Dear Robert

I am writing to you regarding the current situation in Birmingham, where we have seen protests in recent months at two primary schools over teaching about LGBT. I believe that there is no reason why teaching children about the diverse society that we live in and the different types of loving, healthy relationships that exist cannot be done in a way that respects everyone. I am sure you share my concern about the impact these protests may be having on the pupils involved and their education, as well as the impact on staff at the schools. I therefore wanted to provide you with an update on what my department and other agencies are doing to address this issue.

In the case of Parkfield Community Primary School, an academy where protests originated, my department and the Regional Schools Commissioner have been working closely with the school and the parents to enable a constructive dialogue. This dialogue is ongoing and we continue to support the parties involved. I'm pleased to say protests have currently ceased here.

In the case of Anderton Park Primary School, a maintained school, Birmingham City Council are leading the work to support the school and parents to engage in constructive dialogue. The Department and RSC are sharing their learning from Parkfield to help this effort.

My Department is also engaging with other agencies, notably the Police, to ensure that every effort is being made to ensure the safety of the teachers, school staff and, most importantly, the children when protests occur.
More broadly, you will have seen my recent letter to the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), which was published here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-damian-hinds-writes-to-paul-whiteman. This sets out my position that open and constructive dialogue between parents and schools is central to effective teaching of sensitive topics, but that ultimately schools decide what is taught in their curriculum. I absolutely support school leaders and teachers to make reasonable decisions in the best interests of their pupils, having considered parent views. I know you will agree that no teacher should face intimidation for carrying out their jobs.

On the wider national picture, officials in my department are co-chairing a set of meetings with NAHT in areas of the country where we understand there is parent concern about teaching of equalities in primary and/or the forthcoming introduction of Relationships Education. These meetings bring together school representatives, the relevant Local Authorities, the Police and Ofsted to share intelligence and consider what more can be done to support the schools in reaching a positive outcome with their parents.

We are also engaging with the Muslim community in Birmingham and beyond to seek support for a constructive approach. Whatever concerns parents and others may have about education, I believe we can secure consensus in the key principle that protesting outside a primary school is not the way to reach a resolution. Protests can intimidate and unsettle children and staff, and disrupt pupils’ education.

I am informing my Cabinet colleagues about key developments and my officials are also in regular contact with colleagues in the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Government Equalities Office.

The work and support being delivered by my officials and Birmingham City Council has been, and continues to be, instrumental in seeking a resolution, however the increasing media interest is risking undermining the delicate progress made to date and I would ask for your cooperation to ensure we are delivering common messages. I am also happy to hear your views on further action we might take to resolve this situation.

I believe we can find a resolution to the situation in Birmingham that meets everyone’s needs. My department is working hard to ensure that the protests stop and the constructive dialogue that will help us reach this conclusion is supported.
Please do let me know if you would like to know more or discuss this further.

Damian Hinds
Secretary of State for Education