

Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Building  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
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5 February 2024

Dear Secretary of State

## **Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)**

As you are aware, since the start of this academic year 231 schools have been identified as having Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) on their premises. This resulted in immediate full or partial closures to affected school sites. Leaders in affected schools and trusts have worked tirelessly to continue to provide education to their pupils in the most challenging of circumstances, including needing to arrange off-site provision in some cases, and to implement short-term solutions to get as many pupils as possible back on site. This has caused significant disruption to pupils' learning. For many schools, managing RAAC continues to create major issues, including lack of access to specialist equipment for specific subjects and limited or no catering facilities.

The danger of structural failure in school buildings where this type of concrete was used in construction has been known since at least 2018. The Department for Education's own annual report in 2021-22 included the condition of school buildings as one of six significant risks, classifying the risk as critical and worsening. It said '*There is a risk of collapse of one or more blocks in some schools which are at or approaching the end of their designed life-expectancy and structural integrity is impaired. The risk predominantly exists in those buildings built in the years 1945 to 1970 which used 'system build' light frame techniques.*'

In June 2023, the National Audit Office (NAO) reported on the condition of school buildings, and found more than a third of schools are now beyond their design life. Last month Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General at the NAO, referenced the crumbling infrastructure and maintenance backlogs in the public estate in his annual speech to Parliament.

The unacceptable length of time it has taken the government to act on a risk of this seriousness has led directly to the extremely difficult position in which many school leaders now find themselves.

ASCL members leading schools impacted by RAAC highlight several issues with which they require more support from government, as follows:

### **Inspection**

In the autumn term Ofsted avoided inspecting any education setting that was on the DfE's published list of education settings affected by RAAC.

We ask that you instruct Ofsted to continue to avoid scheduling for inspection any school on the published RAAC list until the school is fully operational, unless the headteacher has notified Ofsted that they are happy to undergo an inspection.

### **GCSE, A level and VTQ assessment**

Students in RAAC schools have suffered significant disruption to their learning, including periods of remote learning, and lack of access to classrooms and specialist equipment for several subject areas.

Where schools and colleges have had to close specialist provisions (such as art studios, science labs and technology workshops), students in these subjects should automatically be given special consideration for coursework and non-exam assessment (NEA) in any subjects affected. This should be at a cohort level,

without the need for centres to apply individually for each candidate, as is currently the case. Special consideration should include the maximum extended time to complete the NEA, and the maximum percentage of additional marks available under current JCQ guidance.

We ask that you confirm that these arrangements will be put in place.

We have called on the Chancellor to introduce a new recovery funding stream for all 231 RAAC-impacted schools in the Spring Budget. Schools could then use this funding to provide catch-up provision for pupils whose learning has been impacted by the RAAC crisis.

### **Financial support**

Schools affected by RAAC are suffering financial detriment. Many are still waiting for full reimbursement from the government of reasonable costs incurred in making their buildings safe in the short-term, and ensuring educational provision is maintained as much as possible.

In addition, as the true cost of addressing the problems associated with RAAC continues to emerge, it is essential that school revenue budgets are also protected. The unacceptable length of time taken to get approval for, commission and complete mitigation works means that schools are suffering increasing numbers of in-year pupil transfers to neighbouring schools. ASCL members in RAAC-affected schools are also reporting reduced admission applications for September 2024. The impact of this will have a long tail and manifest in financial detriment at school level for many years.

We therefore ask you to:

- ensure all outstanding RAAC-related spend by schools is reimbursed as soon as possible, and without unnecessary challenge
- provide ringfenced funding at previously agreed levels for RAAC-impacted schools where student numbers have declined as a result, as evidenced in medium-term financial plans
- support our ask to the Treasury for additional recovery funding for RAAC-impacted schools

### **Long-term plan for affected schools**

Schools with RAAC have worked extremely hard to provide short- to medium-term solutions to the problems this has created, and are working with DfE to plan remedial works. It is clear, however, that many schools will require much more substantial long-term solutions, including in many cases rebuilding projects. In most cases, these longer-term discussions have not yet even started.

We ask that you ensure that these long-term discussions start as soon as possible. This should include confirmation that these schools will either be included on the school rebuilding programme, or will receive a clear timeframe as to when and how the RAAC will be removed. All capital works should be dedicated funding for this purpose and not diverted from other essential spending.

Because of wider public and parental interest in this issue, we are writing this as an open letter. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns and requests with you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



**Geoff Barton**  
**General Secretary**

Association of School and College Leaders

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