

December 2021

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**To Directors of Education/Children's Services
Chief Executives of Multi Academy Trusts
Heads of Independent Schools**

Dear Colleague

Omicron and COVID-19 control measures in schools and colleges

On 26 November 2021, the World Health Organization identified the variant Omicron (B.1.1.529) as a new variant of concern. Whilst scientific data regarding the transmissibility of the Omicron variant is still being assessed, there are important implications for all workplaces in terms of the need for robust measures to help prevent the spread of this new variant and to continue efforts to break the cycle of transmission of COVID-19 at a time when case numbers remain high and are rising.

It is vital that appropriate action is taken swiftly to help minimise the spread of the virus in educational settings and in the wider community.

You will be aware that the Department for Education's (DfE's) updated guidance and contingency framework for schools, colleges and other education settings introduces a number of new requirements, together with further support for coronavirus testing and funding to support with coronavirus-related costs. The Government has also given authority to local Directors of Public Health to take action to require additional mitigations to be implemented in schools and colleges in response to the coronavirus, if they believe this is necessary, in order to help protect the health of pupils, staff and the public. The NASUWT has written to all Directors of Public Health to ask them to consider additional mitigations to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19. We also ask you to raise this matter with your local Director of Public Health in order that, together, we can continue to minimise further disruption to education.

As daily case numbers continue to remain very high, and in light of the identification of the Omicron variant of concern, it is essential that appropriate action continues to be taken to ensure that workplaces are safe and to prevent avoidable disruption to pupils' education during the remainder of this term and when schools and colleges reopen following the Christmas break.

The deployment of all available control measures, and stronger mitigations, including extending the use of face coverings and stringent implementation of close-contact self-isolation rules, are vital, together with updating your workplace risk assessments in consultation with staff and trade union representatives. Relying on risk assessments prepared prior to these latest developments is not sufficient for the purpose of meeting the employer's statutory duties and legal obligations for health and safety at work. As educational settings have now been provided with CO₂ monitors, it is also very important that action continues to be taken to ensure good ventilation and that data on the number of identified COVID cases is shared with trade union workplace representatives.

We trust that you will also agree that safe staffing levels must also be maintained at all times. As customary, where there are staffing shortages which may impact on the safe running of a school/college, we trust that appropriate measures will be considered including, if necessary, sending pupils home.

The NASUWT is committed to working with employers to maintain safety in schools, colleges and other educational settings. Our expectation is that all employers will ensure that all settings have completed their health and safety checks and updated their risk assessments in light of the latest advice and information on new threats, including the Omicron variant.

The NASUWT appreciates your efforts in continuing to support the work of school and college leaders and teachers during the pandemic and we look forward to continuing to work with you to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of the school and college community at this critical time.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary