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Covid-19: Government must plan for schools to reopen, say paediatricians

Abi Rimmer

Over 1500 paediatricians in the UK have called on the prime minister to publish a clear plan for getting children back to school.

In an open letter to Boris Johnson, signed by 1633 paediatricians, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) called on the UK government and the Northern Ireland Executive to publish clear plans for getting children back to school.

It also called on all UK governments to deliver recovery plans for children and young people.

“As paediatricians, we are increasingly concerned by the continued absence of millions of children from schools,” the letter said. “This interruption is without precedent and risks scarring the life chances of a generation of young people.”

The letter was signed by more than 500 members within an hour of being sent out and Russell Viner, president of the RCPCH, said the response showed how concerned paediatricians are.

“Schools are vital to the wellbeing of children and young people, providing a range of services from vaccinations to mental health support,” Viner said.

“Schools are also where at risk children are looked out for and supported. Right now, we don’t know how some of the most vulnerable children in our society are faring because they are outside the safety net that school provides.”

Liz Marder, a consultant community paediatrician working in Nottingham who signed the letter within two minutes of it being sent out, said that while very few children had been directly affected by covid-19, it had indirectly impacted many children’s lives.

“It is our most vulnerable children, such as those from disadvantaged families or those with additional needs, who may suffer most,” she said. “Getting children safely back into education as soon as we can has to be a priority if we are to avoid further damage to the health, wellbeing, and life chances of so many of our young people.”