



1 April 2021

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
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Dear Secretary of State

We are aware that the Department, in consultation with Public Health England, is currently reviewing the policy on the wearing of face coverings in schools.

As organisations, we were pleased to be able to provide informal stakeholder feedback recently regarding how the policy has been working in schools since it was introduced. We are also pleased to know that these views will be considered as part of the overall review.

It is important to state that none of us wants to see pupils or staff wearing face coverings for longer than is necessary. We all look forward to the day when this policy, along with many other mitigations currently in place, are no longer necessary.

However, it is our shared view that the government should not rush into changing this policy at short notice without careful consideration of the scientific evidence surrounding the wearing of face coverings in schools. Clearly, the safety and wellbeing of all members of school communities and their families should remain our primary concern at this time.

There is a strong scientific consensus that face coverings can and should form a key part of a comprehensive strategy of measures to suppress transmission of covid-19. As you will be aware, the research suggests that they cut down the chances of both transmitting and catching the coronavirus. We have also seen the emergence of more recent studies that suggest that they can help to reduce transmission of the virus within schools. We also note that many other countries currently have stronger policies in place when it comes to face coverings in schools.

Our view is that while any review should certainly take into account the practicalities of wearing face coverings, as well as the views of a wide range of stakeholders, (including pupils, parents and staff) any policy changes should be ultimately grounded in the latest scientific evidence. Currently, the government has not presented strong scientific evidence to us that suggests that now would be the right time to reverse the policy.

While the DfE's own data has shown a recent increase in the number of pupils absent for covid-19 related reasons, it is not unreasonable to assume that the wearing of face coverings could actually be restraining this increase. At the very least, this should be investigated further before a decision on changing the policy is made.

The feedback we have received so far from members is that, for the most part, the face coverings policy is being well adhered to and not causing any significant disruption in schools. We have also received feedback to suggest that a significant number of pupils, parents and staff have reported feeling safer as a result of wearing face coverings in schools. While this alone should obviously not determine the decision, we believe that confidence in school safety is a vital component in the sustainable return to school full re-opening.



In conclusion, our view is that the current evidence does not justify a change in policy on face coverings at the start of next term and we see little advantage in changing policy so soon. We, of course, want to continue the discussion around face coverings, along with all other safety measures, with the DfE and PHE to ensure that all mitigations remain effective and appropriate.

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