowing care home visits to take place with all appropriate precautions.

And this first step on the road map is made possible above all by our NHS which has now vaccinated more than one third of the entire UK population.

And we take this first step with confidence because all four of the most vulnerable groups have not only been vaccinated in overwhelming numbers

but it is now at least three weeks since they received their first dose and so they will be feeling the full benefits of the vaccine protection.

We will continue on this roadmap

but we must remember that today's return to schools will of course have an impact on the spread of the virus

and so at all times and as we decide on the next steps when we take them we will be driven by the data,

and with the number of patients being admitted to hospital with Covid each day still around eight times higher than the lows of last Summer,

it is more vital than ever to follow the rules.

Hands, face, space,

and please continue to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

Thank you very much.