

COVID-19 OPENING OF SCHOOLS

Dear Member

Schools are now opening fully at the start of the new academic year. This year, they are opening in the unprecedented circumstances of a COVID-19 global pandemic. At this time, when many of you are understandably feeling apprehensive and anxious about your return to the workplace, I want to assure you of the Union's continuing support.

Employers and schools have been working on their plans for opening whilst facing the challenge of constantly changing government guidance, the majority of which has been issued during the Summer break, while schools were closed. As a result, some have been unable to finalise and share their plans with employees, in advance of staff returning and the NASUWT recognises that this may be adding to the concerns of some members.

Therefore, in preparation for the opening of schools, the NASUWT has:

- **written to all employers**, setting out clearly the Union's expectations for the measures which need to be in place for the safe opening of schools, reminding them of their statutory responsibilities for the safety of employees and reserving our members' rights and entitlements to a safe working environment;
- provided a comprehensive **health and safety checklist** for use by employers, setting out the measures which should be taken in preparation for the opening of schools;
- published a **self-audit checklist** for members in vulnerable groups, such as those with underlying health conditions, who are pregnant or who have a disability, and those from a BAME background who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19, to assist them in obtaining individual risk assessments, prior to the opening of schools, to inform decisions about whether it is safe to return to the workplace;
- hosted webinars for members in vulnerable groups, and more generally for members, on COVID-19-related issues, to provide advice and support;
- ensured all the information on the NASUWT website, including the FAQs, reflects the latest guidance from the Government and provides advice on the issues members have been raising with the Union during the Summer that relate to the opening of schools;
- continued to meet regularly with Ministers and government officials to raise with them the concerns of members, to seek to secure government guidance which reflects and addresses those concerns, and to reinforce the Union's position that paramount at all times in the decisions being made about the opening of schools must be the safety of staff and pupils;
- provided NASUWT local secretaries and other activists with advice and information to enable them to engage with employers about their plans for opening and to seek to rectify any deficiencies there may be in that planning.

On returning to the workplace, the NASUWT advises all members to ensure that they:

- have been provided with a copy of the school's COVID-19 risk assessment, which should contain all of the safety measures your employer is putting in place. Risk assessments should be the subject of consultation with staff, and if on reading the risk assessment you have any concerns about the measures being proposed or believe that something has been omitted, you should raise this with your headteacher immediately and contact the NASUWT for advice;
- are clear about and observe at all times the safety procedures;
- use the **incident report form** provided by the NASUWT to report any incidents where the COVID-19 safety arrangements are breached or the employer fails to implement them;
- regularly review the NASUWT coronavirus hub on the Union's website, which is kept up to date with the latest advice and guidance and FAQs, and keep a check on their emails for the Union's COVID-19 updates.

Members in vulnerable groups are advised to:

- make sure that they have received and are satisfied with their individual risk assessment;
- ensure that the measures in the risk assessment are implemented fully in the workplace;
- contact the NASUWT immediately if they have any concerns about their health and safety.

Supply teacher members, when agreeing to take up an offer of supply work, are advised to:

- make sure they request a copy of the school's risk assessment and that COVID-19 safety procedures are made available to them on or, where possible, before their arrival at the school;
- ask, in addition to the general risk assessment, for an individual risk assessment if they have an underlying health condition, a disability, are pregnant and/or are from a BAME background.

The NASUWT is committed to doing all it can to support the safe opening of schools for you and for your pupils. Protecting your health, safety and welfare is our priority.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for help, advice and support.

Best regards



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary



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