



The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London
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16 November 2021

Dear Secretary of State

You will be aware that accordingly to the latest ONS analysis, based on the period between 20 September and 3 October, education staff are nearly 40 per cent more likely than the general population to contract COVID-19.

The ONS is explicit about linking this to the number of cases amongst school children. They say:

“People working in the education sector continued to be more likely to test positive in comparison with those working in other sectors; this is likely related to the continuing higher infection levels among school-aged children.”

You will also no doubt share our concern at the latest [ONS report on Long COVID prevalence](#), from September, which shows that 1.26% of people employed in ‘teaching and education’ have ongoing COVID-19 symptoms that limit their activity to some extent – compared to an average of 0.85% in the general population. We believe it is reasonable to assume that this percentage may have increased since then due to the increase in cases among school children.

These figures are of course concerning both because of the impact of the virus on the lives and health of our education staff, and because of the impact on delivery of education overall.

When education staff do contract the virus, it is imperative that they are treated fairly, whether they develop ongoing long covid symptoms, or not. We believe that given the higher-than-average prevalence both of COVID-19 and of Long Covid among education staff, covid-related absence, including absence linked to long covid, should not be counted against standard sick leave entitlements. We believe that cases of COVID-19 should be treated as a disease contracted at work, with application of the relevant conditions of service provisions under the Burgundy, Red and Green Book schemes – and the higher proportion of cases amongst education staff supports that view.

In these unprecedented times we believe that there is also a moral imperative for employers to disregard COVID-19 related illness and self-isolation absence in relation to trigger points for sickness absence policies. We would urge you to communicate to all employers of education staff that this is how they should operate and that no staff should suffer a detriment because they have caught COVID-19.

Where education workers have been diagnosed with COVID-19, and there is reasonable evidence - (absolute proof is not needed) - to suggest it was caused by occupational exposure, then the

employer must by law (under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) report to the HSE. Again, we would urge you to remind employers of their responsibilities in this respect. We are concerned that there is significant under-reporting of such cases.

It is also important that we do not lose sight of the fact that children can themselves also be affected by long covid which will undoubtedly impact negatively on their educational experience.

The current situation regarding high infection levels across the education service only serves to reinforce our long-held view that the best way to protect staff and students from becoming infected with COVID-19 and, in doing so, to protect the continuity of education, is to bring in proportionate mitigation measures to minimise risk.

We believe that it is essential for you to re-consider these measures given the proportionately higher cases amongst education staff compared with the rest of the working population:

Mask wearing in secondary schools, including in classrooms, which could make a significant difference, as could a firm steer to avoid large gatherings and hold as many meetings/events online as reasonably possible.

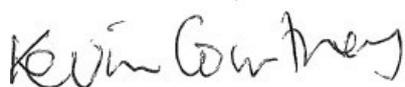
Speeding up the roll-out of CO2 monitors and subsequent action on ventilation if necessary. This is primarily the provision of portable HEPA filtration for classrooms where ventilation standards are inadequate for the room capacity.

Requiring sibling contacts of positive cases to stay at home pending a negative PCR test, as in Scotland, would surely help prevent the seeding of infections in schools and colleges.

Several local authorities have already taken unilateral action along these lines, but a piecemeal approach is not sufficient if we are to do all we can to protect the education service as we enter the difficult winter months.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



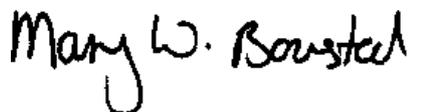
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