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Dr. Patrick Roach
General Secretary
NASUWT Scotland
By email

07 May 2020

Dear Patrick

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the NASUWT Teachers' Union in which you set out your organisations' concerns in relation to the re-opening of schools. I had a useful conversation to discuss these matters with Jane Packham on Tuesday 5 May 2020.

Whilst the Scottish Government is clear that we don't want restrictions to be in place any longer than they need to be, the decision on when and how to re-open schools will not be taken lightly. As you outline in your letter, there are many complexities to consider including, but by no means limited to, the education workforce, staff and pupil wellbeing and the practicalities around physical distancing. The Scottish Government also recognises that any decisions made around schools re-opening must not be considered in isolation given the impact those decisions will have on families, working parents and wider society.

I have set up the C-19 Education Recovery Group which includes teachers, local authorities, parents and others to consider all practical options and provide advice on the purpose and priorities for reopening schools. The first main task for the group is to model what a phased approach to school re-opening will look like. The ERG has been asked to consider the practical steps involved in phased re-opening, but not the timing as this will be a Ministerial decision guided by the evidence on progress in suppressing the virus. Ten work streams have been established with partners (reporting to the ERG) to consider the wide range of policy, practical and operational issues related to reopening schools.

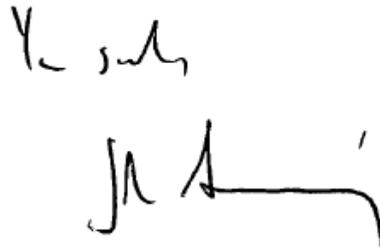
Any decisions made regarding the timing of school opening will be guided by the science, and will align with the Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) framework for decision making. We will not re-open schools until the science indicates that it is safe to do so. The single most important measure to help us understand how fast the virus is spreading and the degree to which it is under control is the R number. To contain the virus we must keep the R number below 1. The method of "test, trace, isolate, support" will be most effective when levels of infection are low. We will be guided by this principle when considering when it is safe to re-open schools.

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The Coronavirus (COVID-19) framework for decision making, sets out the challenges Scotland faces and outlines the approach and principles that will guide us as we make decisions about transitioning out of the current lockdown arrangements. New guidance has also been published to support the home learning of children and young people during the current term. As we begin to consider the transition back to school-based learning - in whatever form that takes – the Scottish Government and Education Scotland will continue to work constructively with local authorities and all partners to continuously monitor and review the support in place, and ensure that children and young people's wellbeing and learning is prioritised in these challenging times.

I do not underestimate the significant impact that the current restrictions are placing on your members, and I am incredibly grateful for the ongoing commitment that you and your colleagues are showing towards supporting the children and young people of Scotland and the rest of the UK and Ireland.

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

JOHN SWINNEY

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