



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dear Parents and Carers

March 2024

Open Letter to Chelmsford Parents and Carers

As a mum, I always wanted my children to have a wide range of choices available to them, so they would be able to choose the best opportunities for their future.

Recently, I have become worried about what I have learnt about the drop in school attendance and how this is limiting choices for Chelmsford's children. I wanted to share this with you.

I am leading a new Bill in Parliament. It will mean every local council will have to use their services to help remove the barriers faced by some children, like access to SEND support or transport issues, and every school in the country will need to publish a detailed attendance policy.

If a young person achieves five good GCSEs, including Maths and English, they have lots of choices. These include continuing studies to A level, the new technical T levels, undertaking an apprenticeship or moving on towards university. Without these grades, choices become much more limited.

Even a tiny drop in school attendance can have long lasting consequences. The evidence is very concerning.

One Chelmsford secondary school analysed last year's results.

- 82% of students who had attended school 95-100% of the time achieved five good GCSEs,
- Only 68% of students who had attended 90-95% of the time achieved five good GCSEs.

In every area, apart from their school attendance record, these two groups of pupils were identical.

These figures show how just missing just one morning or one afternoon each week can have very dramatic, negative impact on a child's outcomes.

Since the pandemic, there has been a noticeable rise in absences, with more children and young people taking an occasional morning or day off. More children are also repeatedly late for school, meaning that they miss multiple classes.

Many Chelmsford teachers have told me how worried they are about the impact of this on our children's choices and opportunities for their future. These hours and occasional days out of school add up. Whilst a 90% attendance level may sound high, over the course of a year a child who has attended 90% of the time will have missed 19 school days (just under 4 weeks) over that academic year.

Member of Parliament for Chelmsford

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I absolutely understand the pressure on families to take time off for family holidays in term, as this can be much cheaper. I have discussed with a number of school heads the possibility of varying term times which may help families avoid only having peak season options. This is not simple to implement especially for families with children at multiple schools, but I will continue to press this and investigate what solutions may be practicable.

I have been working with leaders and experts including the national Children's Commissioner, Action for Children, and other children's charities. I have secured unanimous cross-party support from all MPs for my Bill. This has led to new national guidelines to help children get support for SEND, Mental Health and other issues. I hope this will make a difference for children and families.

I know it can be very hard being a parent or carer, but I also know that you care about making sure your children have the best choices for their future. Therefore, I thought it was important to share this evidence with you.

Thank you so much for taking time to read this letter.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Ford', written in a cursive style.

The Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP
Member of Parliament for Chelmsford