



By Post and email to DFMCSE@gov.scot

16 November 2020

John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister / Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Deputy First Minister

FACE COVERINGS

As you are aware the SSTA has focussed on the safety of all school staff and pupils throughout the pandemic and seeking that all mitigations possible are introduced into schools. We are concerned that measures that should have been in place at the reopening of school have been introduced at different stages as the pandemic has progressed. Unfortunately, the message to school staff and pupils is that measures in the community are important but those in schools are not. This can be highlighted by the difficulties pupils have in adhering to measures outside school when, in their eyes, they are not important in school.

The wearing of face coverings is the best example of this inconsistent message. SSTA members have reported significant numbers of pupils who refuse to wear face coverings in school, leading to a major difficulty in maintaining order in schools. Rather than insisting on the wearing of face coverings, some schools are choosing to interpret the government guidance as optional and thereby avoiding confrontation with the pupils. As a consequence, school discipline and good order is undermined and is ultimately putting all the school community at risk of contracting Covid-19. Please find attached a report of our school reps survey that explains the situation and outlines the fears of teachers in schools. The situation outlined in this survey remains the case, following meetings with large numbers of members in the past week.

As you know, schools are doing a tremendous job in remaining open and continuing education for all pupils in this 'education recovery year'. Teachers have much to contend with without the additional daily challenge of pupils undermining their authority, by refusing to comply with the wearing of face coverings. However, your reluctance to make face coverings mandatory in school and not supporting schools in taking measures to ensure compliance of the wearing face coverings, is compounding the problem.

The SSTA urges you to reconsider your view and give full support to schools in keeping the school community safe and in ensuring all measures including the provision of face coverings for all members of the school community, the strict adherence to physical distancing (reducing class sizes where necessary), the provision of hand cleaning materials in every classroom and the provision of plastic screens in classrooms where teachers require them.

I look forward to your response and the increase of mitigations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seamus Searson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Seamus Searson
General Secretary

Enc. Safety Measures in Schools are Putting Teachers at Risk - 29 October 2020
School Rep Survey Results - October 2020