

Date: 9 February 2021

Your Ref:

Our ref: 210209/Williamson G/PR/FC

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
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NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

Hillscourt Education Centre
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General Secretary
Dr Patrick Roach

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By email: Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk

Dear Gavin,

The NASUWT is clear that the best place for children and young people is in school. However, in light of the ongoing national restrictions, we are also clear that the full opening of schools should occur only when it is demonstrably safe, taking into account the need to minimise the risks to staff, pupils and the public.

We remain concerned that whilst the current national restrictions are in place, alternative provision (AP), special schools and pre-reception early years settings are expected to continue to allow all children to attend full time or for their usual hours. As a result, these settings are subject to a markedly different regime of controls and requirements compared to other educational provision at a time when levels of virus transmission in the community remain high.

The NASUWT is concerned that no clear scientific explanation has been provided by your Department to justify these differences in approach between pre-reception early years settings, special schools and AP and other educational settings. Teachers and leaders in special schools, AP and early years settings continue to share with us their profound concerns about this decision and its implications for the safety of staff and children. As a result, levels of public and professional confidence in the package of COVID-control measures being taken by the Government are being needlessly and unhelpfully undermined.

On the basis of evidence in the public domain to date, and as previously discussed with your Department, the NASUWT is clear that comparable restrictions to those in place currently for schools should be extended to the types of early years settings, special schools and AP identified above, including additional mitigations to assist in minimising virus transmission including access to teachers in these setting to the Coronavirus vaccines. Furthermore, I would ask you to publish immediately details on the numbers of pupils and staff who have been required to self-isolate and who have been diagnosed with Covid-19 following the introduction of the current national restrictions.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary