

## Written evidence submitted by Mrs Cath Kitchen

- The implementation of the critical workers policy, including how consistently the definition of 'critical' work is being applied across the country and how schools are supported to remain open for children of critical workers - *the implementation seems to be very much localised, with LAs making the decision on who they want to interpret the guidance. In some areas, it seems to have become a competition with LAs saying that they have more pupils and more schools open than others. Some are being pushed to stay open. The part being missed is that if children are safe to be at home, then that is where they should be. All of the children are risk assessed to see if they are safe to be at home.*
- The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment - *there have been mixed responses from our pupils. As they are all children with medical and mental health difficulties, some are delighted that they do not have to go through the anxiety of sitting exams, and others a feeling robbed as they were only just beginning to engage fully with their education following a period of illness and were relying on being able to cram for the exam. I think that Ofqual have done a good job at making the guidance as fair as possible and they have been responsive to queries that we have had.*
- Support for pupils and families during closures, including:
  - The consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning - *I think that parents have been bombarded with information and there is so much, it is overwhelming and they don't know where to look. We already had Google systems in place, were able to identify pupils without the infrastructure to be able to access online learning and provide them with equipment before the lockdown was enforced. I know that others were not so fortunate. We have ensured that we interpret the information that comes from DfE and send out weekly briefings for parents that summarise the key points. We also just add in key resources and advice and anything in addition has been done via a phone call so that parents have the chance to chat it through and ask questions.*
  - Children's and young people's mental health and safety outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education - *this has been a real challenge for us. Our pupils already had significant mental health difficulties which is why they were not accessing their mainstream school and are an alternative provision. The keeping the routine of the offline timetable in the online space has been helpful, being able to 'see' their teachers and other peers (if they choose to), and not overdoing the direct lessons has been helpful. Much of the CAMHS support has been withdrawn, so support staff are doing weekly mentoring with all pupils and providing additional support and signposting to pupils who are struggling. Family liaison workers are providing support for parents too, as often their mental health support has been withdrawn and they are struggling to cope with their child who is deteriorating. Information about online support and helpful apps are contained*

*in the pupil area and are readily accessible. HUGE concerns about managing their anxiety once we are given the go ahead to reopen physically*

- The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need) - *planning for FSM distribution for dual registered pupils was a challenge - we took the decision to provide as we did not have opportunity to liaise with schools. We do not receive any money as an AP academy for free school meals as most of our pupils are dual registered. We also provided for pupils whose parents had lost their jobs at the start of the crisis but who had not yet had an opportunity to apply. We ensured that all of our families had provision, and we gave supermarket vouchers from the outset. We also provided £25 rather than the £12.50 - that was very well received and we know made a significant difference in those families.*
- What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency - *head teachers have always had critical incident plans and pandemic plans - this was our learning from the SARs, avian and swine flu times. We have been looking at research from other countries who have suffered disasters and how they managed to engage their pupils in learning whilst they were closed, and how they planned for reopening e.g. New Zealand earthquakes, Ebola outbreak, Australian bushfire. All heads will now have a much more robust contingency plan. So much of this depends on finance and when you live in a local authority that is in special measures finance and safeguarding, then any additional financial resources for their planning to support us is severely restricted. Checking and providing for appropriate infrastructure in all pupil homes would be essential. Changing basic hygiene and health and safety procedures to reflect ongoing risks. Training for pupils, their parents and staff in good hygiene practices. Consider the current accountability framework in schools - it is all about how you do in the Ofsted inspections - no one inspects you on your systems and procedures to keep your pupils safe and your ability to respond in a crisis. Closer work between education providers and post 16 provisions so that transitions can be more effectively managed if there were ever any future periods of lockdown. Possibly starting transition planning (to include year 6 into year 7) much earlier*

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