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Our Ref: 210107/Weir P/PR/FC

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General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education
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BT19 7PR

Dear Peter,

Coronavirus Vaccine

The introduction of further national restrictions and the partial closure of schools and colleges, whilst necessary, is deeply regrettable. It will further disrupt the provision of education and have profound consequences for the wellbeing of all children and young people.

The NASUWT believes that the best place for children and young people is to be in safe schools and colleges. However, this requires that essential mitigations are in place to minimise the risks of virus transmission between pupils and staff on school/college sites and that vital control measures are needed to limit social contacts which could further impact adversely on public health.

The NASUWT has clear evidence that teachers and education staff are at higher risk of contracting the Coronavirus and it is our view that further measures are needed to protect all education staff from contracting this deadly virus and to ensure that education onsite within schools and colleges can be restored fully without further ongoing disruption to provision. Freedom of Information Act data obtained by the NASUWT shows that the prevalence of the virus (in cases per 100,000 over 7 days) shows that staff working in both secondary and primary schools are far more likely to be infected than the wider community, with rates of virus prevalence amongst school staff between 3-4 times higher than the prevalence rate for adults in the local area. It is clear from the data we have obtained that staff working in schools and colleges are at significantly higher risk of infection than the general population, which is not surprising given the lack of social distancing, PPE and other measures in schools.

It is in the national interest that all teachers and education staff are prioritised in the roll-out of the Coronavirus vaccines. Teachers and education staff are unable to practice social distancing from their pupils and few are provided with essential PPE as part of their day-to-day roles. With provision for younger age children and for

children with special and additional learning needs, particularly those in special schools and alternative provision, it is clear that there are additional risks present which are comparable to those that exist in the provision of health and social care. It is, of course, right that health and social care staff are prioritised for access to the vaccine, but the NASUWT also believes that teachers must also be identified as a priority group for the vaccine.

The public agrees with us. Nine out of ten agree that teachers should be included in a priority group for vaccinations so that schools can re-open fully and safely. The majority of the public also agree that teachers should be accorded the same priority status as frontline healthcare workers and social care staff.

Through the autumn term, we have seen a bad situation getting worse by the day. Now, at the start of 2021, the position is as bad if not worse than it was in March/April 2020. The impact on this generation of children and young people should not be underestimated and, it is our view, that everything that can be done should be done to ensure the safe and sustainable resumption of school/college based education for all pupils as quickly as possible.

We have seen too much disruption to children's education. Whilst teachers are doing everything that is being asked of them, they also deserve the same levels of protection in the face of this highly deadly and highly contagious virus.

Getting schools open again as soon as possible, without further disruption, means not only that lessons need to be learned, but also that credible and sustainable solutions are implemented. This means that tougher control measures will be needed to ensure workplace safety, together with priority roll out of the Coronavirus vaccines to all frontline education staff in order to minimise further disruption to children's education.

We hope that you will give this matter your fullest consideration and support.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary