



Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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25th June 2020

Emma Lewell - Buck MP
House of Commons
London
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Dear Emma

Thank you for raising, in the House on Monday 22nd June, the important issue of children who go missing from care. You asked for clarity on how many children have gone missing from care during the pandemic.

The government's position on this matter is very clear. The statutory guidance to local authorities for the care and support of children who go missing, or who are at risk of going missing, remains in place.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities and the guidance actively promotes effective joint working between agencies and professionals to minimise the risk of children going missing.

My department is currently collecting children looked after data from local authorities for the reporting year ending 31 March 2020. Information on the number of children missing from care in 2019-20 will be published later this year. Local authorities will submit information on children who have been reported missing from care after 1 April 2020 in the 2020-2021 annual return.

Although this data is not currently available, I can assure you that my officials have been taking proactive steps to monitor the missing incidents of this very vulnerable cohort of children, engaging with key partners and collecting as much soft intelligence and anecdotal evidence as possible. Accordingly, my response at OPQs on 22 June was that I had been told that the number of missing children at this time has decreased. My officials have been liaising with the Independent Children's Homes Association's (ICHA) who, during the pandemic, have been undertaking a weekly survey of children's home providers. ICHA has a membership of over 1000 homes. Its 16 June report found that, of those homes that responded to the survey, no homes reported an increase in missing incidents. A number felt incidents may have reduced. ICHA's 9 June report, again, did not report any major concerns about missing from home incidents.

During the Police National Expert Reference Group (ERG) meeting on Missing People, that took place on 29 April, a 33% reduction in people missing for over 72 hours was reported. This will be for both children and adults we have been advised that the trend appears to be reflected in both cohorts based on engagement with 14 police forces. The number of

children missing from care was also reported as down overall, although we do not have figures to substantiate this. A slight increase was reported at the 23 June ERG meeting, but with a 25% reduction compared to this time last year. This is taken from data reported to the National Crime Agency.

Officials had told me of this data. I hope this explains the full context of my answer to you.

I am very aware of the risk that as lock down restrictions begin to ease there may well be an increase in the number of missing incidents, and I will continue to monitor the situation.

A copy of this letter has been placed in the library of both houses.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small dash at the end.

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