



Petitions Committee

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Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families
Department for Education

April 2021

Dear Minister,

I'm writing regarding the 29 March update to the Department's guidance, [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) – specifically in relation to the updated provisions on singing in parent and child groups.

As you will be aware, the Petitions Committee conducted an inquiry last year into the impact of covid-19 on maternity and parental leave. This inquiry heard compelling evidence from new parents and experts on how crucial these groups can be for the mental health of new parents, providing support and a much-needed lifeline at such an important time in their lives.

We know many parents will have been extremely pleased that, following the latest lockdown, parent, baby and toddler groups were able to restart on 29 March in outdoor settings. This is an important step to help provide social interaction and development opportunities for these children.

However, while the updated guidance is clear that singing “can be undertaken” in these settings, we are aware that a number of parents are alarmed at the provision that “it should only be the group leader and children” who participate, even outdoors. As you will be aware, singing can be an important developmental and bonding element of these classes for children and their parents, but many young children may be less likely to take part in or experience the full benefit of these exercises without encouragement and participation from their parents.

While the guidance helpfully references other guidelines the Government has issued, notably the [suggested principles of safer singing](#), we have received correspondence from parents concerned that this provision represents a disproportionate and unreasonable interpretation of those guidelines, given the very significant impact this may have on the viability and purpose of the group activities, and the possibility for mitigating actions to be taken (as set out in the guidance), including ventilation, singing quietly, and social distancing.

We are concerned that this provision could severely limit the benefits to parents and children of these classes, cause significant disruption to the providers of these classes when they have only just been allowed to restart, and ultimately deter parents from attending classes which they may have signed up for based on different expectations of the services that would be available – ultimately causing them and their children to miss out on the critical support these classes can provide.

I would therefore be grateful if you could confirm:

- What conversations your Department has had with the baby and toddler group sector about this change and how it is being communicated, to avoid confusion and disruption to classes;
- Whether the Government will consider amending the guidance to provide specific clarification for baby and toddler groups on how they could include singing safely in their activities.

We would appreciate a prompt response to provide clarity for parents as soon as possible, and to prevent unnecessary disruption to these classes.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine". The script is cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'C'.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee