

The Association of Electoral Administrators



Statement from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) on the 11 February 2021 letter sent to Returning Officers and Headteachers from Department of Education and Cabinet Office Ministers on the use of schools as polling stations on 6 May 2021.

We are extremely disappointed to see the letter from Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP and Lord True CBE sent to Returning Officers and Headteachers today (11 February 2021).

The Department for Education and Cabinet Office are correct that it is not possible in all cases to avoid using schools as polling stations.

Election teams regularly review current and potential polling stations venues in each electoral area and only use schools where there really is no other suitable alternative.

The availability of suitable venues for polling stations is already limited in many areas. This is understandably heightened this year due to the block-booking of many community and commercial venues as coronavirus testing or vaccination centres.

The announcement of extra funding for coronavirus-related election expenses last week has come too late to affect the polling station booking process. There is no time available to search out alternative premises and assess whether they can accommodate polling and additional Covid-related safety measures. This is exacerbated by the fact that information is already being sent to printers for poll cards to be sent out.

Guidance on cleaning and ventilating spaces after the polls is welcome, but this must not fall on polling stations teams. They already work a 17-hour unbroken shift on polling day to prepare their station before opening, manage the poll and then transport all materials from the polling station - including the sealed ballot boxes - back to election counts as quickly as possible after the polls close.

If the UK Government would prefer schools not to be used as polling stations in the future, we would expect this to be reflected in the law that expressly entitles Returning Officers to use publicly funded buildings, and in the resources made available to administer elections.

[Full text of the Ministers' letter from 11 February 2021](#)

[AEA Chief Executive's letter in reply sent on 11 February 2021](#)