

Date: 6 October 2020

Our Ref: 201006/Williams K/PR/FC

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Kirsty Williams AM
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General Secretary/Ysgrifennydd Cyffredinol: **Dr Patrick Roach**

By email: DSME@gov.wales

Dear Kirsty,

Thank you for meeting with me and NASUWT officials last Thursday, 1 October 2020. We had the opportunity at our meeting to raise with you a number of issues that came from my correspondence of 18 and 23 September and your reply of 29 September and we were grateful for the time that you took to discuss those issues.

Whilst we believe that the Welsh Government Operational Guidance is not robust enough to ensure that schools in Wales are as safe as they could be during this public health crisis, we are grateful that you share our understanding of the need for compliance with the guidance. In turn, we share your frustration over the challenge of securing widespread agreement over the involvement of Estyn and the HSE in ensuring compliance. However, I must re-emphasise our view that compliance must be assured and the NASUWT will support you in ensuring that the Welsh Government and employers carry out fully their responsibilities in this matter.

We were grateful at our meeting of your clear message to schools that this was not business as usual. Regrettably, our experience across many schools in Wales has been the contrary, with the "normal" annual routines of accountability through Improvement Plans, lesson observations, learning walks, parental meetings and so on continuing as though nothing had changed since the start of the pandemic. The NASUWT also remains extremely concerned that blended learning is being looked at as a 'bolt on' to be addressed and developed in addition to teachers' already challenging workloads. Our members report to us growing workload pressures and exhaustion as they are being asked to find time during their PPA, break times or in the evenings and weekends to develop this work. This is not acceptable and we were gratified to hear from you that Headteachers should worry about their Development Plans next year and that schools should not be pursuing anything that detracts from their primary focus on keeping schools open, ensuring their safety, and securing the provision of teaching and learning. We would ask that you confirm your expectations clearly to Consortia, Local Authorities and School Managers.

We were also grateful for the opportunity at our meeting to share with you data that we have gathered from our supply teachers members in Wales which indicates that this crisis is hitting supply teachers particularly hard. During the pandemic the experiences of supply teachers, whether working through a local authority, directly for a school and/or through a supply agency has been mixed and shows a need for the Welsh Government to act to ensure supply teachers are provided with additional job security during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in a situation where a number of supply teachers in Wales have reported serious financial hardship during the pandemic. The evidence we have demonstrates a need for reform of the supply teacher market in Wales and the Union welcomes the opportunity to discuss this further with you and with your officials, where we will be pleased to share with you further evidence from our latest research.

The NASUWT is especially concerned about reports that supply teachers are finding it hard to secure work. This comes as a surprise given the need for schools to operate the Catch-Up programme and the need to cover for staff who are self-isolating. We welcome your commitment to audit the use of the additional money that has been allocated to support the Catch-Up programme in schools in Wales and we are pleased that you are seeking to ensure that the money allocated for this purpose is being appropriately spent to secure additional teachers. The NASUWT agrees that supply teachers will be needed now more than ever as schools in Wales try to stay open and, indeed, build capacity so that a strong blended learning approach can be developed.

We were grateful for the opportunity to meet with you. A personal meeting ensured that we were able to hear and express the perspectives of both sides directly. We recognise your commitment to maintaining covid-safety in schools and we would urge you to now further develop the means to ensure compliance by schools and employers with the Operational Guidance you have published.

Ensuring the maintenance of education provision throughout the autumn/winter and into the spring cannot be done without further commitment to building capacity to support the work of teachers and headteachers. The NASUWT remains ready to discuss with you further the maintenance of a quality education service in this very difficult and challenging period.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary