



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

1 April 2020

Dear Gavin,

We appreciate the swift steps the Department has taken to safeguard pupils and the education workforce. Teaching staff up and down the country are working hard to ensure that schools and colleges can remain open for children of critical workers, and for vulnerable children. I am sure you will join us in in applauding the professionalism and dedication of our teaching workforce, who are putting themselves at increased risk to support vulnerable children and ensure critical workers can continue their jobs.

Nevertheless, we are concerned that teachers on the frontline may not have access to priority COVID-19 testing, which is currently being developed. We feel that this is particularly important for teachers and school staff who continue to be asked to look after the most vulnerable children, even though most schools remain closed.

There is clearly a hierarchy of needs for priority testing for COVID-19. Other critical workers, including our brilliant NHS staff, are understandably prioritised.

In some school settings, NHS guidance on appropriate social distancing will be much harder to observe, particularly in schools which provide significant levels of specialist personal care and support.

While testing alone will not prevent the transmission of COVID-19, it will help schools and headteachers to make agile and informed decisions and ensure that those who are identified as having COVID-19 are not inadvertently asked to work on the frontline in close proximity to children.

We think that, as more testing becomes available, teachers and school staff should be considered one of the priority groups for testing for COVID-19.

We also ask that, where necessary, frontline teaching staff are given priority access to Personal Protective Equipment. We understand that the DfE will be providing further guidance about issuing Personal Protective Equipment to settings that may require it. We would urge the Department to publish this as soon as possible to end uncertainty.

We look forward to your response.

Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Committee