

Date: 9 June 2021

Your Ref:

Our ref: 210609/Williamson G/PR/LB

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Secretary of State
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Dear Gavin,

Breaking the chain of Coronavirus transmission in schools

The NASUWT is becoming increasingly concerned that the Delta variant of the Coronavirus is spreading rapidly, and this spread is being driven by outbreaks in schools.

You will be aware that the Delta variant has quickly become the dominant variant being 50-75% more infectious than the Alpha (Kent) variant, which was itself 50-75% more infectious than the original virus. PHE data has been showing clear exponential increase since early April, with cases of the variant doubling on a weekly basis, even against a recent backdrop of falling numbers of tests. This indicates that current mitigations are not working and the Delta variant of the virus is out of control. At the same time as the cases of the Delta variant have increased, cases of the Alpha variant have continued to decrease masking the impact of the Delta variant.

At the same time, ONS data over the last two to three weeks has shown a consistent and significant increase in levels of the virus in secondary age pupils, whilst other age groups were largely flat. The most recent data now continues to show a significant increase in secondary age pupils, but also increases in 35-49 age group, demonstrating that the rise in children is now bleeding into other age groups. This appears to provide clear indication that schools are acting to drive a third wave of infections.

The fact that schools are driving the third wave is also demonstrated by PHE data released last week that showed outbreaks of the Delta variant in educational establishments rising rapidly, and far greater than other settings. Outbreaks in educational establishments now account for half of all outbreaks, up from a third only a week ago. Data from NHS Test and Trace also shows the same pattern, with being in an educational establishment the single most frequently reported activity, and almost double the next highest reported activity, shopping. The NASUWT is disappointed, however, that the PHE data released last week only gave the number

of outbreaks and not numbers of infected pupils and staff testing positive in the outbreaks.

The NASUWT would assert that this data provides incontrovertible evidence that not only is the Delta variant spreading rapidly in schools, cases in schools are also driving a third wave of infections in the wider community. This is sadly not surprising given the limited nature of mitigations in schools which were further relaxed prematurely in May. The NASUWT is also concerned that the numbers of lateral flow tests undertaken is falling sharply, thus testing as a mitigation is itself failing.

This spread of the virus in schools risks once again undermining pupils' education through regular and repeated isolation periods. It also puts pupils and staff at risk of infection, illness and death, especially as there are significant numbers of people not yet vaccinated and the emerging evidence that the Delta variant has some degree of vaccine escape, particular in those who have only had a first vaccination. Even if hospitalisations remain low (and data is starting to show an increase), previous ONS data has shown significant numbers of both children and adults suffering from Long Covid which is already blighting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Allowing the virus to spread in schools will cause many tens of thousands of additional, avoidable Long Covid cases. In addition, every additional virus case increases the likelihood of further mutations which could result in a virus which achieves full vaccine escape.

You may also be aware that the Independent SAGE group has recently issued a statement on the UK Government roadmap for ending all restrictions. This included a number of recommendations including ensuring adequate ventilation and infection control measures within indoor venues (e.g. schools, workplaces, hospitality), with rigorous monitoring, certification of venues and sanctions where these measures are not undertaken; and reinstating face coverings for secondary school children and providing resources to enhance classroom ventilation.

The NASUWT believes that urgent action must be taken in order to reduce transmission of the virus in schools. In addition, we urge the Department to introduce a further programme of in-school/on-site testing in order to help break the chains of infection and to address the decline in at home testing. This would need to be repeated on a regular basis to continue to suppress cases in schools. Spot checks of schools must also be reintroduced as a matter of urgency.

I must also ask for the Department to publish on a weekly basis, in addition to the numbers of outbreaks in schools, the numbers of pupils and education staff having a positive test result, in order for the levels of infections in schools, and therefore the effectiveness of mitigations, to be appropriately monitored.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary