

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

15 September 2020

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing to you on behalf of school and college leaders and governing boards. We are sure you will want to join us in congratulating leaders and staff on how they have managed the reopening of schools and colleges this term. However, that success is at significant risk.

We are compelled to express our mounting concern about difficulties in obtaining Covid tests and accessing timely advice from local health protection teams in responding to positive cases.

Test delays cause further disruption to children's education following the lockdown since March, and put pressure on staffing cover in schools and colleges.

We are also receiving reports of difficulties in obtaining timely advice from local health protection teams when there are positive cases. Schools are left in a position of either leaving close contacts of the infected person in school while they wait for guidance, or making a public health call themselves and deciding on who to send home. This places leaders in an impossible situation.

To give you a snapshot of the feedback from schools and colleges, between last Wednesday and 5pm on Monday, ASCL alone had received 276 emails on the test and trace system. Of those:

- 20 were positive – the system appears to be working relatively well in their area
- 264 said they had symptomatic staff and/or pupils who were struggling to access tests
- 51 said they were having problems getting in touch with their local health protection team

NAHT members have contacted the NAHT advice line in similar numbers reporting the same problems.

Schools and colleges are frustrated that having spent the summer painstakingly putting in place safety measures to enable reopening, they are immediately encountering a lack of testing and public health capacity. They feel the government should have foreseen the likely demand on the system, and ensured that it was able to cope.

But this frustration is overshadowed by a deep sense of foreboding about the potential for the system to become ever-more riddled with delays as more cases emerge. This would be increasingly disruptive to children's education and make staffing unsustainable.

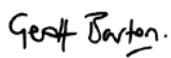
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Our purpose in writing is to implore you to personally take charge of this situation in the interests of keeping our schools and colleges open, and protecting pupils and staff.

We are aware of plans to improve testing capacity but this must happen as soon as possible, and it must be further supplemented if it proves inadequate. Local health protection teams must have the resources they need in order to be able to deliver timely advice.

We are sure you agree that schools and colleges have done a fantastic job in putting in place complex safety systems in order to reopen to millions of children and young people. They now need the government to step up to the plate.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Barton
General Secretary - ASCL
Association of School and College Leaders



Paul Whiteman
General Secretary – NAHT
National Association of Head Teachers



Emma Knights
Chief Executive – NGA
National Governance Association