

Date: 24 June 2020

Your Ref:

Our ref: 200624 Williamson G/PR/LB

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

Hillscourt Education Centre
Rose Hill
Rednal
Birmingham
B45 8RS

General Secretary
Dr Patrick Roach

Telephone: 0121 453 6150 Facsimile: 0121 457 6208

E-mail: nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk Website: www.nasuwt.org.uk

Dear Gavin,

The NASUWT is becoming aware of increasingly poor practice in a significant number of schools with regard to the concept of bubbles.

The NASUWT is clear that the concept means that the same adults stay with the same pupils at all times, save for staff breaks, lunches etc. which the staff member should take separately aware from any other adults or children to preserve the integrity of the bubble. The Union supports the use of bubbles as a method of reducing contact within schools and thereby reducing the potential for virus spread.

We are, however, receiving numerous reports from members and representatives where this concept is not being applied correctly, or even wilfully ignored. Examples that have been reported include:

- Teachers teaching multiple groups either on the same day or adjacent days.
- Teachers moving between multiple groups on the same day.
- Teachers having a different group each day of the week.
- Other adults moving between bubbles throughout the day.

The NASUWT is concerned that these practices are putting teachers and pupils at unnecessary risk due to the clear potential for the virus to spread, completely negating the concept of bubbles. Indeed, some schools appear to have interpreted bubbles solely to apply to pupils and not to teachers.

Some schools are also deliberately flouting contractual provisions and/or The Working Time Regulations 1988 by requiring teachers to be with pupils for the entire school day and preventing them from having breaks away from pupils.

Furthermore, the NASUWT is concerned that these practices are being encouraged by ambiguity in the Department's guidance, with statements such as (emphasis added):

- 'minimising contact and mixing, **as far as possible,**'
- 'mixing between different groups of pupils **should be kept to a minimum.**'
- 'when seeking to minimise contact and mixing **as far as schools are able**'

The NASUWT believes that the highlighted caveats are allowing schools to engage in unsafe practices and effectively circumvent sensible precautions put in place to prevent the transmission of the virus and potentially save lives.

Additionally, the Department's specific guidance that specialist secondary school teachers can move between groups is fatally undermining the bubble approach in many schools.

Conversely, the NASUWT is also aware of many schools, both primary and secondary, which have successfully increased the numbers of pupils in school, offering good provision to pupils whilst still ensuring that there is no mixing between different groups of staff and pupils, demonstrating that the bubble concept can be implemented successfully.

It is, therefore, imperative that the Department clarifies its guidance to state that adults must not move between bubbles other than in exceptional circumstances such as bona fide emergencies. This must include instructing schools to have appropriate arrangements in place for teachers to take sufficient breaks without compromising the integrity of the bubbles.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary