

3 May 2022

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

**Re. Use of lateral flow tests in the run up to school exams**

We are writing to urge you to take immediate action to reduce the risk of Covid disruption and absences in the run up to the upcoming assessment and exams period.

As you know, primary schools begin SATs on 9th May and secondary exams begin soon as well.

We continue to see high levels of staff and pupil absence due to Covid, and we are fearful of further disruption in the coming weeks.

We are therefore concerned that schools have been informed by the DfE that they cannot use any of their stocks of tests – instead they have been told to keep them and await further instructions. This means that tests which could be used by schools to help clarify who is and is not infected, and thereby reduce absences and the risk of illness in the run up to exams, are instead gathering dust in storerooms.

Meanwhile, schools are also struggling to source invigilators. Leaders usually rely on retirees, who are less willing this year because of potential Covid spread. Over 80% of exam officers [surveyed by the National Association of Examinations Officers](#) (NAEO) had a shortage. Anecdotally, the lack of Covid testing in schools and colleges is one of the reasons why people are reluctant to undertake this role this year.

We therefore urge you to both immediately communicate to schools that they can use any stocks of lateral flow tests held locally, and to make free testing available for all pupils and staff (including exam invigilators) for the next few weeks to cover the essential exam period.

If this situation is not addressed, it will be another severe blow to a whole generation of pupils who have already been so badly affected by pandemic disruption.

Yours sincerely



Julie McCulloch  
Director of Policy | ASCL



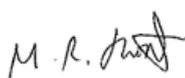
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National Officer | GMB



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General Secretary | NAHT



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