

28 August 2020

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
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Dear Gavin

1. Process for awarding grades

This year's process for awarding grades in A-levels, GCSEs and other qualifications has left many young people, parents and teachers with a sense of deep injustice. It has undermined public confidence, and raises questions about governance and oversight within the Department for Education and Ofqual. Parents and taxpayers will quite rightly be asking what went wrong and why.

We are asking you to commit to an urgent and independent inquiry into what happened this year in order to understand what went wrong and to learn lessons for the future. We are particularly concerned about the arrangements for examinations in summer 2021 and the fact that there is no contingency plan in the event of further disruption. The overriding priority must be focused on ensuring that there is a robust strategy in place to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged next year.

2. Performance tables

We share your commitment to having all schools open to all pupils and we sincerely hope that this proves possible with minimal disruption in the 2020/21 academic year. However, it is likely that pupils will have to self-isolate in line with the government guidance, and that this may extend to groups having to do so. There is also the possibility of schools having to close partially or fully in response to local lockdown restrictions.

It is very clear even at this stage that the impact of this disruption will vary greatly between and within areas, and this will make any attempt to compare school performance through the publication of performance tables both meaningless and damaging. We are concerned it will potentially mislead parents and suggest system frailty, which will in turn leave the Department open to further criticism.

We would therefore ask that you rule out the publication of performance data in the 2020/21 academic year. We believe this move would be widely welcomed in the education sector and relieve staff of one more concern in what is already an extremely challenging time.

We would be grateful for your response on these two issues as a matter of urgency.

Yours



Geoff Barton
General Secretary – ASCL



Paul Whiteman
General Secretary – NAHT



Mary Bousted & Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretaries – NEU



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary – NASUWT