

For the attention of:
Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services
CC: Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education

5 November 2020

Dear Minister for Health and Social Services,

REGULAR TESTING FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Thank you for your response to our letter about the difficulties experienced by schools staff when accessing tests. The initial challenges have settled since the testing capacity expanded and the turnaround time has improved.

The contribution schools staff have made throughout this pandemic is immense. Children across Wales have clearly benefited in many ways from the full return to schools from September. School staff have continued to work during the Firebreak period and have been unable to make the most of their half term break, which fell in this Firebreak period.

Unfortunately, we continue to see a rise in COVID19 cases across Wales and it is not entirely clear how big an impact the operation of schools has had upon transmission within communities.

The post Firebreak period will mark a critical point in terms of managing the outbreak and, now more than ever, we believe there is a strong case for the regular testing of school staff to take place.

As you mention in your response, school staff form one of the priority groups for testing, but we think a more proactive testing approach, such as that taken in the care sector, could provide useful intelligence to help bring the spread of the virus under control.

School staff have shown huge commitment and determination throughout this period. The majority of schools staff are keen to continue to support the safe

operation of schools, but many feel vulnerable and have concerns over the risk of being infected and the risk of spreading the infection to loved ones and the wider community. A more robust testing process for schools staff would undoubtedly instil a higher level of confidence across the workforce and would recognise the critical role they play in society.

School support staff have fed back to UNISON that their mental health and wellbeing continues to be negatively impacted. As mentioned already, school support staff were unable to spend their half term break in a way they would normally. They have had little opportunity to fully recuperate from what was a tough first half term back at school. It is essential that everything possible is done to support these workers, and a regular testing process would go some way in alleviating the concerns many are experiencing.

As ever, we thank you for the continued discussions between UNISON and the Welsh Government, and we look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Yours sincerely

Rosie Lewis
UNISON Cymru Wales
Schools Lead

Jonathan Lewis
UNISON Cymru Wales
Chair - School Support Staff Forum