

Christmas Arrangements for Schools – 11 December 2020

The SSTA met with John Swinney, Deputy First Minister this week and urged him to:

- reconsider the arrangements for Secondary Schools prior to Christmas and
- delay returning to face-face teaching in January

in order for everybody to be kept safe over the Christmas period.

This followed the SSTA letter to Local Authorities asking that schools move to 'remote learning' and fulfil their duty of care to keep everybody safe. Please see the SSTA letter 'Continuing Education and Keeping People Safe at Christmas' <https://ssta.org.uk/chief-exec-letter-dec20>.

It is our understanding from a reliable source that it was a reluctance among local authorities that measures were not introduced to move to remote learning as suggested in the SSTA letter to CEOs.

The Deputy First Minister said that he was following the medical and scientific advisers and believed that pupils were safer in school than in the community. The SSTA stated our strong belief that the voice of the class teacher has not been heard. He may not be receiving the message that teachers are struggling and fearful for their families particularly at Christmas. He did accept that remote learning will be necessary in some areas and it may be appropriate in secondary schools particularly with senior pupils. The SSTA stated that, following the decision to cancel examinations in 2021, the pressure on teachers and pupils could now be reduced and allow measures to keep people safe and have a 'real' break at Christmas.

The DFM said he would consider our comments and would be in further discussions at the forthcoming CERG. The SSTA stated our concern that the CERG consisted mainly of policy makers and managers of the education system who do not represent and speak on behalf of teachers.

The SSTA looks forward to secondary schools being given support to move to 'remote learning' where both pupils and teachers work from home. An alternative would be a move to 'blended learning' where class sizes are reduced to allow strict physical distancing measures to be put in place with some pupils working at home. These are not 'lockdown' measures but measures to continue education and keep people safe.