

## Written evidence submitted by the Children's Commissioner

Rt. Hon Robert Halfon MP  
Chair, Education Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

10<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Robert,

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence before the Committee last week. It was an excellent session and I am very pleased with the Committee's interest in my vulnerability work, my office are looking to set up a demonstration on this shortly.

I would like to thank you once again for the work you have done on this issue, and the speed at which the Committee is working on this issue. This week's announcement that primary schools won't be expanding places this term only heightens the need to look ambitiously at the support offered to children – starting this summer.

I outline my response to your three questions below. Please let me know if there is anything else I can assist with.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Longfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a short, horizontal black line.

Anne Longfield OBE  
Children's Commissioner for England

**Response to the Committee's Questions**

*What role do you think schools, teachers and school support staff will need to have in ensuring the success of summer schools, through liaising with parents, and opening up their school buildings and playing fields to summer camps?*

I am clear that it need not (and should not) fall on teachers to deliver these schemes. The exact composition of each scheme will vary between areas, depending on local arrangement, need and appetite. I believe there is a large pool of potential staff for such schemes: sports coaches, youth workers, trainee and supply teachers as well as existing teachers. Existing summer schools tend to seek volunteers from the staff body and recruit easily and I am confident if funding was available to pay these teachers for their time, there would be many volunteers. In addition, charities such as the Tutor Trust have an excellent record in recruiting and training undergraduates to support children's learning.

In short, I don't think Government would need to proscribe national standards on the mix between teachers and other staff, nor should concerns about recruitment limit our ambition in terms of what can be delivered this summer.

As your question recognises, school staff will need to play a role in facilitating the opening of their buildings and facilities and advertising the scheme to parents. They will need to be supported in doing this. As such it is critical that the details of any summer schemes are finalised by the Department for Education as a matter of urgency. I would hope that independent schools will be included in any plans for summer schools developed by the Department, to maximise the number of settings available to receive children.

*Looking ahead, how should catch-up interventions be best measured; for instance, in terms of tracking the destinations of those who were supported?*

Our first priority needs to be getting children back into the classroom, and keeping them there. We must acknowledge that this will pose a significant challenge with some children so we should incentivise schools to focus on this. Any catch-up interventions should use attendance and exclusions data as an immediate priority.

Over the next 12-18 months we must continue to track Pupil exits (explained and unexplained). These include formal exclusions, withdrawals to home education and possible off-rolling. It should also consider children who might be spending excessive amounts of time in isolation units as a behaviour sanction, or those receiving high numbers of fixed term exclusions.

This would also be an ideal opportunity to place some much needed focus on well-being measures. We know that children's return to the classroom will be facilitated by their social and emotional health. Adding to an already extensive evidence base on the link between pupil well-being and academic attainment. There are now a host of tools available to schools to assess and track pupil well-being. Including these in a catch-up package would enable us to embed well-being into school practice, and could be a positive long-term legacy to come out of the crisis. The learning gained from doing this now, would be invaluable.

In addition, we should continue to track:

- Academic attainment, particularly the disadvantage gap.
- Destinations data

*More immediately, given we are hearing that there have been good and bad examples of schools' approach to supporting remote learning, what work should Ofsted be undertaking now, if any, in assessing schools' performance in this regard?*

I appreciate the desire to minimise burdens on schools at this time. However, as I stated in my evidence to the Committee, I am deeply concerned by the variability in children's experiences of online learning and pastoral support. I think the Department for Education needs to act quickly in establishing a minimum expectation, both in terms of remote learning and pastoral care.

One immediate barrier is that schools are trying to teach pupils without the basic resources to learn, which is why we need much more action on laptops and other learning materials.

We have about six weeks left of term. The Government need to balance the need to ensure all children get a basic entitlement to support with the need not to over burden schools. At this point, they should focus on quickly establishing a basic offer to all children this term, and how schools will need to evidence this to inform any future Ofsted inspection.

Going forwards, I hope to see all children getting back to school in September. But if this is not possible, the Government will need to thinking much more fundamentally about how schools facilitate home or 'blended' learning. Since the onset of Covid-19 the basic expectation that schools offer a broad and balanced curriculum has been dropped. This must not continue beyond September, whether children are in school or at home.

If this is going to be a long-term solution, and I hope it is not, schools will need to be clear not just that they are offering high quality work, but that they are ensuring children in engage with it with the same level of pupil-tracking that it is undertaken in schools. This will require significant additional funding, and the Department will need to provide this - if they fail to develop plans to have all children in school from September.

There may need to be some form of interim Ofsted accountability measure to maintain school accountability during the 'new normal'.

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