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General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

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Our ref: 211112 Somerville S-A/PR/LB

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Dear Shirley-Anne,

Online abuse of teachers - TikTok

There is increasing evidence from NASUWT's casework support for teachers and headteachers that confirms that the use of social media platforms to attack teachers is a significant problem affecting schools and the health and wellbeing of teachers.

The NASUWT has received a stream of reports of teachers who are being subjected to online abuse, including racist, sexist and homophobic comments as well as false and malicious allegations. I am sure that you will agree that the impact on teachers personal lives and their professional reputation can be devastating. You may be aware of the current TikTok craze, referred to as 'School Slander', which involves young people creating fake school accounts and posting images of teachers alongside defamatory allegations.

The NASUWT recognises the Government's intention to take action to secure online safety. However, we are concerned that the impact of a new wave of incidents targeting teachers on the TikTok social media platform requires more urgent action and intervention.

The NASUWT is calling on social media companies to take action to stamp out this abuse. We are also asking that all schools insist on taking firm action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff, particularly those who are subjected to online abuse.

Whilst we believe that social media companies cannot be allowed to hide behind spurious arguments when their platforms are being used and abused to denigrate teachers and headteachers, we urgently ask you to take appropriate action to ensure that TikTok and other social media companies address immediately this very serious issue and take full responsibility for the harm being caused by those who use these platforms to abuse teachers.

I have written to your Ministerial colleague, Christina McKelvie MSP, Minister for Equalities and Older People on this matter also.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary