

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

## Schools

The lack of any government messaging on COVID has also affected the issue



## Energy bills see schools pull back on ventilation and CO2 monitoring

**A UNISON survey has revealed that, amid fears over rising energy costs, there has been a significant drop off in good ventilation practices in schools in the absence of government messaging on COVID and other viruses.**

The survey was conducted among UNISON members working as school support staff across the UK between 4-9 November. This included teaching/classroom assistants working in classrooms, of whom 1,644 responded.

The results showed that:

- on CO2 monitoring, only 26% said that their schools was still actively monitoring levels in all classrooms.

Nearly 50% (49.7%) of respondents said their schools were no longer actively monitoring CO2 levels in all classrooms;

- on ventilation, only 16% of respondents said the school was ensuring good ventilation in all areas, while 38% replied that the school had stopped taking action to ensure good ventilation, and 46% said that their school

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was ventilating rooms much less than last year;

- on the main reason their school was no longer actively monitoring CO2 levels or ensuring good ventilation (multiple choice options), 44.6% of respondents stated it was because their school “no longer thought COVID was an issue” and 42% that their “school is worried about energy costs and heating bills (ie more heating is needed when windows are opened)”.

UNISON is concerned that this drop off in ventilation is increasing the risk of illness and absences in schools, with particular concern for immunosuppressed pupils and staff.

It also comes at a time when statistics from the Department for Education (DfE) show that attendance rates are still below pre-pandemic levels.

The DfE has now announced that it is sending more CO2 monitors to schools – enough for one per classroom – alongside a reminder of the importance of ventilation. It is also reopening the bidding process for schools to apply for air filters.

While this is a welcome step, UNISON is concerned that the criteria being used by the DfE on CO2 levels in schools is being set at such a level that the overwhelming majority of schools will still not be provided with air filters.

The joint unions, including UNISON, recently wrote to the children’s commissioner for England on this, saying: “In July we wrote to the former secretary of state for education, James Cleverly MP, calling on the government to use the summer break to invest in measures such as ventilation in all schools to help reduce the chance of yet another wave of COVID absences this term.”

UNISON is restating its call for the government to provide suitable/appropriate air filters to all schools as soon as possible this winter, and for an urgent announcement from government on the extension of the energy support scheme, which is currently only confirmed until the end of March next year. Removing fears over energy costs will be crucial to supporting ventilation.

In the meantime, the union is also urging schools to follow UNISON guidance on improving ventilation to help reduce illness and absences this winter.

If members have any concerns on ventilation in their schools, please immediately contact the branch for support on 01629 582266 / [branch@unisondc.co.uk](mailto:branch@unisondc.co.uk)