

## **Joint statement from Welsh Government, WLGA and support staff trade unions**

On the 3rd June, the Minister for Education confirmed the Welsh Government's proposal for schools to reopen to all pupils on 29<sup>th</sup> June to 'check in, catch up and prepare' ahead of the summer break.

Following this, reassurances were sought by those trade unions who represent support staff, including teaching assistants. Discussions have been ongoing over the past few weeks to provide those reassurances.

The conversations have focused upon three main areas: risk assessments; the increase demand for cleaning staff; the antibody testing and Test, Trace, Protect.

In relation to risk assessments, the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association are pleased to be able to provide the following reassurance to the trade unions:

### Scrutinising School Risk Assessments

The Welsh Government guidance states:

"Employers have a duty to consult their workforce regarding on health and safety matters and should involve them in the assessment and development of relevant control measures. Employers must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, a representative chosen by staff".

Head teachers and school governors are responsible for ensuring that there is a risk assessment which informs the actions necessary to maintain safety in the school. They have a duty to consult the health and safety representative in assessing and developing the relevant control measures. The health and safety representative, normally selected by a recognised trade union, is responsible for scrutinising the risk assessment to ensure that it meets the needs of staff.

The health and wellbeing of our learners and our education workforce is at the forefront of any planned increase in operation for our schools. With this clearly in mind, work is already underway to adapt the All Wales Covid-19 Workforce Assessment tool specifically for education staff thought to be vulnerable or at risk.

This will be shaped and informed by a working group which will include representatives from schools known to support BAME communities. It is also being supported by Ministers with a direct offer to meet with the working group to ensure this work is progressed as quickly as possible.

We have also been able to agree a process whereby concerns can be escalated to Ministerial level regarding the content and implementation of risk assessments if they are unable to be resolved either in a school setting or at a local authority level.

It has been possible for the Welsh Government to confirm that where schools have unmanageable costs due to necessary increased expenditure on school cleaning

they should notify their local authority as these would be an eligible cost through the Welsh Government Local Government Hardship Fund.

The Welsh Government has produced a full explanation of Test, Trace, Protect, antibody and antigen testing specifically designed for all school-based staff. This has been provided to the local authorities and to trade unions for them to circulate to all staff in school settings. This recognises the need for clear information about the Test, Track and Protect programme. It aims to provide confidence for all staff that appropriate testing and processes are in place to respond quickly to cases in schools and stop the virus spreading. The programme of antibody monitoring is in place to allow us to track the prevalence of coronavirus in schools and education environments and will be expanded as we move through into next term.

The Welsh Government, WLGA and trade unions will gather vital information from the return to school planned from 29th June to help to inform the provision of education for all children from September. We all share the aim of ensuring a safe and successful future for our young people and this is dependent upon reducing significantly the amount of disruption that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused over the past three months.

Kirsty Williams, Education Minister, said: "I am pleased we've been able to make this joint statement today. By working together, Wales is the only country in the UK where all pupils will have the opportunity to return to school before the summer break."

Rosie Lewis, UNISON schools lead, said: "UNISON is pleased that our concerns have been listened to and issues around the risk assessment, increased demand for cleaning staff, and test, trace, protect have progressed.

"School support staff are a vitally important part of the schools workforce and it is essential their welfare is prioritised alongside teachers and pupils.

"The announcement today gives some additional clarity and, where we experience difficulties, there is now a coherent process to raise any local matters and have them addressed or escalated to a Welsh Government Minister if necessary."

Councillors Philippa Marsden and Ian Roberts, of the WLGA, said:

"We welcome the constructive conversations that have taken place over the past week and look forward to continuing to work closely with the trade unions as we are to deliver more education in classrooms for children across Wales."