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General Secretary/Ysgrifennydd Cyffredinol: **Dr Patrick Roach**

Kirsty Williams AM
Minister for Education
Welsh Government
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By email: DSME@gov.wales

Dear Kirsty

I am very grateful to you and your officials for meeting with NASUWT representatives in developing your emergency response to the COVID-19 situation.

Teachers have, as you have recognised, made a tremendous contribution to public health, meeting the challenge of partial school closure and by continuing to support vulnerable children and children of key/critical workers in school, and in the provision of online learning resources for the majority of children who are at home.

However, there has already been a great deal of speculation about when schools and colleges will reopen to pupils and this speculation is increasing daily. I am sure that you will recognise that such speculation is a major cause of confusion for parents and children, as well as anxiety including for teachers and others who work in schools and colleges.

The NASUWT recognises that the decision to institute the partial closure of all schools and colleges, save for vulnerable children and children of key workers, was made on public health grounds alone. We therefore would expect that any decision to partially or fully re-open schools and colleges will be guided by the same overriding public health interest and priority.

As the current situation continues, and as you consider plans for supporting children who are staying at home, the NASUWT has identified five key points that we would ask you to ensure are addressed fully before moving to relax the current arrangements on partial school closure.

It is our strong view that the decision on the partial or full re-opening of schools and colleges must be led by the scientific evidence and advice. Furthermore, it is essential that the scientific evidence and advice drives the policy decision and is not driven to bolster or support a predetermined policy objective. It is essential that lives

are not put at risk, recognising that teachers, support staff and pupils and their families remain at risk of contracting the Coronavirus.

The NASUWT urges that when the current restrictions governing partial school closure are relaxed or lifted, it is important that the Government takes fully into account the concerns of those working in schools and colleges. In particular, the NASUWT would ask you to commit to the following:

1. Recognise the impact of Coronavirus on the existing workforce in schools and colleges. A significant number of teachers will be affected by COVID-19 because they are being 'shielded' due to their health status, or because of underlying health conditions, or because they or someone in their household has COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19. We trust that you will recognise that with a depleted workforce in schools and colleges, this will impact on support and provision available for pupils, with the result being smaller classes sizes and fewer pupils or classes in school/college on any given day.
2. Teachers must be guaranteed the same protections as other workers, and as provided for in the Government's general COVID-19 advice to employers and employees. This means ensuring the continued protection of teachers with underlying health conditions and those who are in vulnerable groups.
3. Where the incidence of COVID-19 remains in the general population, it is important that teachers and those working in schools are protected from the spread of the virus as far as possible. Access to PPE including universal access to soap and hot water is essential in every setting to enable teachers and pupils to wash hands regularly. In addition, other items of PPE, including gloves, aprons and in some instances face masks for those working with children with particular learning needs, will be essential. The NASUWT would ask your Department to set out its plans for ensuring the adequate and effective provision of PPE in schools and colleges, and recognise that decisions on the re-opening of schools must also take account of the challenging context of PPE supply.
4. Social distancing is recognised as a critically important strategy in the fight against COVID-19. However, it is widely recognised that stringent social distancing practice is difficult to achieve in certain educational contexts, including working with the early years and with some children with SEND. Not only is clear advice needed for the sector, but it must also be recognised that any decision to re-open schools wholly or partially will need to take account of the potential consequences for practising stringent social distancing. This may therefore necessitate fewer pupils in classes and fewer classes in schools and colleges at any one time. Physical space constraints in many schools and colleges must also be addressed as part of any guidance issued by your Department.
5. COVID-19 risk assessments undertaken in consultation and agreement with the workforce and trade unions must also be an overriding requirement prior to re-opening schools and colleges. In addition, regular cleaning, including deep cleaning, will also be essential in securing the confidence of parents and teachers when schools re-open. It is vital that all schools and colleges have the necessary cleaning resources and staff to undertake cleaning tasks. The

NASUWT would not expect teachers to be asked to undertake cleaning tasks or to be expected to undertake them to the necessary standards to protect the health of pupils and the workforce.

The NASUWT recognises that children's education has been disrupted as a result of this global pandemic. Our members continue to work hard to ensure that every child has access to learning whether in school/college or from home. Children will need support, not only from teachers and other school staff, but by other agencies that can assist every child to access learning opportunities whether they are in school/college or staying at home. Ensuring that every child has access to the technology and the means to access online learning resources will be critical during this period of school closure and beyond.

At a time of national emergency, I am sure that you will agree that teachers have not been found wanting. It is essential that the needs of the workforce in schools and colleges are considered carefully and addressed fully, with clear undertakings from your Department before committing schools and colleges to reopen their doors.

I look forward to hearing from you and the opportunity to continue to work with your Department to address these important concerns.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary