



January 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the announcement that schools in England will close for most pupils.

I know that this news will be unwelcome for families up and down the country. Children's education is vital and I believe it was right to exhaust all other options to try and keep schools open before taking this decision. I would like to thank teachers and school staff who have done everything in their power to make schools safe and to continue face to face learning for as long as possible. Indeed, I know many locally really did not want to close at all.

However, as the Prime Minister outlined in his address to the nation, the new, more transmissible variant of the virus has caused a rapid and worrying increase in the number of cases. Our hospitals are under more pressure than at any time since the start of the pandemic. This means that stringent action is necessary to reverse the spread of the virus.

Sadly, because of the increased transmissibility of the new variant, the lockdown will include the closure of schools. As of the 5th January, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across England must move to remote provision, except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Early years settings will stay open for all children.

In light of the closures, laptops and tablets will be provided to support children's remote learning. The Department for Education have purchased over 1 million laptop and tablets. 560,000 devices have already been delivered to those who need them, and many more will be provided in the coming weeks.

In the circumstances we face, it will not be possible for all exams in the summer to go ahead as planned. The Department for Education has confirmed that GCSE, A level and AS level exams will not be going ahead this year. Instead, teachers will be asked to assess students' grades. Training and support will be in place to ensure these grades are awarded fairly and consistently across the country. Ministers are working with Ofqual to fine tune arrangements that will allow students to progress fairly.

The Department for Education have set out clear, legally binding requirements for schools to provide high-quality remote education. This is mandatory for all state-funded schools and will be enforced by Ofsted.



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Schools are expected to provide between 3 and 5 hours teaching per day, depending on a child's age. Ofsted will inspect any schools where there are serious concerns about the quality of remote education being provided.

Ministers have agreed with network operators that free data will be provided for key educational websites. EE, Tesco Mobile, Vodafone, 3, Smarty, SkyMobile, Virgin Mobile and O2 are currently supporting this offer.

The brilliant work that schools have done to prepare for the mass testing programme in schools will not be wasted. Testing will be key to getting schools open again and the preparations that have already been made will help to reopen schools as soon as possible. Testing of staff and students will continue to take place for those who are still attending schools during the lockdown.

Extra support will be provided to ensure that pupils entitled to free school meals will continue to receive them while schools are closed. Extra funding will be given to support schools to provide food parcels or meals to eligible children. Where schools cannot offer food parcels or use local solutions, a national voucher scheme will be in place so that every eligible child can access free school meals while their school remains closed.

It is important to stress that we have a clear exit strategy, which will allow us to return to normal life. Thanks to a truly worldwide scientific effort, we are now rolling out the biggest vaccination programme in our history. With the approval of our own Oxford vaccine, the pace of vaccination can increase further. The Prime Minister has said that if everyone plays their part and helps to drive the numbers down, he hopes to be able to lift some restrictions by the end of February. By that point, if all goes well, care home residents, frontline health workers, and over-70s will have received their first vaccine doses and had time to develop immunity—that is over 13 million people removed from the virus' path.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY