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General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education
DENI
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
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BT19 7PR

Dear Peter,

Securing Safe Schools during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, the education of children and young people has been of paramount importance to the country as well as to members of the NASUWT. Teachers and principals have worked tirelessly throughout the year to ensure that every child has access to the highest quality education provision and support, even during the enforced lockdown which saw the closure of schools during the spring and summer.

With the full reopening of schools this autumn, teachers and principals have once again demonstrated their commitment to children's education. As levels of Coronavirus transmission have increased rapidly in the wider community, teachers, principals and support staff have worked valiantly to keep schools open safely.

However, with a second wave of virus transmission, teachers' safety concerns cannot be overlooked. Teachers and principals are increasingly reporting high levels of stress and fatigue as a consequence of trying to maintain a covid-safe environment in schools. Our members report that they are struggling to cope with significant additional workload pressures which are impacting adversely on their ability to continue to provide the education that all children and young people deserve.

It is evident that teachers cannot teach and children cannot learn effectively where their health or safety is at risk. The Coronavirus pandemic has delivered an unprecedented impact on children's education. We believe that without an urgent and effective programme of Northern Ireland wide action and measures to ensure the safety and sustainability of education provision during the pandemic, there is very a serious risk that fewer teachers will be available to continue teaching and that more pupils will be forced to spend time out of school whilst they self-isolate.

The NASUWT believes that Government and employers have a duty at all times, especially during this crisis, to do whatever it takes to ensure that schools are, above all, safe places for teaching and learning.

To that end, the NASUWT has endorsed the attached 10-point programme of measures to enable the safe and sustainable provision of teaching and learning, which we strongly urge you to consider and act upon. These measures are designed to protect the education of children and young people whilst ensuring that our schools can continue to operate safely in the interests of children and young people and the education workforce, whilst Northern Ireland continues to take the wider measures necessary in response to the pandemic threat and in order to protect public health.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss further with you our proposals.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Roach', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary