



Nadhim Zahawi MP Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
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22nd September 2021

RE: Open letter to education and care professionals from new Education Secretary

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you a year after writing to your predecessor Gavin Williamson from No More Exclusions to continue to call for a moratorium on school exclusions in the wake of the pandemic.

We are an abolitionist grassroots coalition movement in education, a collective of teachers, teaching assistants, trade unionists, social workers, lawyers, youth workers, faith leaders, local councilors, journalists, academics, education researchers, SEND specialists, mental health practitioners, parent advocates, parents, and young people working to bring about racial justice in education. We want an education system that works for all.

We welcome your public pronouncements to transform the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in our society. As you will know, these children are disproportionately from Black and other racially minoritised communities, mainly come from poorer homes, have SEND, and undiagnosed mental health needs and are usually in receipt of free school meals.

School exclusions destroy children's life chances. Particularly Black boys, as serious case reviews into Tashaun Aired and Jaden Moodie's tragic deaths clearly demonstrate. In spite of the evidence of the harm exclusions cause, vulnerable children continue to be excluded from school, forgotten about, and denied the opportunity to fulfil their potential. As Education Secretary you will carry the responsibility of determining children's life chances. The implementation of a moratorium on school exclusions would acknowledge that children's safety is paramount and inextricably linked to being in school. As you were given opportunities to flourish and grow, newly arrived from Iraq to



British shores, we hope you can and will translate your experience into giving real opportunities to vulnerable children to achieve the same. This will take investment in schools and a willingness to seek nurturing pathways that heal, develop and instill hope as well as skills within an inclusive model of mainstream schooling.

Segregated and profit-driven pupil referral units (PRUs), alternative provision (AP) and youth detention sites can never be the solution to supporting vulnerable young people. This punitive and shortsighted approach fuels the 'PRU-to-prison' pipeline and will make a mockery of any efforts to help the vulnerable as you purport to want to do. By excluding the rising numbers of distressed children into such spaces you will, in effect, be throwing away lives.

No More Exclusions' call for a moratorium is the best way to effectively kick start the support you speak of for children who are in danger of falling through the safety net right now. Evidence shows that when children are excluded from schools, they are put in harm's way, left open to exploitation by county lines grooming gangs.

We all know that the pandemic has taken an immense toll on the psychological wellbeing of all children, but particularly those deemed vulnerable. These children will likely have parents who have worked throughout the pandemic, experienced greater damage on their health and on their workplaces from the lockdowns, The trauma, bereavement and distress experienced by children from such homes must be given some priority. Children categorised as 'vulnerable' were already overrepresented in APs, PRUs and the youth justice system before the pandemic. With 1.6% of children in APs failing to achieve above a grade 4 in most subjects, whilst attending part time or not at all, mainstream schools should have the funding from these facilities redirected to keep children supported in their original schools. It is imperative that we keep children in schools.

Words won't suffice to underpin the commitments you are making to these children, their families and communities. Investment in our young people's lives, in teachers' training and effective actions will. A great education is one that unlocks the talents, creativity and aspirations of all children and gives them hope, irrespective of their background whilst removing external barriers that prevent children achieving their best.

Exclusion from school is denying too many children the education and life chances they deserve. In your role as Education Secretary, we ask you not to give up on vulnerable children, as the teachers you speak so highly of, did not give up on you. By



implementing a moratorium you can give children returning to school time to adjust to the 'new normal', and take a first step in building back a better and fairer education system that works for all.

Yours sincerely,

No More Exclusions

A grassroots movement in education

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