

19 May 2020

Coronavirus

An update for schools-based
Derbyshire UNISON members
and parents about the proposed
reopening of schools



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HERE WHEN YOU NEED US

The education unions are working together to protect the health and wellbeing of school students, school staff and the public at large against the government's ill-conceived plans to reopen schools too early. Every single school worker we have spoken to is opposed to these plans on health and safety grounds. It could literally kill people.

The unions nationally and locally will put pressure on government and local authorities but we need that pressure to come from as many workers as possible. We need school workers united over this issue.

If you're in UNISON already, pass this advice on to a colleague who isn't and urge them to sign up. If you've been passed this advice from a colleague who is in UNISON, help them and yourself by joining today. Together we can make a difference!

To join, simply visit joinunison.org via your PC, tablet or mobile and you can do it in a matter of minutes. There may never be a more important time to join!



Beginning of June reopening is unrealistic

UNISON's National Schools Committee met last week and agreed the union should continue to oppose the government's unsafe proposal to increase pupil numbers from 1 June.

The Committee was a little encouraged to hear that Department for Education (DfE) officials were keen to stress the 1 June date was 'aspirational' and the guidance being provided was 'non-statutory'.

Nonetheless the Committee expressed strong concerns around the following issues:

Virus transmission failure of the government to provide clear evidence around the transmission risk from pupils and staff.

Social distancing the impossibility of maintaining social distancing in schools and nurseries be-

cause of the year groups chosen to go back first, and the significant increase in numbers this would bring in some schools. The government recognises this yet is still moving on regardless.

PPE the government's guidance to schools on PPE is wholly insufficient.

Testing, tracing and isolation failure of the government to roll out a comprehensive strategy before any increase in pupil numbers.

Travel increased risks posed by pupils and staff travelling on public transport and when parents drop off or collect their children.

Redeployment concerns that DfE guidance will be interpreted to mean schools can deploy support staff to do jobs they are not qualified to perform,



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protected to do or paid to undertake. Examples include using support staff other than cleaners to undertake cleaning duties and teaching assistants to take classes where they are not qualified or paid to do so. Schools must ensure that support staff are not required to routinely cover for teacher absence or lead classes. UNISON will not support any use of staff to support teaching in an inappropriate or un-agreed way.

Cleaning Schools and nurseries will need clear plans about how they will enable the additional cleaning required by government guidance. Additional staff and cleaning materials will be required before settings will be safe to open. Staff undertaking additional cleaning must be paid for these extra hours, including overtime premiums where appropriate.

Early years The government has acknowledged it is not possible to apply social distancing among these children and unless adequate precautions are in place, staff and children in these setting will be placed at risk. UNISON believes all nurseries must undertake risk assessments and have adequate measures in place to ensure safe re-opening before 1 June.

UNISON will continue to work with the other TUC education unions to protect pupils and staff by continuing to campaign for schools and nurseries to only open when proved safe to do so. We have taken the following steps:

- **Produced a model letter for members to send to employers / head teachers**, so that staff should not be pressurised to return by their employers until it is safe and that plans are agreed with unions. The new DfE guidance states it expects schools and trusts to "work closely with parents, staff and unions...when agreeing the best approaches for their circumstances". **We want every schools-based member to send this letter to their head teacher and/or chair of governors. For a Word doc, open [here](#) or download a PDF [here](#).**
- **Produced a model Covid Secure risk assessment / checklist** with other unions to support local discussions. This is being issued shortly.
- **Confirmed members have rights to be safe at work** and protect themselves and others under employment rights and safeguarding legislation.



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- **Called on the government to provide sufficient funding** to wipe out past debts and for additional staffing that may be required.
- **Called on schools to approach local authorities** about having framework agreements covering both LA and academy schools.
- **Called on the government for clear strategies for safeguarding** the most vulnerable pupils and staff, including those who have an underly-

ing condition, are pregnant, over 70 or in the shielded group, and those who live with (or care for) anyone in these categories. These pupils and staff should be allowed to self-isolate or work from home as per NJC guidance.

PLEASE FORWARD THIS BULLETIN TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS, ESPECIALLY THE PARENTS OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

A message to parents

UNISON is acting on behalf of students and parents, not just staff, in its calls to delay the reopening of schools until clearer and more robust safety measures are in place. In this, we have the backing of the British Medical Association. The BMA say the number of coronavirus infections remains too high and the unions have been “absolutely right” to urge caution and prioritise testing before reopening schools on 1 June. “Until we have got case numbers much lower, we should not consider reopening schools.”

The headlines in some of the press are sadly predictable - don't be conned! We understand how many parents are frustrated; their work is disrupted, they are having to stand in as education providers and there isn't a minute's rest! But our members are standing up for everyone by refusing to be rushed into a situation which will result in more deaths. Stand with us and demand the government do more to protect us all.



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