Mr Gavin Williamson CBE MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA  

6th May 2020  

Dear Mr Williamson,

Play First: Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing During and After Lockdown

We are aware of the Prime Minister’s imminent announcement on the relaxing of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. At this time, many children’s emotional health will be suffering due to loneliness and isolation. As experts in children’s mental health and development we urge the Government to prioritise children’s social and emotional wellbeing in all decisions related to the easing of lockdown restrictions and the reopening of schools.

We would like to highlight the following evidence-based recommendations that should be a priority consideration:

1. The easing of lockdown restrictions should be done in a way that provides all children with the time and opportunity to play with peers, in and outside of school, and even while social distancing measures remain in place.

2. Schools should be appropriately resourced and given clear guidance on how to support children’s emotional wellbeing during the transition period as schools reopen. Play should be a priority during this time, rather than academic progress.

3. Public health communications must recognise that many parents and teachers are anxious about their child’s academic progress and the risk posed to children in easing lockdown restrictions. The social and emotional benefits of play and interaction with peers must be clearly communicated, alongside guidance on the objective risks to children.

We hope that when policy decisions are made in the coming weeks and months that children’s emotional health is given the consideration it deserves. Poor emotional health in children leads to long term mental health problems, poorer educational attainment and has a considerable economic burden.

We have attached a short document outlining our more detailed recommendations and the evidence that underpins them. If this is of interest or you would like to find out more about our recommendations, please do get in touch with Prof Sam Cartwright-Hatton (s.cartwright-hatton@sussex.ac.uk), Dr Kathryn Lester (k.lester@sussex.ac.uk) or Prof Helen Dodd (h.f.dodd@reading.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely,

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Professor in Clinical Child Psychology  

Dr Kathryn Lester  
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Prof Helen Dodd  
Professor in Child Psychology

On behalf of Prof Robin Banerjee (University of Sussex), Dr Jenny Gibson (University of Cambridge), Rachel Hurding (The Ellis C of E Primary School, Barnsley), Alison Lacey (University of Sussex), Dr Maria Loades (University of Bath), Dr James Murray (Guernsey CAMHS), Prof Alison Pike (University of Sussex), Prof Paul Ramchandani (University of Cambridge), Prof Shirley Reynolds (University of Reading), Dr Wendy Russell (University of Gloucestershire), Zoe Singh (Lydgate Infant School, Sheffield), Prof Nicola Yuill (University of Sussex)