

Supporting documentation / Email Chains for FOI 202000085891

First Minister Correspondence

No relevant correspondence received in the period requested.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

7 September 2020 - DFM

Dear John,

I have been contacted by a constituent who is concerned about the use of face coverings by children and young people. She is particularly concerned about the impact of the use of face coverings by this group, and the effect on their educational, developmental, social and mental wellbeing. She is also concerned about how these impacts are being monitored, data collected and analysis of data, and whether this is in line with WHO guidelines and has specifically asked me to raise the following questions.

How will the impacts of the use of face coverings on children and young people be monitored?

Will this be done in line with World Health Organisation guidelines?

What data will be collected?

Who is collecting this data?

How will the data be collected?

What analysis of data will take place?

How will it be presented?

When will it be presented?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Dear John,

Face Coverings in Schools

3 September 2020 - DFM

I am writing to you on behalf of a constituent who has contacted me regarding their concerns about the guidance for children to wear face coverings in schools. I have enclosed a copy of relevant correspondence for your attention.

I would be grateful if you would investigate my constituent's specific concerns, responding in a manner that I may share with them.

Given the decision regarding mask wearing in schools has been already made I do wonder what risk assessments have been carried out?

I am cognisant that the First Minister has taken the most recent WHO statement regarding mask wearing, and indeed in her own words, has taken this further (sic).

The WHO (Annex: Advice on the use of masks for children in the community in the context of Covid19) document also states the following -
"Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the use of masks in children If authorities decide to recommend mask-wearing for children, key information should be collected on a regular basis to accompany and monitor the intervention. Monitoring and evaluation should be established at the onset and should include indicators that measure the impact on the child's health, including mental health; reduction in transmission of SARS-CoV-2; motivators and barriers to mask wearing."
The original mandate has been in place for seven weeks and I suspect a substantial amount of data will have been gathered on this already. Could you advise when this will be published?

Furthermore, given the extended use of masks by children over aged 5 which is now mandated I would also like to know, in addition to the above, what the impact of this is on children's education and their brain and cognitive development and confirm -

Who will be monitoring this?

Who is collecting this data?

How will the data be collected?

How will it be presented?

When will it be presented?

Additionally, given the WHO advice clearly states use of masks in such a way by children would be in areas with high transmission levels I would be keen to understand what this might look like at a national and local level and when mask use could be stopped?

I look forward to your response.

[redacted]

2 September 2020 - DFM

Good afternoon John

I have been copied into the enquiry below from my constituent [redacted] regarding the issue of face coverings in schools.

One specific questions she raises below, in the first instance, is in regard to data in this matter so far collated in the use of face coverings in general – will there be published data on this.

With regard to wearing face masks in schools, she would like clarification on how and who will be collecting the data, who will be monitoring it, how and when the collected data will be presented.

I appreciate that you will be responding directly with [redacted] in this matter but I would be very grateful if you could also copy me into the full response.

Kind regards,

[redacted]

[redacted]

7 September 2020 - DFM

Dear First Minister,

The Negative Impact of Face Coverings on Deaf Students

As you are aware face coverings are now mandatory in school corridors and communal areas, a change which Deaf Action believe could create a preventable barrier to everyday communication for many of Scotland's deaf students. Regrettably, statistics already highlight that deaf pupils in Scotland are eight times more likely to leave school with no qualification than their hearing classmates and only 29% of deaf school-leavers go on to study at University compared to 45% of hearing students.

The Scottish Government must do more to address this achievement gap and to provide greater support for hearing impaired and deaf students. This includes better provision and of specialist teachers, a third of which have been lost over the past eight years.

Given this worrying trend for Scotland's deaf students, which will have been exacerbated by the impact of lockdown and the additional barriers being put in place for deaf students such as the wearing of face coverings in schools this is a deeply concerning and uncertain time for the deaf community.

Can I therefore ask what steps the Scottish Government are taking to ensure deaf students don't fall further behind as a result of face coverings being worn in schools?
Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

26 August 2020

26 August 2020 - DFM

Mr John Swinney MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Our Ref: JS7556

Dear John

I am writing on behalf of a constituent, [redacted] who recently contacted me regarding the wearing of face masks in schools.

My constituent is concerned about protocols for face mask wearing. He is concerned that by young people touching the front of the mask, any benefits would be nullified.

He is also concerned that children won't store the masks safely between uses, and wonders how children will have access to wash their hands before and after removal.

My constituent suggests that instead, we reduce the movement of the pupils and move teachers.

I would be grateful if you could provide a response that I can pass on to my constituent.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Jeane Freeman MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport

31 August 2020 - DFM

The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Ref: DC-BD9227

31 August 2020

Dear Jeane,

Risk Assessment on Face Coverings

I am writing in relation to the above matter.

I have been approached by a constituent who has asked about the role risk assessments played in mandating the use of face coverings in various public places. In particular, is there a specific risk assessment that was carried out which would allow my constituent to look at this information for themselves?

As you know, the Cabinet Secretary for Education has also recently announced the extension of face covering in school corridors and other crowded environments within schools, as well as on designated school bus services. I am aware this was acted upon following the updating of World Health Organisation guidance, and after consultation with Councils and teaching unions. However, I have been asked for details of the scientific data used to extend face coverings within education.

My thanks for giving this matter your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

[redacted]

21 August 2020 - DFM

Dear John

I have been approached by a number of parents within my constituency who have raised with me their concerns over press speculation that the wearing of face coverings may be made compulsory in schools, and they have asked me to share these concerns with you.

Amongst these concerns, as expressed to me, are that current guidance from WHO, the UK CMO and the Scottish Government's own Scottish Government CMO is that face masks outside of clinical settings are not meaningful, and that the UK CMO has gone as far to raise the concern that use of face masks in schools may increase infection due to misuse.

They have also expressed concerns that young children will never keep them on, that older children constantly fiddle with them, which itself presents a health risk and that a teacher will be unable to police a class of 30 pupils unconsciously touching their face and mask?

Of course, it is well understood that all practical and proportionate steps which could assist in further suppressing the virus must be actively considered and that mandatory face coverings within schools are at this stage simply a matter being held 'under review'.

Nonetheless, I would be grateful for your consideration of the concerns expressed to me by my constituents and to have your thoughts on them, in due course.
Kind regards,

[redacted]

27 August 2020 - DFM

Scottish Ministers
Scottish Government
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: Scottish.ministers@gov.scot

27.08.20

Dear Ministers

I have been contacted by my constituent [redacted] regarding the mandatory face coverings in schools. My constituent wishes you to guarantee that face coverings will never be mandatory in classrooms for primary school children, in areas where there is a low prevalence of Covid-19.

After the announcement yesterday that primary school age children from 5 upwards will need to wear face coverings on school transport, she feels that this is directly against three separate points of the recently updated WHO guidance.

WHO and UNICEF advise that the decision to use masks for children aged 6-11 should be based on the following factors:

- * Whether there is widespread transmission in the area where the child resides (not currently the case in her area)
- * The ability of the child to safely and appropriately use a mask (unlikely to be the case for most primary age children on unsupervised school transport)
- * Adequate adult supervision and instructions to the child on how to put on, take off and safely wear masks (absolutely not the case on unsupervised school transport).

My constituents a parent of 3 children aged 14, 10 and 6 years old and she is terrified that face coverings being introduced in classrooms firstly in secondary and then in primary schools and feels she would not want to allow her child to wear a mask for 6 hours a day in school unless there is a high prevalence of covid-19 in her local area.

My constituent feels that the approach taken in England seems to be more in line with WHO guidance- that primary age children should only need to wear masks in

areas where there is widespread transmission. She wishes the Scottish Government to take a similar, more proportionate response in Scotland.

The decision on school transport was apparently made to 'bring this into line with the rules on public transport'. Given the WHO guidance, children under 12 should not be wearing masks AT ALL. She again urges the Scottish Government to remove the requirement for children under 12 to wear masks at all, in areas where there is no widespread transmission of Covid-19?

I Look forward to hearing from you

Our Ref: BC2424

27 August 2020 - DFM

Dear Deputy First Minister

Face Coverings in Primary Schools

I am writing to you on behalf of constituents who recently contacted me regarding the case for face coverings to be worn in primary schools.

My constituents welcome the recent guidance providing additional protection to staff and children in secondary schools and on school transport, however believe that this reinforces the point that no effective measures are being implemented to protect staff and children in primary schools.

My constituents consider that the new guidance that "face coverings should now be worn on dedicated school transport by all children aged five and over" makes it an anomaly that these children are not asked to wear face masks in school. They believe that 30 or more children in each classroom are not more socially distanced in the classroom than they are on school transport.

They also ask why adults and pupils in primary schools are not asked to wear face coverings while moving around the school, as in secondary schools, where physical distancing is equally difficult to maintain, and where younger children require constant support and are less able to comply with current limitations.

I would be grateful for any clarification on my constituents' points.

I thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

[redacted]

21 August 2020 - DFM

21st August 2020

Mr John Swinney
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear John

School Leaders Scotland Reflections on the Return to School, August 2020

The return of young people to school and the opportunity for them to re engage with learning has been universally welcomed by our members. Notwithstanding the undoubted challenges which lie before us there is an overwhelming air of optimism supported by an unprecedented level of collegiality within the school community.

School leaders welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the creation of the “Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term” and have embraced it in their planning for the return of young people to school and for the immediate way forward for education in Scotland. It is in this context that we frame the following observations at the end of the first full week back.

In regard of some of our observations we seek an immediate response. We are of the opinion that this is achievable and would prove useful in enabling us to address issues which were unseen when the Guidance was drawn up. An immediate response would enable us to establish and grow confidence within our school communities and more importantly, through establishing a common level of understanding, empower school leaders in planning the next steps in the recovery process.

Other of our observations we raise now, but seek to engage in meaningful dialogue with you in the context of longer term planning with a view to enabling system recovery, system equity and genuine and meaningful empowerment of school leaders.

While we find the Guidance both useful and workable we feel that, as perhaps is to be expected in such a document, the need for greater clarity would arise as the immediate phase of implementation rolled out. It is reassuring to know that CERG will capture this in its weekly reporting cycle and that the Guidance will be updated to reflect changes in circumstance.

1. There are issues which have remained unresolved since the outset of the discussions which led to the Guidance.

- The mixed messages which persist in regard of the wearing face coverings, with particular reference to young adults.
- The confusion in the minds of parents and young people over the wearing of face coverings in shops/public transport/museums where a degree of social distancing is possible yet not in an enclosed classroom along with 30 other young adults.
- Distancing in public places but acceptability of close contact in a school building where despite the most sophisticated of procedures, social distancing is unachievable.
- Swift clarity on SQA arrangements for 2020/21 is needed urgently.
- A clear distinction needs to be made between a return to school full time, and a return to education full time. Guidance on consortia, college attendance and work experience falls into this category .

We are very much of the view that clear guidance overtly supported by scientific/medical evidence would go a long way to establishing and building confidence and removing what are time consuming and distracting debates from the system.

2. The first week back has identified clear and specific gaps in regard of the Guidance. It is our view that these can be rectified quickly by the expansion of the professional guidance afforded the system by Education Scotland
 - The pedagogy developed and embraced within CfE is difficult to sustain in a socially distancing classroom environment. Guidance on alternative teaching and learning approaches would be welcome.
 - The provision of meaningful and workable guidance in relation to the delivery of practical subjects(Physical Education, Home Economics, Music and Drama) is essential and required as a matter of urgency.
 - As it would appear that the level of school absence is set to rise, consideration must be given to revisiting home learning in whatever context is feasible and sustainable
3. We feel that level and tone of messaging to the general public required in relation to the bringing together of large groups of young people needs to be more pointed and robust. In the context of schools, the welfare of young people (in its widest sense, balancing physical health mental health and learning) is a corporate and community responsibility. Parents who allow and condone irresponsible behaviour by their children within the community are jeopardising the safety of the school environment.
4. School leaders have come under enormous pressure over the course of the past five months

- Some colleagues have been working continuously since early January
- During that time the level of demand has been unrelenting
- There has been at least one major change in the National plan during that period
- Some of the demands on school leaders have been without precedent in their complexity
- The stress introduced into the system for school leaders on account of SQA issues cannot be underestimated.

While we raise these observations as of immediate concern, it is also to lay down a marker for need for vigilance on behalf of Scottish Government and of employers in the medium to longer term on the physical and mental wellbeing of school leaders.

5. SLS has long argued for the genuine empowerment of Headteachers and for an education system founded in equity. This crisis has demonstrated that:

- where Headteachers have been empowered, they can, and do have a significant positive impact in and on their communities. In the longer term and in working towards complete system recovery and subsequent development and improvement, we seek assurance that there is a commitment to restoring Empowerment of Headteachers to the forefront of the National agenda.
- equity in terms of resource and staffing in schools across Scotland's 32 local authorities is an illusion and this has served to disadvantage young people in certain areas of the country. We seek a commitment to the fundamental pursuit of equity through a National Basic Minimum Staffing Standard, a National Minimum Funding Formula and a continued commitment to addressing deprivation through strategies such as Pupil Equity Fund and National Attainment Fund.

As you well know, through the productive interactions which we have always had with you, School Leaders Scotland before and throughout the current crisis has been supportive of the Scottish Government's agenda for improving the quality of Scottish Education and thereby enhancing the life chances of Scotland's young people. We remain absolutely committed to these aims, and present our observations to you in the belief that they will assist in establishing the short term and long term priorities in the resetting of that agenda and in outlining the key supporting role that school leaders can, must and will play in that process.

When the time is right we would value the opportunity to engage in dialogue with you.

Yours

[redacted]

25 August 2020 - DFM

[redacted]

Subject: face coverings in senior schools

Our ref: DR/SN/4395

Dear Deputy First Minister,

I have been contacted by a number of parents, including members of Us For Them Scotland, who are concerned that parents had no input into the introduction of mandatory face coverings for children in secondary schools when they are in communal areas, such as corridors and canteens.

I am advised that the WHO advice for face coverings in schools refers only to areas where Covid-19 is at high levels, yet Scotland is still experiencing low levels of the virus. Given that, I would be grateful if you could explain why, therefore, the Scottish Government has decided it is necessary to introduce this measure in our secondary schools?

Furthermore, children with autism could find the sight of everyone in masks or face coverings distressing, and those who rely on lip reading will be further isolated if their peers are all having to wear face coverings in communal areas of schools.

I would be grateful if you could get back to me with answers to the points I have raised in order that I can pass the information back to my constituents.

Kind regards

[redacted]

21 August - DFM

Dear Cabinet Secretary

Re: Consideration for face coverings to be worn in school and on school transport

I am writing on behalf of constituents, who recently contacted me regarding the possibility of pupils being required to wear face coverings while at school and on school transport.

Constituents who appear to support pupils wearing masks have highlighted that in all other aspects of their day, whether it be in shops or public transport, people including school age children, are required to wear masks. They are struggling to comprehend why this should not be carried over to school transport and into schools. One constituent suggested the wearing of face coverings could be limited to moving about corridors between lessons and when pupils are in close proximity to others such as lunch queues and on school transport.

However, a constituent did raise concerns that to ask children to wear a mask for a whole school day would be detrimental to their learning and wellbeing and many ASN children could struggle. Concern was also raised that children and staff who require to lip read would be disadvantaged. He also questioned the extent to which science supports the effectiveness of face covering outwith the medical environment.

I would be grateful to hear your thoughts on the question of the mandatory wearing of face coverings in schools and whether it is an action you have considered or are considering.

Yours sincerely

dear mr murry thank you for your reply i have red over the guidance carefully and understood most of it however it has one major flaw the fact people don't need proof to show tgey have a health condition why i say that is obvious people lie mr murry and people do fraud anyone can walk onto a bus or a shop and say i have health problems just to avoid wearing a mask of course im glad scotland has done well however we shouldn't let our guard down as i understand its the younger generation spreading the virus 10 to 30 year olds igniring the rules which gas caused aberdeen into lockdown which is why i say the rules do have that major flaw i have autisum and asthma mr murry and ive been wearing a mask since late February because i knew scotland would have cases eventuslly i have to protect my mum she is 70 with type 2 diobetes and high blood pressure imdoing my part to help reduce the spread at the expence of my mental health i know your hands are most likley tied but i hope you can possibly deliver my opinion on the rules to miss sturgeon as a concerned citizen if edinburgh as im sure public opinion is much apreciated and valued thank you for your time

[redacted]

18 August 2020 - DFM

Dear John

I have been contacted by constituents who are understandably very concerned that face masks are not mandatory for all pupils and staff in schools as well as on school transport.

My constituents state, "We are surprised and shocked to hear that face masks are not mandatory for all pupils and staff. This virus is an airborne disease, and the emphasis on hand hygiene is secondary to the fact that Covid-19 is mainly passed on through the air in droplets as people speak, laugh, shout and sing. There is no point in my child wearing a mask if no one else is - masks are there to protect everyone else. They only work as a curb on the virus if everyone wears them. The science on the effectiveness of masks at reducing airborne droplets is clear.

"How can it be mandatory for everyone to wear a mask in shops to protect each other, but not for pupils in school? The UK government has extended the use of masks to places like theatres as well. Children may be at much lower risk of the virus itself, but they can still be asymptomatic themselves and transmit the virus onwards, through other children to other households where vulnerable people live. Not wearing masks on the buses seems crazy too, given the very close contact and reduced airspace. Some scientists now consider that children over 10 are just as likely to carry the virus as adults."

"In the UK, we have already had such a terrible time with this virus, and have not learnt lessons from other countries, ploughing onwards with our own ideas and convinced that we were right. We have been proven wrong over and over again. Would it not be better to be cautious now?"

"The virus has not gone anywhere, and we have no cure and no vaccination. We just feel that this is a mistake by the government to assume that a whole school can be a safe 'bubble'. In Germany, all children (also returning next week) will have to wear a mask throughout the day, and year groups are being kept separated from each other. Surely we should be taking our cue from countries like them where the virus has been managed much more effectively? Having everyone wearing masks might be uncomfortable, but it might prevent the second wave that usually comes with viruses like this, keep staff and families safer, and make it much less likely that schools will have to close again in the winter.

"We had an email from the school saying that they'd had complaints about some pupils going into local shops without masks, and asking parents to make sure their children comply. As I said in reply, what on earth did the government think was going to happen? Schools set the example for children as to how they should behave in the wider community. If children can spend their day at school in and out of transport, hallways and classrooms without masks, why would they consider it as important in shops or anywhere else? It undermines the whole policy.

"I spoke to students of mine in Germany and some of their children are back in school now as well - with masks. Children under 6 don't wear masks at all, but over six, they wear them in enclosed spaces, including school premises, but not in class lessons. Over 10 years old, they wear masks all day, including in lessons. They have regular breaks outside to take off their masks and exercise. The idea that our children could not follow such instructions is just insulting. The U.K. government

thought the adult population wouldn't follow lockdown rules, but we did, for months. It's time we learnt from other countries who have not had the huge death rate from this pandemic that we have. This virus is airborne and spreads from person to person in tiny droplets of moisture from speech and breathing. Masks help to mitigate that spread and will perhaps help to prevent a second spike and a further lockdown. Isn't that worth asking people to cope with a little inconvenience for?

"Given the news of the new Orkney cases and evidence of increased cases and transmission coming from states like California where some schools reopened without masks (a 130% increase in cases among young people), surely it is more important than ever to make face masks mandatory for everyone in an indoor setting - including schools. We cannot believe that this is being overlooked. There is clear science showing that air droplets (which carry the virus) are much reduced with mask use. There are many scientists aghast that we are reopening schools without them. Research shows that children spread the virus just as well as adults can, and even if they have less risk from the virus themselves, they will carry it home to loved ones."

In conclusion my constituents state, "Please can you make sure that Orkney students and their families can be as safe as possible by asking that face masks be mandatory for everyone when they're inside a space with people outside their household - including schools and the classrooms inside, and school buses, which are often crowded. A whole school cannot be a 'safe' bubble. It is too big. So many folk have links to the schools through students and staff. Of course masks are a little uncomfortable, but it will keep everyone safer - surely that's more important?"

I have considerable sympathy with the points made by my constituents, particularly the mixed messages around the mask-wearing on public and school transport. I would be very grateful therefore to receive your views and comments on the issue which my constituents have raised.

Given the obvious read across to health, I am copying in Jeane Freeman but look forward to hearing from you in due course.

[redacted]