



Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister

Jeremy Miles MS
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

By email

27th October 2021

Dear First Minister and Minister,

We are writing as unions representing members of the education workforce ahead of the Welsh Government Review of Covid-19 mitigations this week, to urge you to give schools the guidance and resources they need to keep pupils safely learning for the rest of this term.

As you will be aware, Welsh Government data shows that Covid-19 cases among school-aged children surged this term, with attendance for those in Year 11 consistently the lowest.¹ The infection rate in Wales is currently the highest in the UK.²

We welcome that Welsh Government has decided to spend money on ventilation in education settings and is in the process of rolling out CO2 monitors. We will be writing to local authorities asking them how schools will access appropriate funding in their area.

¹ <https://gov.wales/attendance-pupils-maintained-schools>

²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19infectionsurveypilot/22october2021#percentage-of-people-who-had-covid-19-in-england-wales-northern-ireland-and-scotland>

However, cases in schools are still unacceptably high, and we ask that you now support every mitigation possible to ensure safety for everyone in schools in Wales and work with the unions to set a clear threshold for closing classes/schools.

Staff absence is still impacting on education with some children suffering disruption, and all staff under enormous strain, as a result. The Welsh Government has the opportunity to act now in support of our schools in Wales.

It is unclear when the impact of the vaccination programme for 12- to 15-year-olds will begin to be felt and so in the meantime more needs to be done to prevent the spread. Many other countries in Europe, that have kept in place proportionate mitigation measures in schools, such as face coverings and quarantine of close contacts, whilst rolling out a vaccination programme, have not experienced the back-to-school surge in cases that we have seen in Wales.

Without a change in the support and guidance now, the health of some children, vulnerable staff, parents or grandparents, could be compromised. This is an urgent problem, and we look forward to your swift response.

Yours sincerely,

Rosie Lewis,
Regional Organiser,
UNISON Cymru

Mary van den Heuvel
Senior Policy Officer,
NEU Cymru