

22 October 2020

Dear Gavin

We are concerned both by reports from our members working in secondary schools that the increasing incidence of pupils having to isolate either because they have, or have been in close contact with someone who has Covid, is increasing rapidly, and by the figures from the ONS suggesting that secondary school aged pupils are showing the greatest rise in Covid cases, which underlies what our members are reporting.

Irregular attendance causes a wide range of systemic and individual problems for schools and colleges and for pupils. Members tell us that even when in school pupils are distracted and unsettled because of their different, and irregular, periods of absence, and that standards of discipline are declining. We were particularly concerned, yesterday, to see that the attendance figures for secondary pupils in some areas of high deprivation, were so low – Knowsley at 61% attendance and Calderdale at 64%, being two key examples.

We would now appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss ways in which the situation could be improved.

In particular, we want to explore with you the potential of moving to rotas in secondary schools, for older pupils. This move is envisaged in the DfE's tiers of intervention. We are of the view that it is now necessary to consider having the conversation with civic leaders and school leaders on what these rotas should look like. Rotas will enable better social distancing in schools, and proper, regularised arrangements to be made to enable high quality blended learning to be planned for and delivered.

We think this is an important discussion given the recent large increase in cases in secondary schools and the modelling for SAGE which suggest that alternating week-on, week - of school closure with half class sizes could have a significant effect on transmission - equivalent to closing all hospitality venues.

We are gaining very good information from our members who are operating rotas in their colleges. There are examples of very good practice which are worth sharing and disseminating throughout the profession.

Teachers would be in school every day and would teach their normal timetable, but half the children would be being taught remotely in any one week. These children would, however, be taught every lesson.

We would be pleased to meet with you urgently to discuss rotas.

With best wishes

Mary Bousted
Joint General Secretary

Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretary