

9 Columbus Walk
Brigantine Place
Cardiff
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2-7-20

Dear Minister,

I write to express the frustration of NAHT members that details of September return to school plans have not been published.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic schools across Wales have supported their learners, and wider school communities, and opened as childcare hubs for the children of key workers and vulnerable children.

NAHT members have always respected your desire to bring back as many children as possible to school to support their well-being and help prepare them for the new normal. They have embraced the June return for all children and done their utmost to project positivity during these uncertain times.

For many schools, there are just two weeks left of the current summer term, and there is still no clarity from the Welsh Government on what September will look like. It is unacceptable that schools, parents and pupils do not know at this late stage what to plan for in the Autumn term.

NAHT continues to engage in the conversations with education officials on the planning process; however, without immediate publication of your expectations of schools and your detailed advice in support of those expectations, it will be impossible for leaders to plan and implement effectively.

Up until now, the clarity provided by the Welsh Government regarding schools has enabled school leaders to plan and deliver effectively. But a lack of clarity now, at this most sensitive moment, risks putting children in Wales at a serious and unnecessary disadvantage when they return in September.

School leaders require a clear explanation of what is needed and your guidance as to safe implementation. In the absence of such, the Wales Executive Committee has resolved to request that you confirm the following so that it can plan an orderly return in the new academic year.

- That the Welsh Government will require the current social distancing guidance in schools at two metres for September to be maintained
- That the Welsh Government will continue to work with trade unions and other stakeholders throughout the summer on catch-up plans when schools return
- That the Welsh Government will delay any announcement that restrictions will ease in schools until after the summer break as staff will not be available to implement those changes.

Turning around schools to comply with the June return guidance was an enormous task both strategically and physically. Plans were drawn up at short notice, classrooms were stripped down to the essentials, new processes and procedures were brought in, and rigorous risk assessments were drawn up. Teams worked tirelessly on return schedules, catch-up lessons and engaged with parents to reassure them and their children that school was a safe place to come back to. They did this knowing what was expected of them, and it worked. School leaders and their teams stand ready to do this again based on your decisions, but the complexity of the task means that time to do so is running out.

Our members share the ambition to get as many children back into school as possible, and they will endeavour to do just that within their current plans to increase capacity.

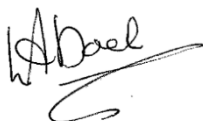
NAHT's Wales Executive Committee assesses that if the Welsh Government fails to publish its plans and guidance by Monday 6 July, there is a serious risk of schools not being ready to open in September because there will not be the time to put those plans into practice. You cannot expect school staff to work through the summer break when many have worked continually since the February half term. An exhausted workforce going into the most demanding academic year ever experienced will be of little use to the children and communities they serve.

In the absence of a statement from the Welsh Government, schools and governing bodies have been forced to put their own arrangements in place because they feel they cannot afford to wait any longer. This will once again result in a mixed economy across Wales.

NAHT's position remains that if school leaders feel, having carried out risk assessments and in conjunction with their governing bodies, that the school is not safe to reopen, our advice to those members will be not to reopen. Head teachers are responsible for their school settings, and they are being asked to make a judgement call on September without knowing what your ambition is and, crucially, what safety arrangement need to be adopted.

A failed September return will do more harm to education than continuing with the current arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Laura Doel
Director
NAHT Cymru