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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
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Sent by email

8 July 2021

Dear Secretary of State

As we understand from your statement in the House of Commons the following changes are happening from September:

- There is a likely requirement for secondary schools to test all children twice with LFTs before start of school.
- The requirements for bubbles and for isolation of close contacts of positive cases will be removed.
- NHS test and trace will take over from headteachers the role of contacting close contacts of children who have a positive test.
- Contacts of those who are positive will then be advised to have a PCR test - but should still attend school until they have a test.
- Schools will operate in September without further mitigations such as masks, on site mass testing by PHE or widespread introduction of HEPA filters or CO2 monitors.

We all want to get back to normal as soon as possible. We all want children not to have to miss face to face education.

It seems that the Government hopes that cases will have peaked by September - that as double vaccination spreads, and as younger people develop immunity by being infected - that will mean that cases begin to fall.

On the other hand many scientists, such as the more than 100 global experts writing to the Lancet today, are worried that this may turn out not to happen and that we may continue to have high cases rates in September which will then increase again as schools open.

These scientists are also concerned that negative health consequences might be higher than the Government expected.

It is obviously important not to base public policy just on hope, but also to prepare for other eventualities.

There are questions that we think should be urgently addressed by ministers.

1. Are there any thresholds on case numbers, or hospitalisation or deaths that mean the DfE would do something different in schools in September?
2. When will the data from the trial of Daily Contact testing be available to the public and so that other scientists can examine it? In particular this trial might give some evidence on what contribution isolation was making to controlling cases and how much an introduction of Daily Contact testing might make to controlling cases.
3. Is there any part of the DfE plan for the Autumn term that will change depending on the upcoming decision of JCVI on the vaccination of secondary children?
4. What is your range of projections of the number of children that will contract Covid under the Government's programme of relaxations during the Autumn term.
5. Under the Government's programme what projections do you have of the number of children who will experience Long Covid and what number will have Long Covid that limits their everyday life - and their ability to fully access school? ONS figures for the 4 week period leading up to 6 June suggest that more than 30,000 2 to 17 year olds were affected – but we understand from the recent DfE evidence paper that there are other studies you can draw estimates from.
6. What plans do you have to help improve ventilation in schools as the Autumn term moves into worse weather – especially in the light of your own recent evidence document which says “World Health Organisation guidance has recently been updated to strongly reflect the role of aerosols in Covid-19 viral transmission. This emphasizes the importance of ventilation, such as keeping windows open, and the relative safety of outdoor settings”- and in the light of the decision of New York city to provide two HEPA filters for each classroom.
7. What projections do you have of what those Long Covid numbers would there be if:
 - isolation were kept, or if,
 - it were replaced by Daily Contact Testing,
 - if mask wearing was retained,

- if additional ventilation measures such as the HEPA filters and CO2 monitoring were introduced,
- If class sizes were at the European averages instead of well above them.

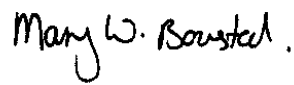
We are asking these questions to because we believe that should cases continue to rise, with negative health consequences in the Autumn term that you have a plan and can act quickly and decisively.

We all know the results of dither and delay.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretary



Mary Boustead
Joint General Secretary