

Australian teachers use social media to speak out on coronavirus danger, unions collaboration with government

Our reporters
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Most Australian schools have had regular operations suspended amid the coronavirus epidemic, though, amid widespread chaos and confusion, teachers are still being pressed to attend schools for training in on-line learning technologies.

Thousands of educators are defying threats of disciplinary action and taking to social media to communicate with one another about the appalling conditions in their schools, their insistence that schools be closed, and their hostility to the unions.

There are multiple COVID-19 discussion groups on Facebook that teachers are active in.

Dylan posted in one of them: “So important that people speak out about this abhorrent use of teachers, and dangerous daily meetings of hundreds more people than you’d be allowed to have at your own funeral without adequate sanitisation and any screening.”

Samantha wrote: “We are now one of the only countries in the world open. Every other country must have got it wrong... Or are they getting different ‘expert medical advice’.”

Kathryn, a teacher’s aide from Queensland, posted: “I have twenty 4 and 5-year olds in the first session and twenty 4 and 5-year olds in the second session and work with Grade 3 in the afternoon session. Do duty with over 100 students, parents at 8.30 a.m. and 3 p.m. inside a 20-square metre at a maximum, not even a metre each without parents, grandparents and siblings, not that we are ever a metre apart. Kids are not sent home with snotty noses or coughs; body contact all day. This is negligent of the government.”

Toni wrote: “I’m horrified that some teachers are being told to bring their own cleaning products and toilet paper in from home to service schools.”

Paul wrote: “Our classroom situations work actively against all social distancing advice. Teachers—like many others in the community—will be infected and some will die. I doubt whether our arrogant politicians will acknowledge they should have done better.”

Others are speaking about the toll on their family life. Mel posted: “My husband is living with anxiety around me when I come home from work each day. He is a severe asthmatic and thinking of going back to live with his elderly mother to keep away from me.”

Leonie: “I’m sick of feeling like I have to choose between my child and my job.”

While some teachers are reporting that their school principal has allowed them to work from home due to pre-existing health conditions, others have been refused. Courtney posted: “The Covid-19 Support Team have advised me that pregnant women are currently not being considered high risk... This was the case even though I had a medical note saying I should stop working and self-isolate.”

Cristy wrote: “In Western Australia we need to use all our sick leave and can’t access extra COVID-19 days. I have a serious heart condition and must use my leave.”

Rosalind from South Australia commented on the Committee for Public Education Facebook page: “We have two more weeks in a viral cesspool. Still no sanitiser at our school. We are collapsing under pressure. At least five teachers I spoke today were fighting back tears. Our union is silent! We are not allowed to work from home. Teachers are being forced to take leave. One of the women in tears, I spoke to, has a 10-year-old daughter who is high risk, and she wanted to stay home preparing online lessons and she was told

no!”

Teacher condemnation of their unions is growing. Sylvia wrote: “What is our union doing? I mean the New South Wales Teachers Federation, the Independent Education Union and the Catholic schools.” In reply Jasper posted: “I actually wonder if they’re doing anything. My post on the IEU page last night was answered by saying I should contact my local member of parliament.”

Dan wrote: “Planning something? Have you seen any evidence that they have a plan or objectives or anything that vaguely resembles actual action to protect us?”

Chantelly wrote: “We need to strike right now. We teach our students to be critical thinkers. The world is screaming at us to see what happens when governments are too slow to act. Yet we march on and follow orders knowing that is the wrong thing to do. Strike now!”

Sas commented on the federal Australian Education Union (AEU) page: “Remember it is all school staff that are in danger, not just teachers. Where is the union in this, stepping up and saying it’s not good enough? Put in decisive measures to protect teachers or we walk out.”

Jamie commented: “AEU, how about you worry about all educators still in classrooms putting their own health and family’s health at risk? Surely NAPLAN is the least of your worries. Why are we paying union fees? Stand up for us and do something NOW, before a teacher or an educators family member becomes the next victim to this horrible situation.”

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) insists that the resolution of the COVID-19 threat cannot be left in the hands of the government and the unions.

Yesterday, after meeting with union executives, Prime Minister Scott Morrison thanked them for their “cooperation and good spirit.” The teachers unions have played a central role in collaborating with the government’s criminal neglect and indifference to the health and lives of the population.

The CFPE calls on all teachers and health care workers to form Action Committees, independent of the unions to develop the widest discussion on measures to protect the health and well-being of workers and students, including the provision of full income to pay for those who need to stay at home to mind their children during school closures.

The billions of dollars being handed out by

governments to the banks and business must be redirected to meet urgent social needs. The CFPE urges all educators to read our statement on the coronavirus crisis and contact us to develop the fight for these demands:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia

The author also recommends:

Australian school system in chaos after coronavirus semi-closures

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