

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 1AA

13 November 2020

Dear Secretary of State

### **COVID-19 Education Impact**

I am writing to you to raise some concerns that Essex County Council has in relation to the government's plans around education during the COVID-19 crisis. We are particularly concerned around the concept of Ofsted continuing with inspections as of January 2021, the prospect of examinations occurring at the end of this academic year and the publication of performance tables.

The instability that the COVID-19 crisis has caused schools is bound to have impact not only on the children but the operation of the schools themselves. Schools are already under great pressure during the crisis and even if COVID-19 ceases at the end of this year, the damage to the education sector will take time to repair. Government proposes to continue with Ofsted inspections as of January 2021, however we question whether such inspections would be fair when considering the current context. As we enter another lockdown, schools are focused on the safety of children at this time and ensuring that they are able to open. Although we support the government's view to maintain the opening of schools, it should be appreciated that attendance and maintaining this is a challenge for all school leaders. An Ofsted inspection at this time does not seem appropriate.

It is clear that the cohort of children for this academic year are to be at a huge disadvantage to previous year groups. Firstly, there is the academic disadvantage that last year the majority of children were not in school during the lockdown and missed an invaluable part of their learning. Secondly, there is the consideration of the mental wellbeing of children who are required to sit exams during this turbulent time with out any contingency arrangements.

In Essex, we understand the intention of the department is to hold exams in 2021 but given the concern regarding disadvantage and inequality we ask that the department to publish its contingency arrangements as a matter of urgency.

We also feel that the publication of exam results and league tables would have little value when compared to previous years due to the impact of COVID-19. The current crisis makes it very difficult to compare progress of children and schools, so publishing this data will create an inaccurate picture of the education sector and does not take into account the challenges school leaders and young people are facing.

In summary, Essex County Council is asking government to let go of the statistical information for this academic year through Ofsted and performance tables, so that we can

successfully navigate children and schools through these difficult times. This would support the wellbeing of young people and enable school leaders to continue to operate effectively during this crisis.

I attach for your information greater detail about some of these issues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Gooding', written in a cursive style.

**Cllr Ray Gooding**  
**Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**