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HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Dear The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson

I am writing to raise some constituency concerns and ideas regarding education that were raised in an Erith and Thamesmead school student survey, in which 250 local school students took part.

The survey asked students across Erith and Thamesmead several questions regarding the closure of schools due to COVID-19. Issues raised as a result of this include concerns about mental health, worries about future examinations and concerns around the overall impact on young people's education.

Whilst it is imperative that safety assurances are given to parents/guardians, students and teachers, it is also important that the Department for Education (DfE) begins to engage with those affected, about how best to address the educational and health issues established as a result of school closures.

Of the 250 school students surveyed, 65% said they felt their learning had suffered in some way during the lockdown and 47% said they felt less prepared for upcoming exams. Over 95% of students surveyed said they had not been attending school during lockdown and of those, 42% said they had done between zero and two hours of learning per day. This raises concerns about the potential increase in the already existing education attainment gap.

Many students raised additional written concerns, stating that they had found it difficult "having no one to help" with work, "not really understanding work" and having "less support from teachers".

In response to the question about how students felt schools should be supporting them once they return, students responded:

- "after school revision"
- "covering everything as a recap... not having exams until September"
- "not moving too fast with exams"
- "lowering grade boundaries... because it's not fair we have to jump into Year 11"
- "cancel GCSE's for Year 10's"
- "free revision guides should be provided".

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Students were also very concerned about their mental health with 19% saying the lockdown has had a negative impact on their mental health and many submitting written comments around this issue.

Some of the concerns received by students when asked how they thought schools should be supporting them once they return are:

- “they should help us with our mental state”
- “talking one to one with students”
- “by not being so tough on the students as some aren’t copying as well”
- “I think we all will definitely need to speak to someone to get our emotions out and discuss how we have been feeling”
- “schools should support students physically, emotionally and mentally”
- “1 on 1 mental health support”.

I am aware that the DfE is continuously reviewing the measures needed to re-open schools and I hope that these concerns and ideas raised by students in Erith and Thamesmead can be taken into consideration in the development of these plans.

There are many obstacles we will face as a country going forward following the COVID-19 pandemic and one of these is the education and mental wellbeing of our young people. I am proud that the young people of Erith and Thamesmead have felt able to raise these concerns with me and I ask that the DfE makes assessments of the additional support needs for schools and young people with students at the heart of their decisions.

If you would like to further consult with young people across Erith and Thamesmead regarding their concerns, please do get in touch and I will be happy to facilitate this conversation.

Yours sincerely,

Abena Oppong-Asare MP