



Craig Whittaker MP

CALDER VALLEY

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Good Childhood Report

Thank you for contacting me about the Good Childhood Report.

I have always taken a close and intense interest in education and the welfare of children and young people both as a local councillor and as MP for Calder Valley, so I am very much aware of the issues raised in the report and very interested in the ideas it contains.

I share your concerns regarding the findings of the report and its statistics on childhood happiness. Figure 17 of the report suggests that the most common disadvantages that children suffer are fears about crime, parental finance difficulties, and parental mental health issues.

With regard to crime, I am very encouraged to see that the latest crime statistics show that crime is down by 38 per cent since June 2010, and in the past year alone is down by 9 per cent in the year to June 2017. The independent Crime Survey for England and Wales, the best measure of crime experienced by individuals and families, also shows that crime is down by 70 per cent since its 1995 peak. This shows that police reform is working, and that families and communities are safer as a result.

At the same time, it is unfortunately the case that the number of crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales has increased. Much of this increase is due to continued improvements to recording practices, and an increased willingness of victims to come forward and report certain crimes like child sexual abuse and domestic violence to the police. That said, some of this increase is due to more crimes actually being committed, which is why I welcome plans to consult on legislative measures to tackle offensive and dangerous weapons, a new action plan to tackle the use of acid and other corrosives in violent attacks, and the implementation of our Modern Crime Prevention Strategy which seeks to address the underlying drivers of crime

On the issue of household finances, the Government has a record to be proud of, lifting four million of the lowest paid out of tax by raising the personal tax allowance and introducing a National Living Wage. While progress has been made, more must be done. I welcome the draft bill, published by the Government earlier this month, which would cap energy prices for millions of families.

I agree that it is important to tackle the root causes of unhappiness in children early on, rather than belatedly intervening. That's why a record £1 billion of funding has been committed to mental health between now and 2020/21, helping both parents and children with their mental health difficulties. Much of this mental health support is being tailored specifically towards children, especially in regard to bullying, which was outlined as a key problem in Chapter Two of the Good Childhood report. This includes a £3 million programme to tackle LGBT bullying in schools, as well as the PSHE Association project to create lesson plans for teachers on issues relating to mental health, seven of which were published in September.

By cracking down on crime, helping those households struggling with their finances, and investing massively in mental health, I'm certain we will be a step closer to ensuring that every child has the happy childhood that they deserve. I will continue to watch carefully how policy unfolds in these areas and how effective it is proving.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whittaker', with a stylized flourish above the name.

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