

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
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11 September 2020

**Re: Deaf children and the impact of face coverings on communication**

Dear Mr Williamson,

We are writing to ask for your support in promoting the use of transparent or clear face masks, as an alternative to opaque face coverings, when they are required in schools.

Your department has acknowledged the communication barriers caused by face coverings. However, there will be occasions when it may be appropriate to use face coverings in communal areas of schools. The use of face coverings in communal areas, or on school transport, could disrupt valuable opportunities for socialising and peer interaction, resulting in deaf children feeling more isolated from their hearing peers. This is likely to have an impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. The use of opaque face coverings is also likely to have a detrimental impact on other disabled children including, for example, those on the autism spectrum.

One way to mitigate this, and to make deaf children and young people feel more included, is to encourage the use of transparent face masks. The World Health Organisation's guidance on this issue states that "Adapted masks to allow lip-reading (e.g. clear masks) or use of face shields may be explored as an alternative to fabric masks".

NHS England has recently announced<sup>i</sup> they have procured 250,000 clear face masks for use in health settings. We now need to see similar action by the Department for Education, to ensure that no deaf child is disadvantaged by the use of face coverings in education.



**We are the National Deaf Children's Society,  
the leading charity for deaf children.**

Chief Executive: Susan Daniels OBE | President: Sir Christopher Benson FRICS DL  
Registered Office: Ground Floor South, Castle House, 37–45 Paul Street, London EC2A 4LS  
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With this in mind, please can we ask you to:

- take steps to ensure that clear face masks are widely and readily available in education settings,
- revise the department's guidance on face coverings in education to encourage the use of clear face masks that help to break down the communication barrier for deaf children and young people.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience but in the meantime please let us know if you, or an official from the department, would like to discuss this issue further by contacting Jennifer Smith, Senior Executive Assistant, on 0207 014 1159 or [jennifer.smith@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:jennifer.smith@ndcs.org.uk)

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely,



Susan Daniels  
Chief Executive  
The National Deaf Children's Society



Olivia Blake MP  
Chair  
All Party Parliamentary  
Group for SEND



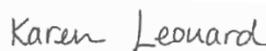
Geoff Barton  
General Secretary  
ASCL



Steph Halder  
President  
BATOD



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National Executive Officer  
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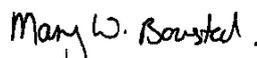
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