



Jeremy Miles MS
Minister for Education and the Welsh Language
Welsh Government
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By email

30 September 2021

Dear Minister

Thank you for sharing the letter with us (28th September). Sadly, this has not landed well with our members.

In the spirit of social partnership we are deeply concerned this was not discussed with us in advance. If it had been, we could have provided clarity on the asks of the profession. Morale amongst the education workforce is incredibly low. Staffing is a struggle, because of a lack of measures to mitigate against the spread of Covid-19.

“Everyone wants to support our school communities but there was a general feeling that this should not be at the expense of the well-

being of staff, because ultimately it is the children in school who are then affected when staff morale deteriorates."

Union Member

We appreciate that we are not in the same place with Covid-19 as we were a year ago. However, the pandemic is not over. The vast majority of children remain unvaccinated, and Welsh Government's own statements refer to 1 in 7 children contracting Long Covid. We believe that means mitigations should be put in place as a matter of urgency.

Schools are places to work and learn. We would expect that Welsh Government can provide guidance which supports the workforce in setting in place measures which help keep staff, learners and the wider population safe. Any setting would expect measures to protect the workforce, the public and visitors, in line with their specific risks. To be clear, this is not about asking for 'harsher' expectations on young people, but helping keep them and the education professionals safe from harm.

Key asks

Framework and mitigations

- To review the current framework risk levels and mitigation measures to determine whether more stringent measures are needed to maintain the continuity of education e.g. grouping of learners, staggered session times, isolating contacts, mask wearing
- Produce clear guidance on expectations for schools to support learners at home due to self-isolation or class/school closures
- Produce clear guidance for schools on the use of CO2 monitors
- Produce and fund a clear strategy on how to deal with issues of poor ventilation when they arise. This should include funding set aside to address any significant issues identified.
- Removing the phrase 'business as usual' from the framework to more accurately reflect the situation in schools
- To support schools in giving a consistent message to the public that does not put schools in conflict with parents

- Ask PHW to update their outbreak guidance as a matter of urgency, to ensure it reflects the very real challenges faced by schools¹
- Review qualifications to ensure any Plan B reflects on the fact that current exam cohorts have faced maximum disruption and continue to do so – particularly years 11 and 13
- Include mitigations for ‘Very High’ within the Framework, and make preparations for all schools to move to that level as necessary

Funding

- To clearly commit to funding covid-related staff absence, including cover for staff with caring responsibilities, staff who are 28 weeks pregnant and staff who need to self-isolate
- Fund all measures needed to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 – including any works to ensure windows can be opened, HEPA filters etc, based on individual risk assessments

TTP

- To increase capacity in the TTP system so schools have sufficient levels of support
- To review all TTP guidance and approaches to supporting schools and bringing consistency to the system across all LHBs

“Combining classes” is a deeply flawed idea. Our members have seen whole classes, and indeed schools, having to close because of Covid-19 outbreaks. Combining classes will make this situation worse and shatter an already low staff morale.

As trade unions, we have suggested meeting with you, and believe that you should now meet with us as a priority. It is clear from the letter that you need to engage with us, and we look forward to meeting with you.

¹ <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/educational-and-childcare-settings/>

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