

**Please ask for :** Andrew Yates  
**Telephone Number:** 0121 626 6060  
wmpcc@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk



Our reference: 2020-01203

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP  
Secretary of State for Education

Sent by email to:  
[SEC-OF-STATE.ps@education.gov.uk](mailto:SEC-OF-STATE.ps@education.gov.uk)

25 November 2020

Dear Gavin,

**Covid 19 – Vulnerability of Children absent from School.**

I wish to bring to your attention my profound concern about the vulnerability of children who are currently not attending school, some of whom as young as 13 are becoming radicalised.

In June this year I sent you a copy of my report, 'A Future Generations Deal', which outlined my concerns about young people who were not in school and the consequence that some of those children would become prey to criminals who would groom them and force them into violent drug gangs. Evidence so far suggests that a disturbing minority of children have not re-engaged with their education following the re-opening of schools after lockdown. For example, I am told that the week before last just 76.3% of children attended school in Birmingham – nearly one quarter of children were absent.

For some children there will be good reason for their absence, however, a significant minority appear not to be returning to school after Covid related closures with potentially very worrying consequences.

I chair the National Counter Terrorism Strategic Board which last met on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November and although, for obvious reasons, the deliberations of this Board are not made public, I want to bring to your attention one issue of concern that was raised. We were told that an increasing number of young children are vulnerable to radicalisation due to the 'perfect storm' of the impact of Covid-19 and rising volumes of extremist content online. We were told that children as young as 13 were coming to the attention of Counter Terrorism officers. This is extremely concerning and I urge you to ensure that the Department for Education looks closely at this issue to ensure that young people are not being groomed in person or online.

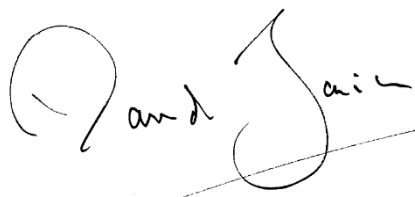
I ask that:

- 1) Your department urgently reviews school attendance and works with schools, colleges and local authorities to address the issue of the vulnerability of non-attendees,
- 2) That your department continues liaise with CT policing to get an understanding of the scale of risks to young people from radicalisation,
- 3) That supporting schools to improve attendance becomes a key priority for your department,
- 4) That you give an update on the implementation of the Timpson review into school exclusions,
- 5) You ensure schools have the resources to provide an appropriate level of pastoral support to help children and families work through social challenges and vulnerabilities.

If you require further information or assistance on this issue I am very willing to meet you to discuss.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Jamieson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

David Jamieson  
West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner