

To:

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education

Dame Glenys Stacey
Interim Chief Regulator Ofqual

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27th October 2020

Dear Mr Williamson and Dame Glenys,

RE: Plans for Statutory Pupil Assessments during 2021

The ongoing pandemic response and recovery plan remains a key focus for Leeds City Council, including that of its Children and Families Scrutiny Board. The Council and its partners are working collaboratively to support all children and their families during such an unprecedented and difficult period.

The Scrutiny Board believes it is vital that all pupils in Leeds, and especially disadvantaged pupils and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, have confidence that they will be fairly treated in terms of assessment in 2021. The purpose of this letter is to express our shared views and concerns surrounding plans for pupil assessment in 2021.

We note the government's announcement on 12th October 2020 which makes clear the intention to go ahead with GCSE, AS and A level exams in England next summer and we welcome the government's intention to undertake further work to consider the range of scenarios which might impact students' ability to sit exams and to develop contingency plans in consultation with the education sector over the coming weeks. We would like to add the following considerations to the debate.

Current transmission rates of Covid-19 in Leeds are above the national average and many pupils are missing in-school learning as they are made to isolate at home either waiting for Covid-19 test results or as a result of their year or class 'bubble' collapsing following a positive coronavirus case. Staff absence for the same reasons leads to further loss of specialist input. Therefore any contingency plans must not only take into account potential exam disruption but also the amount of lost learning which will disproportionately affect many young people in Leeds.

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Contingency plans must also take account of the greater impact felt by our disadvantaged communities as pupils from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to have access to laptops or other devices to use at home to facilitate remote learning and are less likely to have appropriate spaces to study that are conducive to learning. The Scrutiny Board acknowledges the efforts that the government made to provide disadvantaged pupils with devices on which to access remote learning, but there were still pupils left without suitable devices, or who received them after the national lockdown.

It is evident that head teachers and staff already feel exhausted and under a great deal of pressure. This is primarily because of the extra duties they are required to undertake to ensure the school operates in a Covid-19 safe manner, as well as due to the need to provide work for pupils who are self-isolating. If contingency plans involve any form of additional teacher based assessment or externally moderated centre-based assessments, then schools and colleges themselves will also need to have sufficient support and resource measures put in place now to allow them to make the necessary preparations.

Any arrangements put in place also need to offer a supportive solution to both pupils and teachers and not have a further detrimental impact on their mental health and well-being. As such, it is critical that contingency plans are confirmed by the government as a matter of urgency as pupils need to have the reassurance now that their existing efforts and hard work will be acknowledged.

As well as GCSE and A Level assessments, we are also conscious of the need for government to provide further clarity on statutory assessments in primary settings next year, taking into account the unequal effect the pandemic has had on individuals and groups across the nation. These too will place considerable pressure on children and staff as they aim to catch-up on missed learning and we do not believe that they can be justified in the current circumstances.

Given the complexity around assessment we believe that it would be inappropriate for the government to publish performance tables in 2021.

We would be very grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this letter and provide a written response to the issues we have raised so that we can also formally report back to the Children and Families Scrutiny Board as part of its continued work.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Alan Lamb
Chair of Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)



Councillor Jonathan Pryor
Executive Member for Learning,
Skills and Employment