



Health and Social Care Committee

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP
Secretary of State for Education

Monday, 7 September 2026

Subject: Schools, medical appointments and unauthorised absences

Dear both,

In May, I visited Sheffield to meet clinicians and services users from local Complications of Excess Weight clinics to hear more about how these services support children living with obesity. This formed part of my Committee's Food and Weight Management inquiry.

During our discussions in Sheffield, the young people spoke a lot about their experiences managing their health in school and attendees followed up with a summary of the challenges young people face, which you will find attached. These include:

- Schools classifying medically necessary appointments as unauthorised absences
- Schools excluding people from activities like swimming or outdoor learning due to perceived health limitations
- Inadequate support for health needs, including treatment side effects
- School culture and the food environment
- Variability of experiences across educational settings.

There is clearly an overlap between schools and health settings when it comes to supporting children with all long-term conditions and we would be interested to understand more about how schools manage this, particularly for obesity, which is less widely understood and often not considered to be a medical condition. I was concerned to hear that experiences in school may be actively stopping children from accessing the health services they need: all children's health is preventative health and there is great value in supporting children with obesity early on in their lives. It is self-evident that if schools are a barrier to that, it is not only bad for teaching and learning, but also children's future prospects and wellbeing.

I would be grateful if you could set out how these issues are being addressed, how often your Departments discuss supporting health needs in schools and where



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responsibility lies for ensuring that health needs are met, and done so in a compassionate and sensitive way.

I would be grateful for a response by Monday 12th October to ensure it can be considered as part of our inquiry and final report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Layla Moran".

Layla Moran
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee