



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

8 November 2020

Dear Constituent,

Re: School closures

Thank you for your email and for setting out your concerns about the decision not to close schools as part of the second national lockdown.

Whilst I do understand that many people feel incredibly strongly on both sides of this debate I remain firmly of the view that keeping schools open, and children in them, is the best solution for young people.

Education plays a crucial role in the development of a child. We know it is the most significant factor in improving social mobility and provides immeasurable social and emotional benefits. The school building also acts as a safety net for some of Burnley and Padiham's most vulnerable children and it's why I believe it is of paramount importance that children do remain in school.

This is backed up by almost all experts. Speaking to the Education Select Committee in April, the head of Ofsted warned that the lockdown would widen the attainment gap between the most deprived pupils and their peers. We have also seen the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, say schools should stay open "no matter what". And only a few days ago, on 10 November, Ofsted published its second report on the effects of Covid-19 in which it said children had been hardest hit by the pandemic. Its report highlighted how some young children have regressed in basic skills and learning, lost stamina and physical fitness and some are now showing signs of mental distress.

The report made for sobering reading and has only reinforced why it is vital that we offer children the maximum possible support and that is not fully possible, for those of younger age groups, through remote learning.

If you are interested in the full report you can find it by visiting <https://bit.ly/2GQIWfh>.

I do understand the concerns that many parents will have about the safety of their children, and can assure you that the Government is doing everything possible to balance these two and has published very detailed (and regularly updated) guidance to assist schools in staying open safely. Details of this guidance can be found here <https://bit.ly/3evz9rs>.

You may also be interested in the statement issued by all four UK Chief Medical Officers in August which stated that they are all "confident that there is clear evidence from many studies that the great majority of children and teenagers who catch COVID-19 have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all." The full statement can be found at <https://bit.ly/2lqv2M>.

I have also raised the importance of children being at school safely during the pandemic with ministerial colleagues and will continue to work very closely with local schools feeding back any concerns they may have with the Department for Education.

People are making big sacrifices not just to protect the NHS, but also to allow schools to remain open. I would urge parents to continue taking their children to school and I am extremely grateful to teachers across the country for their dedication in enabling schools to remain open.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Higginbotham', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Antony Higginbotham MP
Member of Parliament for Burnley