



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 4887 Email petitionscommittee@parliament.uk
Website www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee

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

27 April 2021

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your reply of 14th April to my letter about the Department's updated guidance on singing in parent and child groups.

Your reply references a further update to this guidance, [*Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak*](#), published on 13 April to coincide with the return of parent and child groups in indoor as well as an outdoor settings. Thank you for drawing the Committee's attention to this update.

As your letter sets out, this update provides more detailed guidance on how singing should take place in parent and child groups in indoor and outdoor settings. I am pleased that your Department has been working closely with the Cabinet Office and Public Health England to revise this guidance.

However, I remain concerned that this most recent update to the guidance continues to impose impractical restrictions on activities involving singing, which could significantly impact on the social interaction and development opportunities these classes and activities provide for children.

While it is a step forward that up to six adults including the group leader can now take part in singing alongside the children in these groups, it is not clear either from your letter or from the updated guidance what rationale has been applied in devising this new limit, other than partial equivalence with wider restrictions on gatherings of more than six people or two households.

In addition, the updated guidance notes that "good ventilation with fresh air" should be maintained where singing is occurring in an indoor setting. The basis for this advice is clear and it is in line with the [*suggested principles of safer singing*](#) guidelines. However, the updated guidance does *not* advise on whether other mitigating actions set out in those guidelines (such as singing quietly and social distancing) could allow this limit of six adults to be lifted – in either an indoor or outdoor setting – or at least allow activities in an indoor setting to function in sub-groups (to be consistent with classes taking place in an outdoor setting).

Correspondence we have received on behalf of parents and providers suggests that, for these and other reasons, this new update to the guidance is seen as confusing, counter-intuitive and not mindful of practical considerations.

It remains unclear what conversations your Department has had with the baby and toddler group sector, communication which I am sure you will agree is critically important to ensure that guidance is appropriate and workable. I am aware that in other sectors, the Government has been able to endorse guidelines produced by sector organisations on how activities can continue in a covid-safe manner (such as the guidelines developed by The British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions, BALPPA, for indoor play centres and soft play¹).

I would therefore be grateful if you could confirm:

- What is the specific rationale for the limit of 6 adults singing as part of indoor classes, or as part of a single group or sub-group in outdoor classes?
- What assessment the Government has made of the impact of removing the limit on the number of adults singing in such classes, and instead emphasising mitigating actions including ventilation, singing quietly, and social distancing; and whether it will consider revising its guidance to that effect if there is not strong evidence to suggest this would have a significantly increased impact on covid-19 transmission?
- What conversations your Department has had with the baby and toddler group sector about the updates to this guidance over the past month, to help inform this guidance and ensure it is effectively communicated?
- Whether the Government is aware of and has considered endorsing any guidelines developed by organisations within the baby and toddler group sector on how classes (including those involving singing) could be conducted in a covid-safe manner?

The Committee greatly appreciated your prompt response to my previous communication and would value a similarly prompt response to this letter, again to provide clarity for parents and providers as soon as possible.

Best wishes,



Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee

¹ [Guidance for indoor play centres and areas and soft play centres and areas](#). Cited as part of: [COVID-19: Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms](#), Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, version updated 29th March 2021 [accessed 26th April 2021]