



2020-0053258POGibb

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

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Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary, NASUWT
By email: frances.cater@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

Your ref: 200915/Gibb N/PR/FC

01 October 2020

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter of 15 September, regarding testing for COVID-19.

As you are aware, all year groups in all types of school, returned full time from the beginning of the autumn term. We continue to do everything in our power to ensure all children can remain in their classrooms safely, as this is the best place for their education, development and wellbeing.

Through Regional Schools Commissioners and teams within the Department, we closely monitor the experiences of schools, including confirmed positive cases and schools asking close contacts to isolate. Where schools are doing this, all our evidence is that it is being done in line with our guidance.

The number of confirmed cases in schools remains low but, to protect schools, it is important that head teachers continue to have access to timely support and advice. There is a new dedicated advice line that will help schools, colleges and nurseries to implement the most appropriate public health measures, once a case is confirmed. A team of advisors will inform schools, colleges and nurseries what action is needed in response to a positive case based on the latest public health advice, and work through a risk assessment.

When a child, young person or staff member develops symptoms compatible with coronavirus, they must be sent home and advised to self isolate. All staff and students have access to a test if they display symptoms of coronavirus and are encouraged to get tested in this scenario. Where a child, young person or staff member develop symptoms, they are encouraged to alert the school. Staff, and parents of children who test positive should inform their child's school immediately.

The guidance for full September reopening states that schools should ensure that those who have COVID-19 symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school. If someone tests positive, they should follow the guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection and must continue to self isolate for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms. Other members of the household should continue to self isolate for the full 14 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms. The guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/u25Puoa.

Employers, staff and workplace health and safety representatives should work together to resolve any concerns. If concerns cannot be resolved, they can be raised with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Where employers are not taking steps to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, the HSE will consider taking action to ensure that the risks are controlled. This includes the provision of advice, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. More information on the role of the HSE in regulating occupational health and safety during the coronavirus outbreak is available at: tinyurl.com/Y4tn7xw9.

Once schools have assessed their staffing demand and capacity, any schools experiencing problems should work with their local authority or trust to establish whether there is a need to move any pupils, teachers or other school staff. Staff may be asked by their employer to work in different locations to help maintain the required provision during this challenging period. In some cases, staff members may be prepared to temporarily undertake a different role to their normal role. We ask all those working in schools to be flexible when considering whether to make or agree to such requests. Whether an individual can be required to work in an alternative location will depend on their individual contract of employment. Schools and local authorities should have regard to the Department's guidance on protective measures when making these arrangements.

Testing capacity is the highest it has ever been, but we are seeing a significant demand for tests. It is vital that children and school staff only get a test if they develop coronavirus symptoms. The home testing kits supplied to schools and colleges are only for those who develop COVID-19 symptoms and face significant barriers to accessing a test. In particular, these tests kits will help symptomatic staff who test negative and are not close contacts of confirmed cases, to get back to work as soon as they feel well enough. We have contacted all schools and colleges with details of how to access additional test kits through an online portal that opened on 16 September. Home testing kits will be supplied in boxes of 10, with one box provided per 1,000 students. A new order may be placed 21 days after the last order was despatched.

We continue to work closely with schools, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS Test and Trace to ensure all appropriate steps are taken to keep staff and pupils safe.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Neil', written in a cursive style.