

Date: 2 January 2021

Your Ref:

Our ref: 210102A/Williamson G/PR/LB

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

Hillscourt Education Centre
Rose Hill
Rednal
Birmingham
B45 8RS

General Secretary
Dr Patrick Roach

Telephone: 0121 453 6150 Facsimile: 0121 457 6208

E-mail: nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk Website: www.nasuwt.org.uk

By email: Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk

Dear Gavin,

Issues regarding January 2021 school reopening

Your statement to Parliament on 30 December 2020 refers.

The NASUWT requests urgent clarification from you in respect of the following matters:

1. Will you confirm that schools and colleges will be permitted to move to blended/remote learning if they believe that the situation and conditions demand the same and in order to protect the health and safety of pupils and staff?
2. Will you publish immediately the scientific evidence and advice you have received on the transmission of the Coronavirus, including the new variant, in schools and colleges? Our members urgently request clarification as to the detailed rationale for keeping the majority of primary schools open whilst virus transmission rates continue to rise out of control.
3. Will you confirm the criteria and factors you have used to determine a highly selective list of tier 4 local authority areas where primary schools should remain closed to pupils from 4 January and what criteria and factors will be used by the Government when reviewing whether primary and secondary schools in these areas should remain open or close? NASUWT members are especially concerned by what appears to be your privileging of London and the South East in the extension of measures to protect health and safety in schools and to safeguard public health, given your decisions to apply the Contingency Framework only to schools in these Tier 4 areas. This is not only unfair, but also appears contrary to the overriding imperative to protect public health in all areas where the risk of Coronavirus transmission is most severe.
4. You have made a number of media statements since 30 December on the issue of mass testing in secondary schools and colleges. Can you confirm that

the national implementation of mass testing will be coordinated and undertaken by personnel additional to those already working in secondary schools and colleges? It is essential that provision for mass testing is delivered as an integral component of a coordinated public health response and that schools are not expected or required to remodel themselves to act as Covid-19 testing centres.

5. Will you confirm the date when pupils attending primary and special schools will be tested routinely, and on what basis, to ensure a Covid-safe environment for teaching and learning?
6. Will you confirm that mass testing arrangements will not be used as an alternative to the requirement for self-isolation where pupils or staff have been in contact with persons who have had a positive Covid-19 test?
7. Given the extremely serious threat of Covid-19 transmission across the country and particularly in Tier 4 areas, will you commit immediately to mandatory use of face masks/visors (subject to appropriate exemptions) in school and college settings, including in classrooms?
8. Will you confirm that all staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable, together with staff in other high risk groups, will be required to stay at home and work from home?
9. Will you confirm how much additional financial support beyond that which you have already announced, will be provided to schools and colleges to enable them to deliver Covid-safe teaching and learning environments, including additional funding for PPE, cleaning and handwashing supplies, additional staffing, signage, digital equipment to support remote teaching and learning?
10. Will you confirm that education staff working in schools and colleges will be deemed a priority group for access to the Coronavirus vaccine as a basis for ensuring that schools can continue to remain open safely? We believe that it is essential, given the priority to keep schools and colleges open, that the vaccination of education staff must be a priority alongside access for health care staff.
11. Will you confirm what additional contingency arrangements are now being considered, and with whom, concerning your plans for public examinations in summer 2021?
12. Will you confirm that, in light of the additional disruption caused by the increased transmission of the Coronavirus, all statutory primary school pupil assessments for 2021 will be cancelled?

The NASUWT has written to all employers to remind them of their legal obligations for ensuring health and safety at work. It is extremely regrettable that following your most recent announcements, school and college employers have not had the opportunity to review and consult appropriately on their health and safety risk assessments prior to the start of the new term. It is essential that you confirm that they must do so prior to the general onsite admission of pupils and staff.

The NASUWT is extremely concerned by the lack of consultation prior to your announcements on 30 December. We are further concerned that the late and changing nature of announcements from the Government on critically important matters affecting the safety of provision in schools and colleges has seriously undermined and compromised the ability of schools and colleges to respond appropriately and safely to the current situation and challenges.

The NASUWT recognises that schools and college employers have been placed in a situation where the wrong decision will result in people becoming seriously ill and dying, and will, therefore, appreciate that there can be no compromise on health and safety. If this means that schools and colleges need to delay reopening to pupils in order to ensure they can complete all necessary planning, consultation and training of staff required to safeguard the health and safety of staff and pupils, then that position must be accepted.

The NASUWT looks forward to working with you to ensure that the health, safety and welfare of staff and pupils are protected in these unprecedented circumstances.

We trust that given the extremely serious situation, you will recognise the importance of meeting immediately in January to develop an effective and coordinated response to this ongoing situation.

I look forward to your response to these serious and urgent matters.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary