



Professor Wei Shen Lim
Chair, Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
c/o JCVI Secretariat
Department of Health
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG

25 January 2021

Dear Professor Lim,

On 4 January, the Prime Minister announced that schools would move to remote learning until after the February half-term. If this commitment to reopen schools is to be made a reality, and the Government is to get children back into the classroom sooner rather than later, teachers and support staff working in schools must be made a priority for vaccinations.

In the first national lockdown, when schools were closed across the country, some [2.3 million children did less than an hour of learning per day](#), if any at all.

The Government has taken valiant steps to invest in remote learning, establishing the Oak National Academy, supplying laptops, tablets and routers to children without devices, and working closely with telecommunication companies to grant free internet access for families that need it.

Despite this, however, hundreds of thousands of children remain on the wrong side of the digital divide. Further, we know that pupil's experiences and the quality of remote learning are extremely varied. Home learning requires children to work independently, without the structure of the classroom or motivation offered by their teachers and peers. School closures place enormous pressures on parents, many of whom are juggling their own work commitments whilst trying to help educate their children.

According to [a new report by the IFS](#), education inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers has widened significantly. Since July, pupils from poorer areas and households have been more likely to miss days from school. They are also less likely to return to schooling, even when given the chance to do so. The IFS state that the pandemic will halt or reverse the closing of the attainment gap - undermining much of the work the Government has done to address this, since 2010.

[Undoubtedly linked to educational attainment and outcomes](#) is the concern of growing mental health issues amongst children and young people due to social isolation and school closures. A few months ago, some 1,500 members of the Royal Society of Paediatrics and Children's Health (RSPCH) signed [an open letter](#) warning of the "scarring" harms to children's mental health and their life chances caused by keeping school closures.



At the end of December, Dr Karen Street, an Officer for Mental Health at the RSPCH [wrote about the harrowing 400% increase in eating disorders](#) amongst young people, in part due to school closures and social isolation.

On Saturday 8 January, [in The Daily Telegraph](#), Dr Bernadka Dubicka, Chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists Child Faculty, warned that:

“Inequalities will widen, life chances will diminish, and the [mental health crisis already running rife](#) in our young people could plague this generation for years to come – that is unless the Government urgently prioritises children and young people and places them at the centre of policy making.”

For these reasons, we must get schools open again and sooner rather than later. That starts with ensuring teachers and support staff are a priority for vaccinations. This isn't to favour one group of workers over another, but to get children back into the classroom and learning again. Teachers and support staff should be made to feel safe. Vaccinating school staff will help put an end to the revolving door of learning that pupils have experienced when schools reopen, whereby their teachers must stay home due to Covid-19, and whole year groups self-isolate.

The end of half-term re-opening of schools should be a reality, not just an aspiration. Otherwise, we risk an epidemic of educational poverty and a mental health crisis for our young people. However, schools cannot return to normality without the assurance that only a vaccine can provide - that their teaching and support staff will be safe and able to continue educating and supporting our children.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Halfon MP

Miriam Cates MP

Signed by

Tom Hunt MP

Simon Fell MP

Sally-Ann Hart MP

Duncan Baker MP

Alexander Stafford MP

Christian Wakeford MP

Steve Brine MP

James Sunderland MP

Siobhan Baillie MP