



March 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the use of face coverings in schools.

I welcome the return of all pupils to the classroom on the 8th March.

As you will be aware, new Government guidance recommends that the use of face coverings in Higher Education, Further Education and secondary schools is extended for a limited period to all indoor environments - including classrooms - unless 2m social distancing can be maintained. I believe that this measure will offer even greater reassurance that face-to-face teaching is safe.

This is a temporary measure that will last until Easter when it will be reviewed. At this point, the impact of schools' return can be assessed and the Government will consider, in the light of that, whether mask wearing needs to continue.

I appreciate that there have been some calls to make the guidance on the wearing of face masks in secondary schools mandatory. Ministers have been clear that it is a strong recommendation to use face masks in the circumstances I have outlined above and I am sure that students and parents will wish to follow this guidance until the impact of schools' return can be fully assessed.

Face coverings should also be worn by pupils in year 7 and above when travelling on dedicated school transport to secondary school or college.

Children in primary school and early years' settings do not need to wear a face covering. In these settings, face coverings should be worn by teachers where social distancing is not possible in indoor areas outside of the classroom between members of staff or visitors.

Ahead of Step 4 of the roadmap, the Government will complete a review of social distancing measures and other long-term measures that have been put in place to limit transmission. The results of the review will help inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which rules on 1m+, face masks and other measures may be lifted.

Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. For example, people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability, or if you are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate. The same exemptions will apply in education settings, and we would expect teachers and other staff to be sensitive to those needs.



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I know that face coverings can make it more difficult to communicate with children with additional needs who may rely on lip reading or facial expressions for understanding. Along with the Department for Education, I expect school staff to be sensitive to these needs when interacting with and teaching children.

It is completely understandable that some parents and teachers will have concerns about safety at school. I am encouraged by the growing body of evidence that children are less affected by the virus. As the Chief Medical Officer has stated, children are more likely to be harmed by missing school than by coronavirus.

I hope parents will be further reassured that schools have implemented a 'system of controls', including increased cleaning and keeping children in consistent groups, to reduce the risk of transmission

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris".

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY