

DfE COVID Workforce Fund – too little, too late and too short-term

Earlier this year, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that the Government would not be funding schools for the additional coronavirus-related costs of full reopening from September 2020 onwards and expected schools and academy trusts to meet these costs entirely from their previously allocated 2020/21 budgets.

The Government's decision was unacceptable to the NASUWT, and the Union is campaigning against the Government's refusal to fund schools sufficiently during the pandemic. The NASUWT has made it very clear to the Government that the costs of COVID control in schools and cover for coronavirus-related staff absence are spiraling and that, for schools to be able to continue to open safely, school funding must increase. In addition, it is unacceptable that schools must now develop their remote learning offers without sufficient additional funding.

The Secretary of State for Education has now announced the establishment of a short-term COVID Workforce Fund for schools. Initial details of this are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-funding-to-support-schools-and-colleges-during-covid-pandemic>. The DfE will provide more information of how schools can claim from this fund in due course.

The additional funding for schools has very significant limitations:

- Despite schools having to bear substantial additional coronavirus costs since they fully reopened in September 2020, with no additional funding, the new COVID workforce fund will only cover November and December 2020. No costs for September and October 2020, or for January 2021 onwards, will be able to be claimed;
- Only workforce costs can be claimed. Costs arising from additional cleaning or social distancing measures cannot be claimed.

The DfE has provided only limited information at this stage about the criteria and process for claiming additional funding, but there are arbitrary staff-absence-rates thresholds for claiming funding which will mean that many schools which have sustained substantial additional costs will not receive funding:

- Mainstream schools and colleges must be experiencing a short-term teacher absence rate at or above 20%, and/or a lower long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10%;
- Special schools and alternative provision schools must be experiencing a short-term teacher absence rate at or above 15%, and/or a lower long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10%, to be eligible.

If schools do not meet these thresholds, they will not be able to claim from the fund.

The NASUWT has made it clear to the DfE that this new funding will not even scratch the surface of what schools need, as schools need sufficient additional funding through to the end of the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, many schools will not be able to claim at all. The NASUWT, therefore, continues to demand from the Government adequate funding for schools during the pandemic.

The NASUWT will provide additional information and advice about claiming from the COVID Workforce Fund when this is released by the DfE. The Union continues to encourage NASUWT activists to engage with MPs and local authority elected members to make clear the inadequacy of school funding during the coronavirus pandemic.

NASUWT school funding briefing and campaigning materials are available at: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/coronavirus-guidance/full-reopening-of-schools/full-reopening-of-schools-england/school-funding-briefing-for-activists.html>.

