
United Kingdom. Lockdown in Birmingham, school reaches out to children and families

Sarah Minchin, principal at Saint Paul Catholic primary school, is still waiting for the 43 computers she was promised during the second lockdown in November by the British government for schoolchildren without access to a home device. "I received only 21 computers in December and 12 last week, so I had to make do with the ones we use here at school," she told SIR. "I asked technicians to set them up and for parents to sign an agreement stating they would return them once their children were back in school. I distributed 32 laptops, allowing all my students to attend online classes even during the third lockdown that began in early January." **"Pupil premium"**. 70% of the pupils at St. Paul's Catholic primary school, which forms part of the Lumen Christi Catholic Multiacademy, located in one of Birmingham's poorest neighbourhoods, are eligible to receive free school meals since their families can't even afford a second-hand computer. *So-called "pupil premium" or "free school meals" help the school's 137 disadvantaged pupils from families that live on welfare state benefits* with a grant received by the school that covers the costs of their education. Ten-year-old Kye is one of these children. His mother **Chelsie Moore**, 27, said that she decided to send him to school during the first lockdown last spring, because she could not help him at home. "I didn't feel safe," she explained. **"Key workers"**. In Great Britain, in-person classes continue for 'vulnerable children', i. e. those at risk of abuse or living in poverty, as well as for the children of 'key workers' who are indispensable to society, such as nurses, doctors and teachers. *During this third lockdown, the government extended this group to include children without access to computers.* Currently, 43 pupils attending classes at St Paul's belong to all these categories.



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[This time, however, Chelsie felt reassured and preferred to keep her son Kye at home. "I received a great help from the school," she said. "The government announced restrictions on Sunday and on Monday we already had a computer. Whenever I have a problem I contact them and they help me. Naturally, Kye, who is an only child, misses his friends enormously, but the teachers are very helpful and if they notice that Kye is struggling they offer him individual lessons via Zoom. "Ensuring safety."](#) "Teaching and learning at school is obviously the best option, but unfortunately crowded classrooms are still a high-risk environment," concluded Sarah Minchin. "It is my duty to ensure the safety of teachers and pupils and, if possible, I prefer to supply families with computers so that only the children of key workers and vulnerable children are in the classroom. There are sadly still four families whose two or three children have to share one computer, and in those cases I preferred to ask these children to come to school."

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