

27 May 2020

Coronavirus

An update for schools-based
Derbyshire UNISON members
about the proposed reopening of
schools on 1st June



UNISON has continued to oppose the government's unsafe proposal to increase pupil numbers from 1 June. We had concerns over virus transmission, social distancing, PPE, testing, tracing and isolation, travel, redeployment, cleaning and early years settings.

It became apparent that local authorities, schools and millions of parents shared these concerns. It is extremely unlikely there will be wholesale re-opening of schools next Monday throughout England as the preparation time has been inadequate.

However, there will be schools who believe they have done enough to assess and eliminate risks and will be trying to re-open.

The following advice is for all members, in all jobs, in all schools in the state sector, whether still under the control of the local authority or in academy chains, whenever it is decided to re-open your school, and for whichever school years/numbers of students. The principles are also relevant to private schools and nurseries, including those who deal with students with severe learning or behavioural problems.

We thank all those members who have sent in, and are still submitting, the model letters covering your concerns to headteachers and governing bodies. Again, these have had an effect within Derbyshire.

What happens next?

Every school must have completed an updated risk assessment in preparation for reopening. You are entitled to see that risk assessment before you re-enter school to work in the new environment of an increased number of students.

We don't believe any school will deny staff that opportunity as it is backed by the government, the county council and all unions. But should any headteacher not let you see an updated risk assessment before your 'return' to work, you must report it to Derbyshire UNISON immediately. Email us at branch@unisondc.co.uk. By 'before', we mean before Monday (or the proposed date of opening) not minutes before school starts!

What if I don't agree with the risk assessment?

If there are factual inaccuracies in the assessment, tell your headteacher immediately. Don't wait until the day of reopening.

It is more likely you will disagree with the ability to eliminate unnecessary risk than find incorrect information. In these cases, you should also record your doubts with the headteacher now.

I live with people in the vulnerable category; should this be part of the risk assessment?

If this is the case, you should immediately demand a personal risk assessment as well as the generic one. This relies on you telling your headteacher of your personal circumstances.

As there will not be a need for a full staff complement in schools yet, each school should be able to accommodate requests by workers in such situations.

Will UNISON be able to check a risk assessment for me?

As each assessment is based on the school itself and its specific circumstances, it would be nonsensical for UNISON to 'check' them. You know the place of work, we don't. If you have doubts, follow our advice and raise them with the headteacher. S/he has the ability and authority to address concerns there and then; hundreds of members contacting UNISON to tackle the issues will only delay a solution.

Can I refuse to return to work if I disagree with the risk assessment?

You have a right not to put yourself at risk but it is far better if concerns are tackled collectively by all school staff together. If just one person refuses to work, whilst everyone else attends, further problems will obviously occur. Talk to your work colleagues now; most of you are probably already doing so.



Contacting Derbyshire UNISON



01629 582266



BRANCH@UNISONDC.CO.UK

If I return to work and then find, during the day or week, the risk assessment is not working and staff and students are unable to minimise risk, what do I do?

Again, the key is to do things collectively and immediately. Talk to other staff, insist on meeting the headteacher, obviously whilst maintaining social distancing, and highlight your concerns. You should demand an immediate solution and tell them you are not prepared to put yourselves, students and their families at further risk and that the school should close again if no solution is offered. There is no statutory obligation at the moment for schools to reopen – if it is unsafe to do so, your headteacher will not be penalised for closing again.

Again, we would ask you to inform UNISON by email branch@unisondc.co.uk if such a situation occurs. It will be impossible for UNISON stewards and staff to respond if we're having to spend our time answering hundreds of telephone calls! But we will do everything we can to protect members from all risks.

How will we know if advice changes?

We urge all members to daily check our website derbyshireunison.com so you can see any updated information without delay. (If you are viewing on a mobile phone, it is best to navigate to the page named [Mobile](#))

I've got other questions not covered here. How do I find out the answers?

Derbyshire UNISON is trying to give advice to members on the most immediate issues. Over a short time, we know we may have to extend advice to cover other matters. However, if you think we have missed something, email us or leave a message on the [Contact](#) page of our website.



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joinunison.org

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.

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!

In the last week dozens of school workers have joined UNISON in Derbyshire following our previous bulletin and the advert in the Derbyshire Times (see below). That advert is being repeated this week; make sure your colleagues see it, especially those not yet in UNISON.



THANK YOU!



- Derbyshire UNISON thanks the thousands of members providing essential services during the coronavirus lockdown - in care homes, schools and our communities.
- These thanks extend to those working from home, on furlough or, sadly, those who've contracted the virus. Every one of you is playing an important part in stemming the spread of this lethal disease, often in the face of confusing and mixed messages from the government.
- Derbyshire UNISON is making a difference, helping and advising members about PPE, pay, leave and more. It demonstrates how important unions are, collectively and individually. If you're not a member, join now! Sign up from your mobile in minutes.
- *Latest news at* DERBYSHIREUNISON.COM *including advice about schools reopening.*



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