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**Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP**  
Secretary of State

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Andrew Harris  
Senior Coroner  
London Inner South  
Southwark Coroners Court  
1 Tennis Street  
London  
SE1 1YD

24 May 2018

*Dear Mr Harris,*

Thank you for your report following the conclusion of the inquest into the tragic death of Abdul Jamal Ottun, in Canada, on 12 July 2015. This was received on 19 April 2018.

I was saddened to hear about this tragic case. You highlight some extremely important issues in the report enclosed with your letter. I share the concerns you have identified, and it is important that we take steps to help prevent future tragedies of this kind occurring.

I have noted your recommendations, and I can confirm that my department is making progress in the extremely important areas your report highlights.

The new physical education curriculum, developed with a range of sector experts, was introduced in 2014. Swimming and water safety is compulsory in the national curriculum at primary levels - key stages 1 and 2. The curriculum sets out the expectation that all pupils should be taught to:

- swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres
- use a range of strokes effectively; and
- perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

Whilst there are no specific statutory requirements on secondary schools to provide swimming lessons, the key stage 3 physical education curriculum sets out that pupils should build on and embed the physical development and skills learned in key stages 1 and 2, and become more competent, confident and expert in their technique. Swimming lessons are one way of doing this and swimming and platform diving are two of the permitted activities in the activity list for GCSE and A-Level PE.

I can assure you that we are aware of the inherent risks of water-based activities and that my department is committed to reducing the number of deaths by drowning. To this end, we tasked an independent group of experts from across the swimming sector to submit an independent report setting out recommendations for improving curriculum swimming as part of the Sporting Future strategy. The group published their report in July 2017 and we subsequently established an implementation group, and are currently reviewing the recommendations in the report. In response to the report, We have already provided schools with more flexibility to use their PE and School Sport Premium funding to support Top-up swimming lessons, as well as funding teacher training to support delivery of high quality swimming lessons.

We also fully support the National Water Safety Forum's National Drowning Prevention Strategy, which was launched in 2016. It aims to achieve a 50% reduction in drownings by 2026 by encouraging people to stay safe whilst enjoying themselves. The strategy includes a target for every child to have the opportunity to learn to swim and receive water safety education at primary school and where required at Key Stage 3.

The risks associated with water activities undertaken during outdoor education activities are a particular concern. Outdoor learning and educational visits do of course play an important part in the development of our young people. These activities often involve swimming and other water-based activities, and it is important that schools and colleges undertake a thorough risk assessment when planning such activities.

We are currently reviewing the guidance we provide to schools and colleges undertaking educational visits. Our intention is to remind schools and colleges about the importance of careful planning when visits involve water based activities, especially where these are undertaken abroad. As part of our review, we have discussed with stakeholders how we can better signpost the advice and support that is available to schools and colleges on this important matter. We are due to publish revised guidance later in the year.

I do hope that the steps we are taking that I have set out here reassure you that we are not complacent about the risks associated with swimming and other water-based activities. As you can see, we are working with sector professionals to ensure safety is improved, while children are still able to enjoy exciting educational experiences that broaden their horizons.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Damian Hinds', written in a cursive style.

**Damian Hinds**  
**Secretary of State for Education**