

## NORTHERN IRELAND TEACHERS' COUNCIL

C/O Ben Madigan House  
Belfast

RT96.0NW

I&S

17 March 2020

First Minister Arlene Foster  
Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill  
Stormont Castle  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast  
BT4 3TT

Dear First Minister and Deputy First Minister

We write on behalf of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) seeking urgent action to address the increasing concern around the safety of pupils and all school staff in the face of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

As you will be aware the advice issued to schools yesterday from the Department of Education stated that "We recommend all educational settings remain open unless advised otherwise". We are concerned that this recommendation is now in violation of the Prime Minister's direction to avoid 'non-essential' contact with others to curb coronavirus.

In the past 24 hours we have seen the closure of many public facilities in a bid to avoid gatherings and crowded spaces, everyone has been advised to work from home if they can, yet schools have been advised to remain open.

We call on you to bring an end to this uncertainty by announcing the date for school closures. At this time of crisis the NITC will do all in our power to work with the Department of Education to ensure that staff, pupils and parent remain safe and informed.

We are appealing for the Department to work with the NITC to ensure schools are provided with sufficient ability and guidance to plan for the period of closure. Provision must be made to ensure that inequalities and any detriment to pupil learning and welfare are mitigated whilst being mindful of the urgency and severity of the situation at hand.

A clear communication to parents from the government must be made to allay fears and ensure that punitive sanctions in the event of parents withdrawing their children from school are not imposed.

In the interest of the safety of school staff, teachers, principals and pupils we implore you to act immediately.

Best wishes

Gerry Murphy Chairperson  
Justin McCamphill Secretary  
Jacqui White  
Mark Langhammer  
Geri Cameron

cc Peter Weir, Minister of Education