

P-04-522 Asbestos in Schools – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 16.10.14.

Dear Kayleigh,

Thank you for sharing the correspondence with the Minister and with governors Wales.

I am a little surprised at the Minister's reference to the letter from Kevin Myers, the then acting Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive, as being "a letter from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in England", when the 2nd paragraph of that letter confirms that "HSE is a GB-wide regulator". It does not seem to me, that the Minister begins in any way to address the main issue arising from the letter of Mr Myers, namely that policy with regard to asbestos in schools is a matter for Welsh government.

The letter from Mr Myers clearly states that "the regulations do not include any requirement to provide information to parents, or to provide access to such information online, but the Welsh government could decide it wanted schools to do this." I would respectfully suggest that the Minister fails to address these points in any way.

With regard to the guidance, as committee will be aware, I have always welcomed this.

I note that the Minister intends to await the outcome of the consultation in England, before then considering its findings. Whilst I would welcome the fact that note will be taken of the consultation in England, I am disappointed that Welsh Government will not take the lead with regard to this important issue affecting schools in Wales. Unless I am very much mistaken, the consultation undertaken by the Department for Education in England, is specific to English schools. Action is still therefore required by Welsh government with regard to schools in Wales.

In the circumstances therefore, in view of the Minister's decision I would ask that the Petitions Committee review matters again once the outcome of the consultation in England is known.

Turning to the letter from Governors Wales, I welcome their considered response and in particular their view that there should be openness and transparency with regard to the issues of asbestos in schools.

It is my understanding that Wales TUC will be replying to correspondence from the Chair, but I have not had sight of this and cannot comment. I would welcome the opportunity to do so in due course.

Finally I would that over the last few days I am grateful for having had the opportunity of having met with politicians from different political parties both in Wales and England. This has included a round table meeting on asbestos at Westminster, hosted by Shadow Ministers Steven Timms MP and Kate Green MP where it was clear that the issue of asbestos in schools was being taken very seriously by them.

Once again I would thank the members of the Committee for continuing to consider this important matter.

Yours sincerely

Cenric

Dear Kayleigh

As you can see I have now received a copy of the letter of Wales TUC to the Petitions Committee.

I welcome their comments and would repeat my request that Welsh Government formally consults on the issue of Asbestos in Schools in Wales, with a view to formulating policy on the issue.

At the heart of the petition before the committee, is the call for openness and transparency. This was echoed by the statement made by the former CEO of HSE Geoffrey Podger at the Labour asbestos round table meeting on Tuesday when he said that “ It is not acceptable for a few to know the facts and keep them from others” . Clearly Governors Wales agrees with that statement.

I believe as part of their deliberations the Department for Education in England is considering the option of encouraging schools and local authorities to publish data on asbestos on line.

Thanks again

Cenric