

Message

From: GODSMARK, Hollie [Hollie.GODSMARK@education.gov.uk]
on behalf of GODSMARK, Hollie <Hollie.GODSMARK@education.gov.uk> [Hollie.GODSMARK@education.gov.uk]
Sent: 18/12/2020 8:06:48 PM
To: Alexandra Burns [ABurns@no10.gov.uk]
CC: [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; Rory Gribbell [RGribbell@no10.gov.uk]; Josephs, Kate - CO (OFF-SEN) [kate.josephs@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@cabinetoffice.gov.uk; Dan Rosenfield [DRosenfield@no10.gov.uk]; Imran Shafi [Ishafi@no10.gov.uk]; Stuart Glassborow [SGlassborow@no10.gov.uk]; Martin Reynolds [MReynolds@no10.gov.uk]; Clare Brunton [CBrunton@no10.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; Meg Powell-Chandler [MPowell-Chandler@no10.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; 'Kathy Hall' [kathy.hall@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@cabinetoffice.gov.uk; 'James.rogers' [james.rogers@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; PERMANENT, Secretary [PERMANENT.Secretary@education.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@cabinetoffice.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@cabinetoffice.gov.uk; Henry Cook [HCook@no10.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; William Burgon - Cabinet Office - (OFFICIAL) [william.burgon@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@cabinetoffice.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@education.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@education.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@education.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@education.gov.uk; [REDACTED]@no10.gov.uk; Stephen Higham [SHigham@no10.gov.uk]; [REDACTED]@dhsc.gov.uk; PS, Gibb [Gibb.PS@education.gov.uk]; PS, Sec-OF-STATE [Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk]
Subject: RE: TODAY - Schools/Jan
Attachments: Joint Union Advice on Testing with logos final.pdf

Hi Alex,

Many thanks for your message below. Had a reply drafted, but not managed to click send yet, but its appreciated and I will pass on to the team.

Following up from our call earlier, the unions, jointly with a number of other groups, have issued a joint press notice outlining their opposition to the delivery of testing in the first week of January. Its attached, and is focussed on deliverability.

We are drafting a response letter – to be finalised shortly and to go out tonight – that responds to their concerns, outlines the medical rationale etc. We are also organising a time to meet the signatories, and a couple of other relevant associations tomorrow. This is likely to be two meetings (one on employer rep groups, and one with staffing unions focussed on workforce) as we think is beneficial handling and comms wise. We will be inviting key folk across gov – T&T, DCMO, military etc who are important in detailing operations and resources to support delivery. CO TF team, I know Gurveer has a call with you shortly where she will discuss.

As discussed on the phone Alex, we would also like to invite someone from No.10 as we feel its beneficial to hear the concerns first hand, and will enable us to agree responses in real time, which is important give how fast everything needs to move. *Are you the best person to attend?*

Many thanks

Hollie

Hollie Godsmark | Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT

[REDACTED] Irrelevant & Sensitive | hollie.godsmark@education.gov.uk

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From: Alexandra Burns <ABurns@no10.gov.uk>

Sent: 18 December 2020 10:52

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: RE: TODAY - Schools/Jan

Team DfE,

Well done on getting this out there yesterday. I know the hardest work is still to come in delivering this over the next couple of weeks, and we in No10 and the centre stand ready to help. But the speedy, all-hours work over the past 48 hours has been important and is recognised and appreciated here.

I know it has been an intense couple of weeks more broadly. We in No10, including the PM, hugely appreciate the hard work that has gone into and is continuing to go into the attendance push (which has held more than we might have expected given it is the last week of term & the current context), the London/Essex/Kent testing (where I know test and trace and DfE worked rapidly to get this off the ground in no time at all, and seems to have gone smoothly) and this push now to get as much testing set up in schools in the first week of term as possible.

I know lots of this is the same people who have been working incredibly hard throughout the past 9 months or so. Please do pass on to those people, and I hope all can get some semblance of a Christmas break.

Alex

Alexandra Burns | Private Office - DfE & DCMS | Downing Street

From: Alexandra Burns

Sent: 16 December 2020 20:54

[See recipients listed above]

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: RE: TODAY - Schools/Jan

Hi all

Adding the Health Sec's office, **Name Redacted** here.

Following further developments and discussions today, the PM now expects this to be announced by DfE tomorrow – as early as is possible once all products are cleared.

Whilst we will be sticking to the return dates for different groups outlined below in the proposal agreed this morning, we now know that there is not sufficient delivery confidence for us to publicly commit to a test for every single pupil on return.

The PM would still like DfE to work with test and trace, and the military, to stand up as much testing in schools as possible in the week of 4 January, with a particular focus on high prevalence areas as is necessary. There should at minimum be a clear *offer* to schools in these areas, on the understanding that it is possible not every school can stand it up for all pupils.

The framing on the delayed return should be around the standing up of this testing, maintaining our core messages about schools being safe and a priority.

I know those at DfE have been working hard on the products listed below – **please can we have an update this evening on where we have got to – with draft products where relevant - and revised suggested sequencing given the announcement didn't happen today.**

In addition – please can we have an update from DHSC and DfE on the delivery plan as it stands at the moment? We will also help to push along the MACA request here.

Thanks v much all
Alex

From: Alexandra Burns

Sent: 16 December 2020 11:48

[See recipients listed above]

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: TODAY - Schools/Jan

Hi **NR** Hollie,

To confirm, the PM and SofS spoke this morning and agreed that the lead proposal to be fleshed out and discussed at Covid O is for:

- Primary school children to return to school as planned on 4th Jan
- In secondary and FE - exam years, critical worker kids and vulnerable children back from 4th, with a test
- All others tested throughout that week, for return from the 11th

The Covid O paper and discussions should be clear about the detail beneath this on eg staggering and testing delivery plans.

The PM will refer to this at his press conference, scheduled for 3.30pm. Clearly this means there is a lot for us to work together on before that point. I think the list of products here, in addition to the Covid O paper, includes:

- A Press Notice
- Key Q&A (including on key issues such as why we are closing schools to some pupils in w/c 4th having issued legal directions to keep them open this week, and on schools being safe on return)
- A Dear Colleague
- Relevant Guidance

Ideally these will be ready to go by the time the PM speaks. Think it is especially important that the first three are. We and the taskforce stand ready to help and to clear speedily – this is the priority for everyone today.

In addition, we clearly need a plan for managing **stakeholders and parliament**. On the former, can DfE share with us a plan for engaging education stakeholders as appropriate once Covid O has signed off the policy but before announcement at 3.30, and on the latter – we would like DfE Ministers to offer an all MPs briefing tomorrow, to be referred to in the DC. In addition, we expect that this will need to be covered in the Health Secretary's statement tomorrow, which DfE (including a Minister) will need to support. Please can the Education Sec speak to the Speaker today ahead of announcement to give him the heads up.

Please can DfE return to us with a proposal for the sequencing of this in the next hour, along with first drafts of all products by 1pm, so we can develop together and be in a good position by 3.30.

Thanks all – and do call if helpful. It's going to be one of those days!

Alex

Alexandra Burns | Private Office - DfE & DCMS | Downing Street

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