



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

THE COUNCIL HOUSE
VICTORIA SQUARE
BIRMINGHAM
B1 1BB

Tel: 0121 464 4000

Email: Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk

Our Ref: IW/1133tr

19 May 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State

These clearly are difficult times and as leaders we seek to make the right decisions for the children, families and communities we serve.

We are sure you will agree that staff in schools across the country have shown exceptional commitment and dedication in recent months to support children, young people and their families. Birmingham schools have been open for vulnerable children and those of key workers throughout the coronavirus outbreak, including during school holidays and on bank holidays.

We welcome the recent guidance produced by your department and support the return of pupils in the prioritised year groups in addition to vulnerable children and the children of key workers where it is safe to do so. We have produced a risk assessment to support Birmingham schools as they prepare for an increased number of children attending/returning to school and are in regular conversations with school leaders across the city about this.

We must however raise concerns where we believe that your guidance has so far failed to address the anxieties of Birmingham schools and families, namely the scientific advice on which your decision was based and the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 outbreak is having on BAME communities.

In our discussions with school leaders there are real concerns relating to the disproportionately negative impact that Covid-19 is having on BAME men and women, specifically those from the Black community. School leaders tell us that these concerns were further heightened when reading the 'Overview of scientific advice and information on coronavirus (COVID19)' published by your department on Friday 15 May.

The guidance states:

'This provisional analysis has shown that the risk of death involving coronavirus (COVID-19) among some ethnic groups is significantly higher than that of those of White ethnicity. Further research is needed to understand why some ethnic groups have higher death rates from coronavirus (COVID-19) than others... Schools should be especially sensitive to the needs and worries of BAME members of staff, BAME parents and BAME pupils.'

Over 42 per cent of Birmingham citizens are from BAME backgrounds and there are understandable concerns in light of the Office of National Statistics findings regarding the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people of black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

When schools have contacted BAME parents as part of their plans to reopen, the vast majority have stated that they will not be returning their children to school on 1 June. Parents expressed their concerns on the disproportional impact on them as black parents if their child were to contract the virus and bring it home. We feel that further guidance is required for schools with large BAME communities on the implications of reopening.

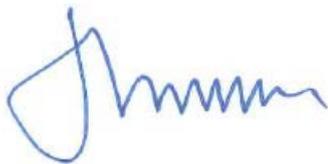
Finally, we would welcome your department publishing the scientific advice on which the overall decision to reopen schools was based to reassure us and the wider education community that it was taken on solely public health grounds. All communities in Birmingham must feel safe to return their children to school.

We look forward to your response to the concerns we have raised.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Councillor Jayne Francis
Cabinet Member for Education, Skills & Culture