

SOCIALIST PARTY in SCHOOLS

April 2020



... until outbreak under control and mass testing in place

A campaign is being waged by sections of the press and big business to 're-open the schools'. We need to resist it.

Yes, there are growing pressures on the incomes and well-being of many in our communities while the lockdown continues. But the pressure to get schools fully open isn't driven by concerns about welfare or education. They just want childcare in place so they can earn their profits again, never mind the risks to their workforce.

Re-opening schools now would be a major risk to public health - and to staff and their families too.

World Health Organization advice is clear that an 'exit' shouldn't take place until Covid-19 transmission is under control. The UK isn't even yet at the 'peak' of the outbreak, let alone getting cases and death rates down to a controlled number.

Secure social distancing simply isn't possible in a school environment. We've all seen that many adults can't manage it consistently in a supermarket, let alone children in a classroom!

Opening schools would inevitably mean the spread of the virus being increased again. Yes, few children would show symptoms, but they

would be spreading it on the bus home, back to their parents and grandparents. The poorest families, those with the worst overcrowding at home, would be most at risk.

Any genuine 'exit strategy' depends on government correcting its failure to deliver on mass testing first.

Again, WHO advice makes clear the necessity of first having existing cases under control so that new clusters can then be quickly identified and isolated through immediate testing and tracing of contacts of those carrying Covid-19.

So school staff and unions should bluntly make clear to politicians calling for schools to open: "we'll happily do so when you've done your job first - get mass testing in place!"

... without prior trade union agreement over safe teaching and working arrangements

The press and politicians calling for schools to open don't seem to understand that most schools haven't closed completely in the first place.

Staff have been supporting vulnerable pupils and children of key workers in schools and hubs, even over the Easter break. They have also been working from home to give online support.

Generally, perhaps an indication that parents understand the health risks more than those rashly calling for rapid re-opening, the numbers in schools have been lower than expected. But, even then, the experience of rota working has confirmed that returning to working again with

full classes is not straightforward.

- * What situations create risks where PPE is needed - not least in special schools and nurseries?
- * Can social distancing measures be put in place to reduce risks?
- * Is adequate cleaning provision in place, both regularly during and at the end of the day, but also after confirmed infections?
- * How will counselling and other health advice be provided to students and staff who need it?
- * Will staff & pupils be fully tested?
- * Will full pay be in place for those living with vulnerable relatives so they can remain safely off site?

No member of staff should be working in a school unless these

questions have answers - and ones negotiated and agreed with staff trade unions - both nationally and, in detail, on a local and workplace level too. If staff feel unsafe, unions must back members leaving their workplace if risks aren't addressed.

Finally, when we do go safely back, let's also demand that we return to a better education system than before. Scrap Ofsted, SATs and league tables for good, teach a broader curriculum, end cuts and performance pay, get rid of the privatised agencies that have been ripping off supply staff. Above all, build strong unions to protect staff, school students and education!

www.socialistparty.org.uk