

## Mass Testing of Pupils in Secondary Schools and Colleges

On 17 December 2020, the Department for Education announced plans for the rollout of mass testing of pupils in secondary schools and colleges from 4 January 2021. The NASUWT has publicly criticised the Government's plans and the timing of this announcement; the Union has also raised a number of serious concerns with the Department for Education about the associated logistical implications for schools and colleges.

The NASUWT, together with other unions and employer associations, issued a [Joint Statement](#) on 18 December 2020 which made clear that:

- an effective mass testing system in schools and colleges is necessary;
- it is unrealistic to expect schools and colleges safely to recruit, train and organise teams of suitable persons to staff and run testing stations on their premises by the start of the new term;
- it may not be possible for schools and colleges to implement mass testing at the beginning of the spring term;
- no school or college should come under pressure if they are unable to implement these plans, or if they believe it would be unsafe to do so;
- we cannot reasonably expect them to organise, run and staff Covid testing centres, whilst also providing education and vital pastoral support.

On 19 December 2020, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, met with the NASUWT, other unions and employer representatives to discuss concerns.

The Government has now confirmed that mass testing of pupils is optional only. There is no requirement for secondary schools and colleges to provide a mass testing offer for pupils from 4 January 2021.

### Are secondary schools and colleges required to deliver mass testing from 4 January?

Members should be clear that the rollout of mass testing in secondary schools and college is not mandatory and is optional only. Schools are invited to make arrangements for mass testing but are under no obligation to do so.

The Secretary of State for Education confirmed in a [letter dated 19 December](#) to the NASUWT and other stakeholders that:

*'We have had to quickly weigh up the public health need for additional measures, with the operational challenges for education settings that would result from a short notice announcement... We were also clear that this would be a difficult ask of school and college leaders, and that is why **testing of all students** (as opposed to the staggered closure, and the serial testing already announced) **is recommended and supported, but not mandated.**'*

The Secretary of State has also confirmed that no action will be taken against any school or college that does not offer mass testing to pupils.

Irrespective of whether schools provide access to mass testing from 4 January, schools and colleges will still be expected to reduce the number of pupils attended for the first full week of January. Vulnerable children, children of key workers and exam cohorts (Y11 and Y13) should continue to receive face to face education. All other pupils will be expected to undertake learning remotely.

Primary schools should continue to operate as normal.

### **How will the tests be conducted?**

New lateral flow tests will be self-administered by pupils using a simple swab test. Staff/volunteers deployed to support the testing process will not carry out swabbing of pupils. Schools and colleges are asked to organise the process and to ensure that test results are recorded and reported in line with the forthcoming guidance and advice.

Schools are asked to organise appropriate staff who can:

- Schedule/coordinate pupils for the tests, including securing consent from parents;
- Managing and organising test equipment and the test area;
- Administer the process for obtaining the test results;
- Record the results of each test;
- Communicate the results to the pupils and record the test outcomes;
- Cleaning of test area/equipment;
- Report adverse results.

The DfE has confirmed that teachers in schools should not be deployed to conduct or manage these tests.

### **How will the Government support mass testing in secondary schools and colleges?**

Where schools choose to provide a mass testing offer, the DfE has confirmed that it will ensure the following:

- Provision of all test kit, PPE and training, as has been provided in other settings such as care homes and universities;
- Reimbursement of reasonable costs for the additional workforce needed to deliver the testing of students on return in January in state-funded secondary schools and colleges. It is understood that £71 million additional funding is to be provided to support the workforce costs associated with mass testing in secondary schools and colleges;
- Provide support for schools and colleges delivered by armed forces personnel who will assist schools with planning their mass testing offer and, in exceptional circumstances, provide additional practical support for individual schools where needed;
- Issue guidance, model letter templates and training for schools is to be issued prior to 4 January. A webinar programme supported by the armed forces will also be provided for schools.

**What should members do?**

NASUWT members should note the following advice:

1. There is no requirement for secondary schools or colleges to put in place arrangements for mass testing from 4 January. Schools and colleges should ensure that they continue to focus their available staffing capacity on teaching and supporting pupils' learning, whether in school or remotely.
2. Schools should not spend time during the holiday to prepare for the administration of the tests.
3. Teachers and school leaders cannot be required to administer tests and the NASUWT would strongly advise that they do not volunteer to do so.
4. There is no requirement for any person who is asymptomatic to undergo a test.

Members are strongly advised to continue to monitor the NASUWT website for further advice and guidance as the situation on returning to school and testing develops.

The NASUWT has long-advocated for Covid-19 testing to be prioritised in schools and colleges in order to help keep schools safe. The Union continues to make the case that teachers and school leaders are already making a critical contribution during the pandemic to the health and wellbeing of pupils by providing access to education. Teachers and school leaders should not be distracted from their core task of teaching and leading and managing teaching and learning.

The NASUWT will continue to press the Government to provide a credible, effective and nationally delivered plan for mass testing of pupils which will help keep pupils, the workforce and the public safe.