

Date: 1 December 2021

Our ref: 211201/Edge JM/PR/TF

Hon Julie Marie Edge MHK
Legislative Buildings
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By email: Julie.edge@gov.im

Dear Ms Edge

COVID-19 Mitigations in Schools

The NASUWT is extremely concerned by the current surge of COVID-19 cases on the Isle of Man which appears to be being fuelled largely by cases in schools. This surge is having a significant impact on schools' ability to operate as well as directly on the teachers in schools.

Despite the surge in cases the Isle of Man has some of the weakest mitigations in relation to preventing the spread of the virus in schools. Face coverings, though recommended, are seldom worn by pupils in communal areas, and although the NASUWT welcomed the programme to roll out Carbon dioxide/air quality detectors to schools, it appears that many schools are still awaiting sufficient numbers. There are precious few other precautions.

The NASUWT is also deeply concerned that non-essential activities are continuing with staff expected to attend. There can be no justification for these to continue. In addition, figures from the Office of National Statistics in the UK show that education staff are more likely to test positive for COVID than staff in other sectors. It is highly likely this is replicated in the Isle of Man.

NASUWT members are reporting that the lack of robust protections in their workplaces leaves them at risk of contracting the virus and spreading it to their families. Schools are the only places now where large groups of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people congregate. No evidence based justification has been provided for not applying precautions to education setting that apply in other similar locations.

Teachers are also experiencing significant increases in workload due to staff absences and being required to undertake excessive cover. This, combined with fear of contracting the virus, is having a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of staff, and there is a clear risk that the COVID-19 pandemic will be followed by a work-related stress epidemic in schools, and one that will be made all the worse if significant numbers of staff are unable to travel off-island at Christmas due to infections contracted in school.

Many other countries in Europe that have kept in place mitigation measures in schools, whilst rolling out a vaccination programme, have not experienced the surge in cases that we have seen in the Isle of Man.

The NASUWT therefore strongly urges the Isle of Man Government to:

- stop whole-school assemblies and in-person staff/parents meetings;
- introduce mandatory face coverings in all school areas;
- postpone/cancel any non-essential activities.

It is important that Government issues these instructions in the interests of ensuring that all schools remain open safely and in order to protect public health.

I look forward to your urgent response.

Yours sincerely

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary