

Robin Walker MP
Chair of the Education Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Steve Brine MP
Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Rt. Hon. Victoria Atkins MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Rt. Hon. Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

18 January 2024

Re: School Attendance and Self-Care Public Health Information Campaign

Dear Gillian and Victoria,

We are writing to recommend a joint public information campaign between the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Education (DfE) to help pupils and parents make more informed decisions about attending school with a minor illness, and about appropriate situations in which to seek care from a GP.

The Education Committee previously published a report on persistent absence in schools. While illness was the primary cause of absence both pre- and post-pandemic, illness related absences remain significantly higher than pre-covid owing to the shift in parental attitudes surrounding sending their children to school with minor illnesses. In the recommendations from that report the Education Committee wrote: *"The Department should launch a targeted public information campaign to guide parents on when and when not children who are unwell should attend school."* This explains the nature of the challenge faced in education.

There is a high demand on primary care services, particularly during the winter months. This has become even more clear to us both through conversations with general practitioners in our constituencies and from the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry 'The future of general practice'. The challenge of ensuring communities have access to their GP can be exacerbated if parents do not have an understanding of when it is appropriate to contact their GP regarding their child's illness, and when to administer self-care. The added demand on primary care could also be

addressed in a public information campaign such as the one recommended by the Education Committee.

The national campaign would advise parents on when it is appropriate for children to attend school despite a minor illness, when it is best to administer self-care, and when to seek NHS services. It would also be a more effective use of both DfE's and DHSC's budget to pool their resources for this purpose.

Would you both be willing to endorse a joint public information campaign between the DHSC and DfE to help tackle both challenges simultaneously?

Yours sincerely,

Robin Walker MP

Member of Parliament for Worcester, Chair of the Education Committee

Steve Brine MP

Member of Parliament for Winchester, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee