



## COVID-19 Update

The NASUWT became aware that the Directorate Children and Young People (DCYP) was putting plans in place to reopen its schools either as childcare settings or as educational provision around the world on 27 April. At that stage, it was apparent that no formal discussions or consultations had taken place with key stakeholders.

The NASUWT immediately initiated contact at the most senior level within DCYP, requesting an explanation. The NASUWT has met with members virtually where possible and lobbied DCYP on a daily basis, expressing disappointment at the lack of consultation.

As a result of this lobbying, including the sharing of the NASUWT's five criteria for the reopening of schools (below), DCYP agreed to consult formally with PROSPECT, which allows the NASUWT to feed back its views to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) formally. The NASUWT understands, through its links with PROSPECT, that at the time of going to press this consultation is still in progress.

1. Do not rush to reopen schools. The Government needs to recognise and accept that with a potentially depleted workforce, due to the impact of COVID-19, it will simply not be possible to reopen all schools to all children, and that there will need to be fewer pupils in school on any given day.
2. The Government needs to ensure that teachers are provided with the same protections as other workers, especially by safeguarding those teachers who have underlying health conditions or who are in a vulnerable group. That will inevitably mean fewer teachers being available to work in schools, and the Government must plan accordingly, recognising that schools will face staff shortages.
3. The Government should ensure that teachers and other staff in schools are protected from the coronavirus as far as possible. Access to personal protective equipment (PPE), including universal access to soap and hot water, as well as provision of gloves, aprons and face masks where appropriate, must also be given priority. The Government's suggestion that PPE is not necessary in educational settings needs to be withdrawn.
4. The Government needs to accept, too, the importance of social distancing in schools, although this will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in practice where schools are reopened fully. Again, it is important that there are fewer children and fewer classes at any one time, given the physical space limitations across the majority of schools and colleges.

*(continued overleaf)*

5. Finally, the Government must insist on the effective conduct of COVID-19 risk assessments in every school and college prior to full or partial reopening. These risk assessments need to take place in consultation and agreement with the workforce and trade unions if the process for reopening schools and colleges is to be managed successfully. Regular cleaning, including deep cleaning of schools, will also be essential to secure and maintain confidence. Schools also must have the necessary resources and staff to undertake the cleaning, which will be vital in helping to reduce the spread of the disease.

The NASUWT has continued its high-level engagement with DCYP at both national and local levels attending meetings via Skype. The NASUWT has shared a variety of its documents with DCYP, including a checklist for the reopening of schools and a checklist of guidance for remote learning, which you can find on the NASUWT Coronavirus Hub page on the following link: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/coronavirus-guidance.html>.

Dr Patrick Roach, NASUWT General Secretary, wrote to DCYP reiterating previous correspondence and the consultation response that was fed through PROSPECT, urging extreme caution in relation to the reopening of schools.

It is possible that DCYP, going forward, may seek to mirror the recent UK Government advice and guidance. Therefore, DCYP members will wish to note that an NASUWT review has highlighted a number of fundamental concerns, not least that the Department for Education (DfE) guidance is inadequate and incomplete and lacks detail on a number of critical issues relating to the health and safety of staff in schools and colleges. Furthermore, the DfE guidance is inconsistent with guidance issued by the Government for other workplaces and workers. The scope of the Government proposals for the reopening of nursery and primary schools is particularly concerning, and whilst the proposals for secondary schools appear more limited, in all circumstances we believe there are serious health, safety and welfare issues for staff and pupils which have not been addressed.

The NASUWT has further made it clear that parents and pupils must also have time to prepare.

The NASUWT looks forward to receiving DCYP's formal response and wishes to acknowledge DCYP's recognition of our concerns in not pushing ahead with some elements of its original proposal in relation to the reopening of school provision in some of its jurisdictions on 18 May. Indeed, the Union welcomes its commitment to further engagement with all its stakeholders.

The NASUWT is committed to quality education for every child. We know that children's education has been disrupted because of the COVID-19 emergency, but as we have seen from widespread public support for our members, teachers have not been found wanting. At this critical time, it is vital that teachers' concerns are addressed fully before any decision to reopen schools is made.



E-mail: [advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)  
Website: [www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)