

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
SW1P 3BT

MISSING VOICES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Dear Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP,

We are writing to you with concern over the **missing voices in the education system: parents and particularly those parents experiencing disadvantage**. We believe that any long-term plan to make sure all pupils have the chance to recover from the impact of the pandemic must focus on supporting parents as well as supporting schools.

Why does this matter?

A key focus of the covid recovery plan is narrowing the disadvantage gap. We know from IFS data (2010) that although schools are responsible for 14% of the disadvantage gap at age 11, 49% can be attributed to factors involving parents. We will only see this gap narrowed and a fair education system created for all if we consider parents as part of the solution.

We know that parental engagement in children's learning from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement and continues to do so into adolescence. However, the emphasis in recent years has been disproportionately focussed on the role of our schools. We believe that schools are being asked to do too much on their own and that coming out of the pandemic we have an opportunity to create an education system, rather than a schooling system, that works for all.

We are at an unprecedented moment of opportunity for this change. The last year has shown a re-balancing of involvement in the education system and we believe that there is an opportunity to shape the future of education for the better.

What is needed?

- **Parental engagement in learning prioritised ahead of parental involvement in schooling**

While many schools are focussed on involving their parents in school life, it is the interactions that take place directly between a parent and a child, often at home and behind closed doors, that most influence a child's life chances. In the past this has been seen as too difficult to influence, but new approaches spurred on by the pandemic and new technology are changing this.

- **Increased parent voice in the education system**

When 1900 parents were asked who they think influences education policy, they ranked parents 8th¹ and children 12th (bottom). Parents felt that Ofsted have the biggest voice in influencing policy. In contrast ParentKind report that 56%² parents surveyed would like a say in their child's education at government level. It is imperative that parents are seen as contributors to and not recipients of change in order that we build a system that puts learning in and out of school at the heart.

- **Focus explicitly on parents facing disadvantage**

Many policy makers are themselves parents, leading them to draw upon their own experiences. Policy decisions which treat parents as a homogenous group can lead to approaches that only work for some parents, unintentionally widening the disadvantage gap. In contrast, solutions designed for parents facing disadvantage also work for their peers, ensuring that all children benefit.

One example of this arose in the National Tutoring Programme. It is our experience that many parents still believe that this is just available for the privileged few and do not know how or whether their children can access support.

Our offer to you: We want to work with you to narrow the achievement gap by engaging and working with parents.

We are a coalition of organisations that have expertise, insight and evidence on how to engage parents meaningfully in learning, specifically parents experiencing disadvantage, and would like to work with your teams to translate this into specific policy actions.

We would like to help you create lasting change through your covid recovery work by putting parents, particularly those facing the most disadvantaged, at the heart of a fairer education system for the future.

Kind regards,

Tom Harbour, CEO, Learning with Parents

Sam Butters, Co-CEO, Fair Education Alliance

Tracy Jackson, Head of Early Years, Save the Children UK

Janet Davies, Managing Director, Parental Engagement Network

Jaine Stannard, Chief Executive, School-Home Support

Anna-Louise van der Merwe, Director, Foundation Years Trust

Bea Stevenson, Head of Education, Family Links the Centre for Emotional Health

¹ 1902 responses through Parent Ping daily survey app

² ParentKind annual education survey 2020, 1500 responses, nationally representative data

Sally Smith, CEO, Peeple

Sonya Christensen, Engagement and Inclusion Manager, Children's University

Jon Smith, CEO, Pobble

Sophie Linington, Deputy CEO, Parent Zone

Abigail Shapiro, Co-Founder & Executive Director, The Tutor Trust

Nick Bent, Co-Founder & CEO, The Tutor Trust

Julie Westrop, Director, A2E2 Education Ltd - Cafes for All

Evie Keough, CEO, Boromi

Douglas King, Assistant Principal, Flipped Tuition

James Whitaker, CEO, Parent Hub

Sarah Sewell, Chief Executive , Yes Futures

Paul Campbell, CEO, Capture Education

Sonia Stephens, Parental Engagement Coordinator, School Home Support

Darius Bluck and Vanessa Green, Co-founders, The Parents' Guide to

Gina Cicerone, Co-CEO, Fair Education Alliance

Sera Kadem, CEO, Brainy Maths

Paul Rose, Managing Director, YouTeachMe