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General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

Date: 18 December 2020

Our Ref: 201218/Swinney J/PR/LB

John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

By email: DFMCSE@gov.scot

Dear John,

In your letter of 14 December 2020 you set out the rationale for your decisions on the school Christmas and New Year holiday period. You also confirmed your commitment to continue to consider the balance of risks and harms in the light of any new evidence on the potential direct health risks to children and staff from Covid-19.

It is widely recognised, including by the Scottish Government, that the relaxation of the Covid restrictions over Christmas is likely to significantly drive up rates of virus transmission. The NASUWT is concerned that without additional measures in place there is the potential that virus transmission will further increase when schools reopen in January. To that end, we believe that the Government must now urgently consider stronger action which puts the health, safety and welfare of children and the school workforce first.

I reiterate my previous call to you to trigger a move to blended learning when schools return in January. This will be especially important in those areas where virus levels are highest or are rising significantly and in order to reduce the risks and maintain continuity of education provision for pupils.

You will have noted the statement issued today from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine that the Scottish Government must do "whatever it takes" to get a grip of the virus and its continued spread. You will also be aware of the announcements in the last 24 hours in other UK jurisdictions regarding arrangements for the start of the new term, including decisions to delay the physical return of pupils to schools as an attempt to mitigate against the inevitable rise in in-school virus transmission following the Christmas/New Year holiday period and to allow for the implementation of mass testing of pupils and staff in schools. We urge that you now give urgent and serious consideration to taking similar steps as necessary to minimise the risk of virus transmission as schools return in January.

Never has it been more vital for you to take the teaching profession with you and to take all necessary steps to prevent a further surge in Covid-19 cases when schools return in the New Year.

I look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary