

generations mixed, the higher the risk.

Responding, THE GOVERNMENT'S CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER said that there was little evidence on this matter, but the principles being discussed were right: it was better from a risk management perspective to have children together without those of other generations, and better still to segment those children by classes or bubbles. If this was not possible, mitigating factors such as the wearing of face coverings on public transport would reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that returning children to school should be seen by the Government as addressing a national crisis. It would take great organisation and an aggressive campaign to get the transport system ready in the four weeks that remained. There should be a viable plan for every child to return to school, including exploring walking and cycling 'buses' or dedicating buses to school transport at peak times. A clear plan was needed to build confidence among parents and teachers. Local Authorities should ask parents about their plans for school travel. School was compulsory and any excuses for non-attendance should be addressed. It was for Local Authorities to fine parents if pupils did not attend.

The Committee:

— took note.

Scenarios

THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, DELIVERY, COVID-19 TASKFORCE said that the second scenario set out that the virus remained steady but with higher incidence in specific local areas, leading to local restrictions being deployed through the 'contain' framework. In this scenario, the Government would ask that schools remain open but a hypothetical Local Authority had taken the decision to close schools. The Secretary of State's powers may be used in this scenario to force schools to open. The Department for Education had developed a set of plans to ensure the provision of education in any eventuality, including a tiered system that allowed some schools to remain open, albeit using rotas.

In discussion the following points were made:

- n) schools should not be told of a fallback plan as it would allow them to have an excuse not to open in September. The best way of communicating it would be in the context of a wider

communication from Public Health England or the Joint Biosecurity Centre about imposing local lockdowns generally, with the closure of schools low down the list after restrictions had been reimposed on social and economic activity;

- o) indicators had been developed to identify the point at which decisions would be needed for national restrictions. Similar indicators, rather than hard triggers, could be developed to guide when to move between the tiers of action on schools; and
- p) the actions of the Scottish Government would be particularly instructive given that their schools were returning earlier.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that restricting education should be a last resort. If this meant further delay to reopening the final sectors which were not open then so be it. In the event that a Local Authority wanted a school to close, the Government should use its powers to direct schools to open if it had been unable to persuade the Local Authority. Explicit contingency plan guidance for schools should not be shared in advance to avoid undermining momentum towards a full reopening.

The Committee

— took note.

September return update

THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, DELIVERY, COVID-19 TASKFORCE said that the third scenario was the worst case: the virus would be increasing nationally. The Committee should be clear on its approach to the reimposition of restrictions, and whether it would want to take pre-emptive action to keep schools open.

In discussion the following points were made:

- q) the best way of preventing large scale closures of schools was to ensure the Track and Trace system worked and to be clear that the decision for local lockdowns was for the Government at a national level. The Secretary of State's powers could be used, or threatened to be used, but the fewer Local Authorities for whom this was used the better;
- r) some Trade Unions had expressed a preference for school staff to wear face coverings. This was not the Government's policy,