

# COVID-19: If you don't think it's safe, then union groups must escalate !



**S**TAFF HAVE RETURNED to school wanting to do the best for their students. But schools' responsibilities for education and welfare also extend to safety - for children, for families, and certainly to their staff.

## ● **SCHOOLS WILL TRANSMIT COVID-19**

**Covid-19 won't be controlled by hopes and good intentions.**

An indoor environment with closely packed classrooms means the risk of viral transmission is inevitable, just as it is in buses and shops where, unlike schools, greater protection is being insisted upon. Within days of re-opening, school outbreaks were emerging in Scotland. Already, cases are being reported in schools in England too. Even last term, while schools were only partially open, outbreaks were being reported. A Public Health England survey of these cases shows transmission from staff was more common. Nevertheless, in a quarter of the outbreaks, primary-aged children were identified as being the source of the infection.

## ● **DfE GUIDELINES ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH**

**Many schools are doing the best they can** to implement the DfE guidelines but 'bubbles' will inevitably leak, whether that's around the school or when friends and siblings meet outside it. Sanitising, even the face coverings that should be being worn, will not be sufficient to overcome the lack of physical distancing. Unions have to insist on better safeguards. Union groups must also resist any pressure to increase workload, e.g. from longer days or extra duties.

● **ONSITE STAFF TESTING**  
**Cases may have fallen in most areas but there's no guarantee it will stay that way.** The NEU must

still demand its '5 tests' are met, and keep up the pressure for:

- Weekly onsite testing of staff to provide real reassurance and clarity about infection risks.
- All who have to isolate should be supported on full pay.
- A reliable community-based testing and tracing system, run through local Council and NHS services, not private profiteers.

## ● **ACT TOGETHER TO PROTECT STAFF AT GREATER RISK**

**Staff and parents under the most pressure are those who feel themselves, or relatives, to be at greater risk of serious outcomes.**

The NEU guidance makes clear that all staff at risk are entitled to an individual risk assessment. But what if the school's assessment is disputed by the member of staff? Individuals must not be left to fight alone. The NEU's "Test Five" stated that *"vulnerable staff, and staff who live with vulnerable people, must work from home"*. If this test is being failed by a school, the whole union group must say that management have failed to acceptably account for risk overall.

## ● **DEMAND 'SAFETY FIRST' WHEN THERE ARE LOCAL OUTBREAKS**

**Swift action is needed if cases are identified within a school.** However, Health Protection (HP) teams are under political pressure to keep schools open. Unions must insist on full and open discussion. The latest NEU guidance makes clear that *"failure to send home all who are in same group / shared a classroom or otherwise had close contact with positive case, whether or not advised by HP team"* should trigger escalation. That could include refusal to attend an unsafe workplace under 'Section 44'.

If there are two or more cases within 14 days - classed as an 'outbreak', SPinED believes that the whole school should close to allow a full clean and test-and-trace of the school community, to make sure the outbreak is swiftly controlled. Anything less simply risks infection spreading further and the risk of longer closures.

## ● **AREAS WITH HIGH INFECTION RATES MUST BE BETTER PROTECTED**

**Where local infection rates are high, the risks of transmission in school are inevitably higher too.**

The NEU is planning an interactive map that will allow you to identify the rates in a school locality. But that resource needs to be matched with a clear action policy too.

Socialist Party in Education believes that a local rate exceeding 20 new cases per 100,000 over seven days - the rate being used to trigger quarantine requirements for international travel - should be a trigger for the following measures:

- Return to blended learning with no classes larger than fifteen.
- Consultation with staff and parents over priority rotas.
- Government to provide support for additional staffing and resources to help home learning.

## ● **ABOVE ALL, ESCALATE!** **The best way to protect safety is to act together as a union group.**

If you feel your safety is at risk:

- Meet as a union group to agree your demands for a safe workplace.
- Contact your Branch to support you in escalating action - a ballot for strike action and, if needed, union backing for 'Section 44'.
- Write to your NEU National Executive members calling on the National Union to back the demands in this bulletin.