



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary
NASUWT
Hillscourt Education Centre
Rose Hill
Rednal
Birmingham
B45 8RS

7th December 2020

I am writing further to your letters of 12 and 13 November, two letters of 17 November and letter of 3 December in which you raise a range of concerns about the safety of schools in the Coronavirus pandemic, the consistency of public health advice, the use of the NHS Test and Trace App, the transparency of workforce data and parents sending back children to school prematurely after self-isolation.

I have welcomed the opportunity to discuss these issues in our regular meetings but wanted to provide some specific reassurances on some of the issues you have raised.

The safety of pupils and staff is of course absolutely central to our approach and we are working closely with Public Health England to ensure our guidance is up-to-date and reflects the latest public health advice and evidence. Schools and colleges have done an excellent job in implementing protective measures in schools and I am profoundly grateful for their efforts. We are aware there may be some instances where concerns over safety cannot be resolved through engagement with the school leadership and trade union representatives and such concerns can be raised with the Health and Safety Executive. Where HSE identify employers who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, they will consider taking a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks.

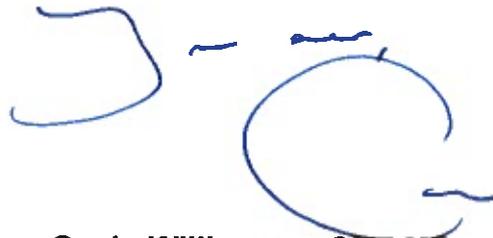
With regard to the concerns raised about public health advice, the position you have set out regarding the definition of close contacts should be the one being used across the public health system, whether that is through the national helpline or through regional and local health protection teams. The use of

seating plans, timetables and other information held by the school (in particular schools teaching year 7 and above) is important in supporting the identification of close contacts.

On the NHS Test and Trace App, I understand NASUWT officials were able to attend a presentation involving the DHSC NHS App team on the x November. On the back of that discussion, DHSC and DfE officials are engaging on the points raised. It is a matter for individual staff members as to whether they use the App, but employers should not be preventing staff from using the App if they wish to use it.

I can also confirm that the department will be publishing data on staff absences collected through the daily data collection early in the new year. The usual quality assurance processes ahead of publication of the data are being conducted.

Finally, in your letter of 3 December you raised the issue of parents sending children back to school prematurely after they have been sent home to isolate for displaying COVID – 19 symptoms. In the majority of cases, schools and parents will be in agreement that a child with symptoms or who is a close contact of someone who tested positive should not attend school, given the potential risk to others. In the event that a parent or guardian insists on a child attending school prematurely, schools can take the decision to refuse the child if in their reasonable judgement it is necessary to protect their pupils and staff from possible infection with coronavirus (COVID-19). Any such decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and the current public health advice.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'G' followed by a large 'W' and a horizontal line.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education