

Written evidence submitted by Caen Community Primary School

I am the Head Teacher of Caen Community Primary School in Braunton. I am writing to the select committee as I feel that the government and DfE have greatly mishandled the opening of schools by on the one hand giving too much autonomy to schools to select year groups and on the other by not allowing local areas to have greater autonomy to react to local data.

I am writing to you regarding the guidance about schools reopening and the impact that it is having. We were open throughout the period and from June 1st opened to all eligible pupils. We are a large [for North Devon] primary school with over 400 on roll. We are averaging 160/170 children in daily and of eligible year groups [Nursery, YR, Y1 and Y6] attendance is 67% which compares very favourably to the national figures. [Schools Week](#) [16.6.2020] gave the following figures: YR 32% [Caen 72%], Y1 29% [Caen 65%] and Y6 39% [Caen 63%]. We have more children booked in for next week as well. Today we have 197 on site and will have roughly 230 individual children in over this week and are now having to turn away children.

I was really disappointed to read in the guidance published on 15th June 2020 that community and church halls cannot be used by schools to have additional bubbles. I had been liaising with Braunton Parish Council and the Vivian Moon Centre to use their rooms to put two or three additional bubbles but Monday's announcement said that these rooms cannot be used. I was going to get my cleaners to clean daily as they do here and follow the same hygiene protocols. I had also lined up a number of DBS cleared parents who could help us spread staff further which would allow us to open more bubbles.

We were hoping to bring back additional year groups on a rota basis and I am getting daily emails from families where one parent cannot return to work as they are not able to take their child to work and their child is not in a targeted year group. Allowing a rotad return would allow some parents to go to work at least part-time and crucially give more children the opportunity to receive an education which is a right and not a privilege. However, I was further disappointed that the guidance continues to be that we cannot run such a system.

I am disappointed that the government seems to be setting such low aspirations for secondary schools to either take back more of their own pupils or begin the Y6 transition over this term. This June 1st return would have provided a golden opportunity to get the Y6 children in to meet the staff, receive some teaching, be assessed before the September start and be shown how the home learning will work should we go through a second spike at the start of the autumn and we need to go back in to lockdown. I offered to bring up my Y6 children with their teachers and then the secondary staff could have watched the children and then after a week or so they could have done some teaching themselves. This idea was not even entertained or acknowledged by my local secondary. GCSEs are done by mid/ end of June and why not get Y6s in for more time to allow for a much smoother hand-over. By starting this transition process in June, I would be able to free up some more teachers to teach the children of Caen. This period offers a real chance for some more major longer-term changes to education and other sectors but there seems to be a lack of 'blue sky' thinking. Unfortunately, a secondary school about 20 miles away is offering such a transition and it is a real shame that our pupils have not been given such an offer. In a similar vein, a local primary academy is having a four-week lead-in to taking Y6 pupils having taken a new year group each week. I believe that these such differing offers in small geographical areas have been made easier by the disparate school system whereby academies are accountable to the RSC and maintained to the LA etc. In a time of emergency why cannot the government mandate all schools to do the same thing at the same time [if safe to do so]. If they can 'take over' private hospitals to help with the efforts why not the same for academies?

We have opened really successfully and smoothly here. We have followed all guidance but not gone overboard unlike some schools and MATs that the media tends to focus upon. We opened to all eligible from the start. The children have all settled back really well and we are trying to get as many in as possible. They are met and greeted daily with a smile and run on in to class and wash their hands. They aren't met with staff wearing PPE or having their temperatures taken. North Devon has some of the lowest rates of infection in the country [and a negative death rate for this period when compared to the 5yr average] yet there is not local decision making. If there was and we carried out a risk assessment, we could safely take more children either in school by increasing the bubble sizes, running rotas or using local rooms. However, the government seems to be stymying our aspirations to offer a good education to all of our families.

Schools and teachers can get a knock sometimes and as I write this they are by Conservative colleagues on the Education Select Committee. However, I must say that I have had great support from my all of my teachers and support staff and I know that my local primary colleagues are also trying to accommodate as many families as possible.

Kind regards,

Sam Page

Sonia Grant

Head Teacher

Chair of Governors

June 2020