

# Unions call for more Government support in schools during spring term



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“There has been much speculation about the possibility of more disruption to education over the next academic term as a result of the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

“As trade unions representing the vast majority of education staff, we wish to emphasise that teachers, leaders and support staff desperately want to be able to conduct face-to-face teaching for all children and young people on a consistent basis and without further interruption caused by the pandemic.



“Education staff have moved heaven and earth to support pupils and students throughout the course of the crisis and they remain committed to providing the best possible support for all children and young people.

“They are acutely conscious that this is essential particularly in supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people who have often been most badly affected by the pandemic both educationally and in terms of their wellbeing.

“But last term education staff were more likely than other workers to test positive and therefore to have to self-isolate, inevitably leading to disruption of education.

“Schools and colleges cannot on their own reduce the threat posed by the virus and they need from the Westminster government more than rhetoric about the importance of education.





“We need the minimum amount of educational disruption this term in order to avoid a third successive year where GCSEs, A-levels and other exams have to be cancelled, and thereby removing the uncertainty and additional workload for students and teachers.

“It is essential therefore that the government takes immediate and urgent steps to mitigate the risk of Covid transmission and that it provides more support to minimise disruption in schools and colleges by such steps as:

- Providing government-funded air cleaning units to every school and college classroom that needs these devices. While we welcome the provision of a small number of these units to special educational needs and alternative provision settings, the government’s decision to signpost all other schools and colleges to purchase this equipment from an ‘online marketplace’ is simply not good enough. We also question why the Westminster government takes such a different line on face coverings in secondary schools to Scotland and Wales when they use the same evidence.
- Committing to providing schools with more resources in the event that on-site Covid testing is again required. Secondary schools have once again been left in the lurch at the beginning of the spring term by being asked to set up and staff testing stations with little support from the government.





- Providing improved financial support to schools and colleges for the costs of supply staff to cover for Covid-related absence. The current government scheme contains so many complex conditions that it is inaccessible in many circumstances.
- Making it clear that all schools or colleges due for an Ofsted inspection this term can request that the inspection is deferred, and that their request will be automatically granted. This will enable teachers and leaders to focus on the immediate and urgent task in hand – that of supporting their pupils and students – and remove the unnecessary pressure and distraction of unhelpful inspections at this time.

“As a new year begins, we urge the government to work more collaboratively and constructively with education workforce representatives to keep schools and colleges open. By working side by side, we can remove unnecessary burdens and find solutions with government in the interests of all children and young people.”

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