

ACT NOW TO AVOID LOCKDOWN LEGACY

THE Sunday Express today calls for the Government to put long-term plans in place to protect "Generation Lockdown" – the youngsters whose futures have been jeopardised by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It comes as experts warn that Britain's young are on the brink of a mental health disaster.

Lockdown measures have brought down deaths and infections – but children have suffered a hugely reduced education, including cancelled exams, and now face a bleak economic outlook.

Our crusade calls on the Government to guarantee long-term financial, educational and health support for children, teenagers and young adults caught up in the lockdown crisis to try to ensure their futures are not blighted permanently.

In the coming weeks and months we will be talking to politicians, experts and parents to see what is needed to be done – and to make sure it is acted upon immediately.

Ellen Townsend, a professor of psychology at the University of Nottingham, said it was a matter of life and death.

"Ultimately what we are talking about is reduced life expectancy across the board," she said.

"It is well known declines in mental health and material wealth are directly linked to a reduced life expectancy.

"For this generation this is millions of life years lost collectively."

She warned that without a return to normality soon, "Generation Lockdown will suffer unnecessarily for years to come".

Yesterday the Prime Minister wrote an open letter to parents, *right*, describing how he is "in awe" of the way they have risen to the challenges of the pandemic.

"We're doing everything we can to support you," he added.

But a recent survey by the Prince's Trust found one in four young people now feel unable to cope since lockdown restrictions placed a "devastating" toll on their lives.

Figures from the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM), one of the largest providers of child and adolescent mental health services in the country, showed referrals to its emergency child and adolescent mental health service doubled from February 2020 – a month before the first lockdown – to November last year.

The data covers four boroughs across south London, but experts say that it mirrors the growing crisis across the rest of the country.

In addition, there had also

SCHOOLS ARE SO VITAL: Sir Graham Brady

SUNDAY EXPRESS
CRUSADE
GENERATION LOCKDOWN
Never let them lose out



By **Lucy Johnston** and **David Maddox**

been a five-fold rise in urgent referrals for eating disorders. Specialists warn the figures represent the tip of the iceberg.

Dr Bruce Clark, clinical director for child and adolescent mental health services at SLaM, said: "Research has shown us that young people have been more likely to have experienced the detrimental effects of lockdown.

"We have seen a significant rise in depression and anxiety disorders to a startling degree.

"But I think there is worse to come when the economic impact hits parents – as we saw after the 2008 financial crash.

"We cannot pretend the health service will solve this by doing more of the same.

"We currently do not even have the resources to meet the immediate demand, let alone the demand in the medium or long term.

"We need to accelerate investment to develop high-quality innovations to tackle this problem which will affect each person differently, in the same way all cancers are treated differently," he said.

"Right now the most fundamentally important thing to do in the short term is to get schools open as early as possible."

NHS research has shown that one in six children now have a mental health problem, up from one in nine just three years ago.

A study released last week from the Education Endowment Foundation found primary school children had "significantly lower achievement in both reading and maths as a likely result of missed learning" due to partial school closures.

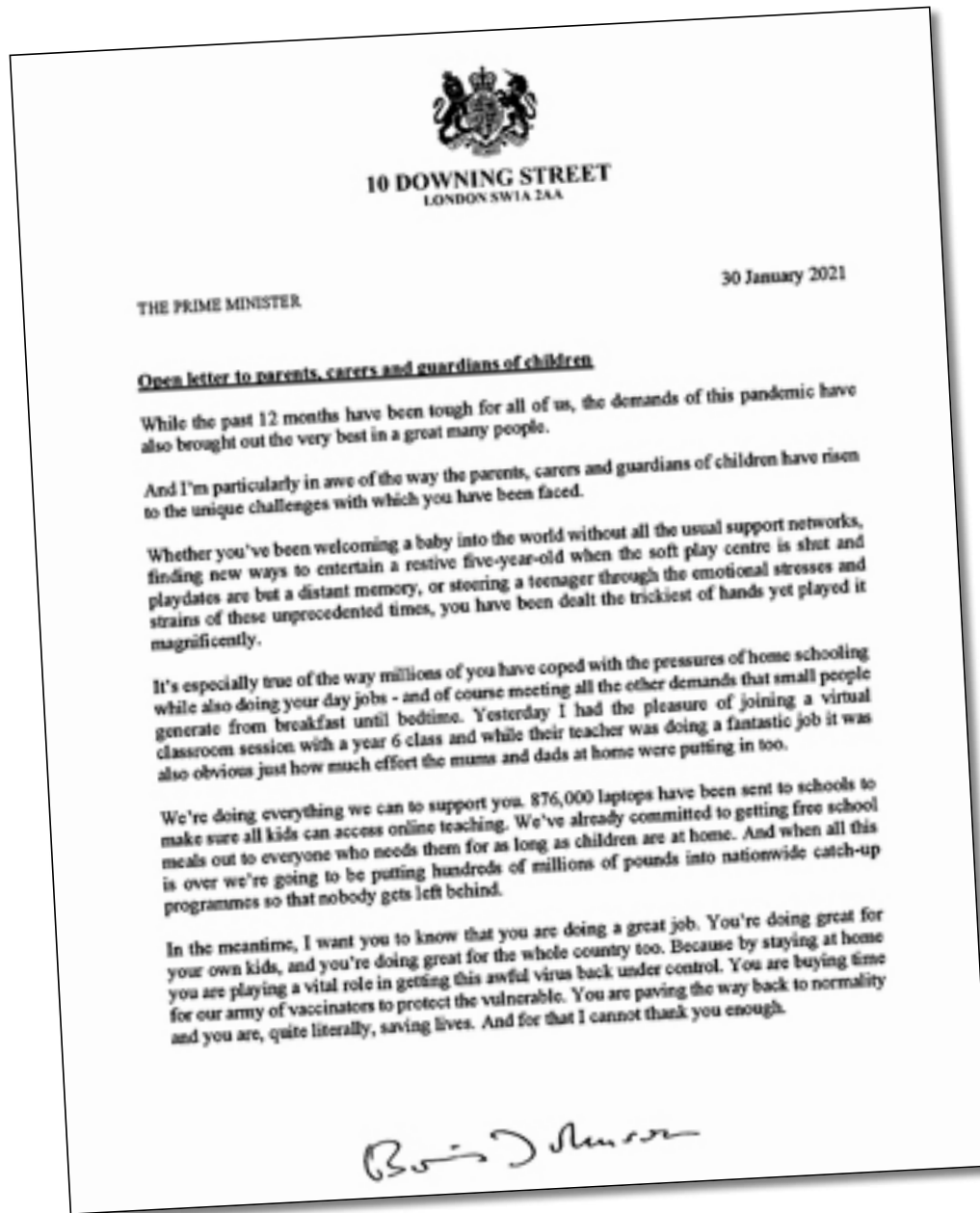
Last week 10 of the UK's child experts wrote an open letter warning that anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts are at "frightening levels" among children and many parents are on the brink of breakdown.

NHS figures show the number of children referred to its child and adolescent mental health service CAMHS was 4,615 per 100,000 – the highest on record and up nearly 20 per cent on last year.

Earlier this month the Royal College of Psychiatrists warned the Covid pandemic risks a generation being lost to "lifelong" illness.

The warnings have come as senior Conservatives MPs are pushing the Government to stick to its promise to reopen schools by March 8.

Sir Graham Brady, the chairman of the 1922 Committee, which represents Conservative MPs, told the Sunday



Express that he wants to launch a campaign to "save our jobs" because of the economic impact of lockdown.

He said: "The key to it is to reopen the schools – not only because that is what is best for the children and teenagers but also because it allows people to start to go back to work. Without the schools being open then it will be very difficult to reopen the rest of the economy."

Former work and pensions secretary and founder of the Blue Collar Conservatism movement Esther McVey described schoolchildren and university students as "the forgotten victims of this pandemic".

She said: "All the focus seems to have been on the effects of Covid.

"Not enough focus has been given to the long-lasting impacts of lockdowns, and we mustn't allow our youth to be the victims of that failing."

In a Blue Collar podcast released this weekend, Ms McVey also interviewed parents on the impact of the lockdown on their children. Liz Cole, co-founder of the Us For Them parents' campaign group,

said: "The damage is happening every day. It is a matter of urgency now. We are calling for schools to reopen as soon as possible – and if the Government doesn't reopen schools we want to see the cost benefit analysis for that."

Mother of two Victoria Slatter described how her four-year-old son had only just started school when lockdown closed it.

She said: "You don't get a second chance at being a child or having a childhood and having the experience at school.

"People are trying to brush it under the carpet saying it's OK, they will make that time up, but a lot won't."

Another mother of two, Christine Brett, described how her nine-year-old son sobbed in January after she told him school was closed again.

"It's cruel," she said, adding that she fears the Government will "change the goalposts again" in six weeks' time.

Headteacher Adrian Kneeshaw told Ms McVey that he is "not convinced" schools will open again on March 8, describing it as "a best-case scenario".