



James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

21 July 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Re. Covid – need for a summer action plan to prevent a winter of absences in schools

We are writing as school leader and school staff unions to urge the government to use the summer holidays to reduce the risk of another winter of Covid disruption and illness in schools.

We are sure you will agree that the latest figures from the Department for Education - showing that pupil attendance has hit a five month low - are a real cause for concern, given that they coincide with yet another Covid wave. Almost one in five eligible secondary students were absent on 7 July.

With scientists predicting an even larger wave of infections in the autumn term, we are urging the government to use the summer holidays to take the following preventative measures:

- **Provide additional funding to schools to improve ventilation and support spiralling energy costs.** Schools could use this to implement a programme of maintenance to improve natural ventilation by ensuring all windows can be opened and air vents are cleared, as well as consider other forms of ventilation where necessary. A study in Italy overseen by the Hume foundation in March this year found that efficient mechanical ventilation systems can reduce the transmission of Covid-19 in schools by more than 80%. The severe heatwave this week further highlights the importance of sufficient ventilation systems in schools.
- **Provide HEPA air filtration devices to all schools for September** as an immediate measure while schools improve their ventilation. The Department for Education's data on the use of CO2 monitors and air cleaning units shows that only 1287 schools out of a total of 24,413 in England have been provided with air filters, and given schools have multiple classrooms, this is nowhere near sufficient.
- **Re-establish funding for schools to cover supply costs for teaching and support staff absences in the autumn term.** This has been a major additional expense for schools over the last two years, which they will be even less able to afford in the next academic year as school budgets are tightened further.
- **Make lateral flow tests available for free to all staff and pupils in education settings** as a key measure to reduce transmission and disruption to learning.

- **Issue clear public health guidance** on what the public should be doing to minimise the chance of infection. The absence of such clear messaging is extremely concerning.
- **Run a public health messaging campaign on vaccination** given the very low rates of childhood vaccination as recorded in the national flu and Covid-19 surveillance report.
- **Publish updated guidance for schools on face coverings** when dealing with increased Covid cases.
- **Reinstate the need for Covid risk assessments**, including for vulnerable workers and pregnant staff, to mitigate against further disruption and illness from the predicted winter wave of infections.

Given what has been learnt about the level of educational disruption and illness this virus can still cause, and with education staff having among the highest rates of Long Covid according to the ONS, in our view the Government must act now.

We therefore urge you to immediately set out your plans for using the school holidays to protect learning and health in the winter.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Barton
General Secretary | ASCL



Avril Chambers
National Officer | GMB



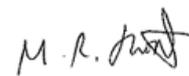
Paul Whiteman
General Secretary | NAHT



Patrick Roach
General Secretary | NASUWT



Mary Boustead & Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretaries | NEU



Mike Short
National Secretary | UNISON



Clare Keogh
Regional Officer | Unite