

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE

Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
23 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

17th February, 2021

Open letter regarding quarantine arrangements for children in independent boarding schools

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing on behalf of 169 HMC boarding schools in the UK, which provide excellent education for over 45,000 pupils.

As you know, HMC and our sector more broadly has been supportive of the government and devolved governments' responses to the pandemic. We mobilised an army of support, including offering thousands of beds to NHS, critical workers and the homeless, made and distributed PPE, raised money and developed a number of other initiatives to support the UK during this unprecedented period.

While we appreciate the need to contain the virus and its mutations, we are deeply concerned by the new quarantine rules for international children coming to our schools.

The current 'red list' hotel quarantine arrangements in UK pose a significant safeguarding risk to the children in our care. We may well end up in a situation where minors have to travel alone and quarantine in hotel rooms with adults they do not know well. It would never be acceptable in a school, guardian or homestay setting for children to share a room with such adults. To prevent this, we would urge you to consider allowing minors to quarantine in their boarding accommodation, fully and safely operated by their schools. These schools in turn would commit to removing risk to the wider population by facilitating private, COVID-secure transport.

It has been estimated that international pupils at independent schools with parents living overseas supported a total gross valued added contribution of £1.26 billion, 27,370 jobs and £390 million in tax payments in Britain. In addition to these impacts, it has also been noted that international pupils' attendance at boarding schools brings subsequent benefits for British higher education institutes. The number of international students has remained consistent over the past three years, so these figures are expected only to have risen.

As the UK government's recently launched International Education Strategy recognises, boarding children and their families have made a considerable commitment to the UK and to

From the General Secretary and Membership Secretary
Dr Simon Hyde



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their schools, sometimes over many years, and have maintained that commitment even during the challenging times of COVID. Whereas all international travellers understand that some restrictions are inevitable now, it is essential to ensure that those who have made such a commitment to the UK in good faith are not unfairly and disproportionately penalised.

Boarding schools in the UK have continued to make strenuous efforts to ensure that they offer educational excellence even in the most difficult times. Remote learning has been exceptional, but it cannot replace the full richness and variety of life at school. The financial pressures on schools in our sector have never been more acute and whilst we realise that schools are not alone in facing those pressures, it would be remiss of us not to bring our concerns to your attention.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Hyde'.

Dr Simon Hyde
General Secretary and Membership Secretary

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