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NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

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

Dear Gavin

I am writing to you today following the announcement by the Prime Minister yesterday of further national restrictions in response to the significantly increased threat to public health from the Coronavirus pandemic.

As a second wave of Coronavirus transmission has prompted the Government to uprate the COVID threat level to 4, we believe that there are implications for schools and colleges which now urgently need to be considered and addressed by your Department and by the Government.

The NASUWT is concerned that whilst the Government has announced a number of additional measures to be followed by the general public and in workplaces, no additional measures have been announced to ensure that the virus does not continue to spread within schools and colleges.

We are further concerned that the additional emergency measures announced by the Government yesterday do not go far enough and that urgent and additional action is needed to protect the health and safety of teachers and support staff across all schools and colleges.

We note that whilst the Government has again stated the need for people to work from home if possible and to minimise social contact, no corresponding advice has been provided to those who work in schools who are being expected to continue working as normal.

We are concerned to note that your Department has not issued any advice to school and college employers following yesterday's announcements which require, in the event of the increased COVID threat level, that employers review and update their risk assessments and control measures in consultation with employees and unions.

You will know from our previous discussions that there are significant numbers of teachers who are pregnant, or who are clinically extremely vulnerable, or who have underlying conditions or who are from higher risk groups (e.g. BAME teachers) who are working in schools and who are already extremely concerned and anxious about their safety at work. Their concerns have been heightened as a result of the increased incidence of Coronavirus transmission, together with the lack of social

distancing within schools and the absence of PPE within classrooms. These risks continue to present serious concerns for our members. We, therefore, ask you to confirm what additional measures you intend to implement to minimise the risk of the Coronavirus being transmitted to these groups within the workforce.

In my letter of 14th September 2020, I asked for your response to a number of urgent matters regarding COVID-safe practices in schools. I am still awaiting a response from you on the measures you will be taking to address:

- (i) the lack of additional funding for schools which is leading schools to make critical decisions (e.g. in respect of cleaning, PPE, etc) on the basis of cost rather than health and safety considerations;
- (ii) the depletion of staffing numbers in schools which is resulting in serious operational difficulties for schools in maintaining safe working practices at all times;
- (iii) the heightened risks to health for vulnerable teachers (including teachers who are otherwise categorised as clinically extremely vulnerable, pregnant teachers, older teachers, disabled teachers and teachers from particular BAME backgrounds) following your guidance on those who may return to work in schools;
- (iv) the lack of social distancing within schools, the absence of PPE and other effective non-pharmaceutical interventions;
- (v) the failure of the test and trace system to keep up with the demands on it;
- (vi) how your Department will have regard for the practical and logistical challenges within schools to meet the Government's demands for COVID-safe working practice;
- (vii) the need for further guidance and measures to be taken by your Department to ensure that schools adopt and maintain COVID-safe working practices;
- (viii) the need for your Department to implement appropriate measures to ensure compliance across all schools.

I also request clarification from you as to:

- a) the data on which the Department is relying with regard to virus transmission and the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases involving pupils and staff in schools since 1st September;
- b) the position in respect of teachers who are unable to access childcare due to local lockdown restrictions and/or where a child's school/bubble is required to self-isolate;
- c) the support and assistance the Government intends to provide to supply teachers who are unable to obtain work as a consequence of how schools are applying your Guidance on COVID-safe working practice.

We await your swift response to these extremely 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