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General Secretary/Ysgrifennydd Cyffredinol: Dr Patrick Roach

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Dear Minister,

TEST AND TRACE

The NASUWT is in receipt of reports across the country from schools and from our members who are expressing serious concerns about the failure of the Covid-19 testing system and the impact of this on schools.

In particular, areas where additional local restrictions have been introduced due to the increase in the R-number are now unable to cope with demand for tests. Teachers, support staff and children and young people are unable to access tests where they have Covid-19 symptoms. Employers are struggling to deal with the implications and consequences.

The risk assessments that schools have relied upon are predicated on access to Covid-19 testing and the capacity to effectively and appropriately isolate suspected and confirmed cases. Pupils sent home with symptoms are facing uncertainty about when or where they will be able to access a test. With the delay in testing, pupils and staff who are part of a 'bubble' within a school are not being isolated even where there are multiple suspected cases and/or where multiple pupils displaying symptoms have already been sent home. This is putting at risk the health and safety of others within the school and within the local community.

Schools appear to be seeking to do their utmost to carry on. However, we have reports that schools are unable to cope with a situation that is becoming increasingly out of control.

There is clearly a need for further advice from the Welsh Government to all schools reiterating the essential steps they must follow in these circumstances and where pupils or staff are unable to obtain a test.

We therefore ask that, as a matter of urgency, the Welsh Government confirm to schools that:

- i. it remains essential that schools ensure that where a pupil or member of staff is confirmed with Covid-19 or has symptoms of the same, they must be sent home/stay at home immediately and seek a test;
- ii. individuals who live in a household with someone who has Covid-19 should self-isolate for the prescribed period;
- iii. employers must not put at risk the health and safety of the school community and must have regard to the Welsh Government's guidance;
- iv. schools must not expect or require pupils or staff with Covid-19 symptoms to remain in school and they should direct pupils and staff who have symptoms to stay at home;
- v. where schools are unable to maintain appropriate staffing levels due to staff absences, they should send groups of pupils home in order that they can continue to maintain safe working practices.

Finally, given the current challenges regarding the availability and demand for Covid tests, we are seeking commitment from the Welsh Government that the education sector will be prioritised for the allocation of tests while the current situation continues.

I await your reply to these very urgent and pressing matters.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary

cc. Kirsty Williams, AM, Minister for Education