

North West Statement on Education

There is a national and local consensus with school leaders - the best place for children and young people to be is in school. Their safety, wellbeing and life chances demand this, and so do we. Yet almost every school in the North West now operates under local restrictions which impact on attendance, curriculum and virus control.

Government accepted the impact of lost time in education is substantial, with disadvantaged and vulnerable children hardest hit. Far from the 'decrease in prevalence of coronavirus' envisaged by the Department for Education, thousands of children and teachers in the North West are missing more time in the classroom than their peers nationally.

To address this, the Department for Education must:

- **Devolve decision making on use of CONTAIN framework Tier 2 and Tier 3 education to a local authority level, accompanied by appropriate resources**
- **Provide additional COVID funding for schools and early years settings to continue to stay open and provide effective remote and catch-up learning; proportionate to infection rates**
- **Urgently develop contingencies for awarding qualifications which include alternative arrangements for national, standardised assessment; allowing schools the time to plan and ensure children get the grades they deserve.**

Equipping local authorities, including our crucial Public Health functions, to take robust and devolved decisions with schools is key. The current centralised approach is negatively affecting children, the economy and delivery of key public services as virus control measures impact parents' ability to work. Any decision on measures as significant as introducing rotas and remote learning should attract Government support. To be timely and effective, decisions must be taken locally where the impact on children and families, including the most disadvantaged, is managed best.

Government acknowledged in July that funding to support schools to make up for lost teaching time was needed due to unprecedented disruption. What children and young people in the North West face is no longer unprecedented. Once again, they're missing crucial time in the classroom. The quality of remote learning can't replace or replicate that which takes place in school. The case for additional funding is accepted, mechanisms are in place to provide it. Additional Coronavirus Catch-up premium funding in early 2021 should be targeted to settings where pupils have experienced

notable disruption to their learning – settings already disproportionately bearing costs of supply teaching, cleaning and other response measures.

Planning for awarding 2021 qualifications must focus on fairness for children.

Contingencies which address logistical arrangements for examinations serve a limited purpose – to ensure exams take place. At best, this means pupils affected by self-isolation or outbreaks in June or July are not further disadvantaged. At worst, it sustains a policy of 'examination at all costs'. Without action now, those costs - fairness, equity and a good start in life - will be disproportionately borne in the North West.

Examinations and assessments may go ahead, fairly, for some in 2021. For others, disruption to their learning means end of year testing will measure not their ability or achievements, but lost teaching time and policy failure. Our children and young people, even more so those who are disadvantaged for socio-economic reasons, must not be disadvantaged by the lost learning time they have experienced in comparison to their peers nationally.

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