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Convener
Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email to: es.committee@parliament.scot

14 September 2017

Dear James,

I am writing to you, as convener of the Education and Skills Committee, to provide an update regarding schools and aluminium composite cladding panels.

Let me assure you that the Scottish Government takes the health, safety and security of all school users very seriously. As you will be aware, a Ministerial Working Group on building and fire safety is overseeing a review of building and fire safety regulatory frameworks, following the tragic Grenfell Tower fire in London.

I wrote to all Education Authorities on 24 June to seek assurances about external cladding systems used in school buildings. In particular, whether any panels used in new build or refurbishment of high rise schools are made of a particular type of cladding made of Aluminium Composite Material (ACM).

All education authorities confirmed that ACM cladding systems have not been used on any school buildings over 18 metres. With regard to low rise school buildings, ACM was identified on 30 buildings across 12 local authorities which represents 1% of the school estate. The returns identified that different types of ACM have been used and the extent of coverage on individual buildings varies significantly. These would be appropriate if installed correctly and in accordance with building regulations. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring the safety of school buildings in their areas and as part of this work further checks were carried out.

On 1 August, I wrote again to all education authorities stating that as part of these checks, it is also important for a fire risk assessment to be carried out and that any necessary and appropriate interim fire safety measures put in place. The letter advised that local authorities should seek and follow professional advice on next steps depending on their own particular circumstances and what, if anything, these further checks and assessments show.

All local authorities responded to my letter and from the detailed responses received, I am reassured that local authorities have reviewed, fully investigated and, where appropriate, taken immediate action to ensure the fire safety of their schools. Going forward, the Ministerial Working Group for Building and Fire Safety will continue to liaise with local authorities. You can find details of their work online at <https://beta.gov.scot/groups/building-and-fire-safety-working-group/>.

I hope that you find this information and my comments reassuring.

Yours



JOHN SWINNEY