

Date: 26 January 2022

Your Ref:

Our ref: 220126/Zahawi N/PR/FC

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

Hillscourt Education Centre
Rose Hill
Rednal
Birmingham
B45 8RS

General Secretary
Dr Patrick Roach

Telephone: 0121 453 6150 Facsimile: 0121 457 6208

E-mail: nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk Website: www.nasuwt.org.uk

Dear Nadhim,

The NASUWT shares your desire to keep children and young people in school and to avoid unnecessary disruption to children's education. However, it is clear from the Government's own data that your ambitions in this regard are not currently being delivered and it is questionable whether measures in place are sufficient to keep schools operating effectively.

Your recent publication of attendance data confirms that around 1 in 8 pupils were absent from school in the latest period. Within that figure, there are local and regional variations, and your data also shows that the proportion of schools that had at least 25% of their workforce absent has increased up to three-fold over the period since the start of January 2022. We are sure that you will also agree that this level of disruption cannot continue indefinitely.

Whilst the levels of Covid related absence are now at their highest across primary schools, we are yet to hear from you how you intend to further support those schools over the remainder of the period of this term and next term. With preparations for statutory assessments, primary schools are struggling to deal with unprecedented Covid pressures, with many unable effectively to manage staffing levels or to secure supply teachers to cover for staff absences. Furthermore, where significant numbers of pupils continue to be affected by Covid related absences, we believe that serious consideration must now be given to the fairness of continuing with primary school statutory assessments this year, as originally planned.

Furthermore, across all phases, we seek clarification from you regarding the factors or criteria that will trigger and inform local decisions on the need to escalate Covid control measures on an area-wide basis. We recognise the option for local areas to be designated as 'Enhanced Response Areas' where Covid case rates are high. However, we also seek assurance that where schools are experiencing significant difficulties, such as higher case numbers or absences affecting pupils or staff, additional support and mitigations will be implemented.

Beyond the current contingency framework, we also believe it is now necessary for you to confirm the additional support that schools can expect, especially where they are experiencing significant workforce supply difficulties.

Based on the available data, we believe that we may not see stabilisation of Covid case numbers affecting all schools for some time. Looking ahead, we believe there is a need for you to confirm a Plan B for education which can provide confidence to schools and reassurance to parents.

As ever, the NASUWT remains committed to working with you to keep pupils in schools safely.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary