

Promoting & protecting children's rights

1st May 2020

Boris Johnson Prime Minister

Dear Prime Minister,

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby. Every baby is special and brings huge and unbridled joy. It's also remarkable to note that your new son is one of an amazing 60,000 babies who have been born so far under this lockdown. They, and all our children are growing up in unprecedented times. On behalf of the 12 million children in England, I would like to ask you to devote some of your time to speak with children.

This is a strange time for everyone, but particularly children. The impact on their daily life is profound: they are not going to school, not seeing friends, not seeing extended family. But children are also acutely conscious of the impact on those around them, not least the worries and stresses this is placing on their parents. Some children will have taken on additional caring responsibilities for siblings and parents, which is especially complex if they are caring for a shielding parent. We are rightly proud of the sacrifices the country is making to beat this virus, and it is important we recognise and acknowledge that children are also making those sacrifices. Many of them will also of course lost family members to the virus.

Over recent months, other countries have held specific events for Government to speak directly to children. Both the Danish and Norwegian Prime Ministers have held press conferences specifically for children. These events have both practical and symbolic value, and they have been well-received both by children and their parents. From the conversations we have with children, I know many of them would welcome the reassurance that Government is listening to them and responding to their worries. Speaking directly to children also lifts the burden on parents to ameliorate the concerns children are raising. It would be great to see Government is with them. It was very welcome to see the Secretary of State for Education speak directly to children at the daily press conference, and I believe there is a real opportunity for the Government to build on that.

There are many ways to achieve this, though I think something that mirrored the daily press conference would show the Government recognise the strains that many children are under and the sacrifices they are making. I would be more than willing to participate in this, or to support the proceedings by working with children, schools and families to source questions – something that is particularly valuable as at the moment only adults are able to put questions in the daily briefings. Having the PM appear alongside the Education Secretary or the Children's Minister would show the Government recognises that this crisis impacts on children in very unique ways, and that it is listening and able to respond to the worries children have. It would also be a huge opportunity to children's Commissioner for England: Anne Longfield OBE

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give practical advice directly to children. Including a mental health expert such as the NHS Clinical Lead for children's mental health, Professor Prathiba Chitsabesan, would also be incredibly helpful.

I do hope that this is something that you will consider.

Yours sincerely

PD

Anne Longfield OBE Children's Commissioner for England

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