# Scotland’s schools reopen as COVID-19 infects students

**Steve James**
**17 August 2020**

Scotland’s 700,000 students were sent back to class at almost 2,500 primary and secondary schools last week by the Scottish National Party (SNP) government.

SNP First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and Education Secretary John Swinney ordered the return of more than 50,000 teachers. The move is a trial run for the Johnson government’s homicidal back-to-school drive across the UK.

Schools were reopened despite a resurgence in coronavirus infections.

On Friday, 65 new COVID-19 cases were reported across Scotland, while 253 people are in hospital with the virus, three of them in intensive care. More cases have been identified in the first two weeks of August than in the whole of June and July. Fifty two cases were reported on Tuesday alone, although no deaths have been reported for 29 days. On August 13, however, Sturgeon reported the “R” number, which charts the number of new infections arising from any single case, stood at around 1.3.

In Aberdeen, an outbreak led to a partial lockdown, with almost 200 cases. Pubs, cafes, and restaurants have been closed and some professional football matches have been cancelled. The Aberdeen outbreak led to cases in nearby North Angus. Five cases were also reported in Orkney.

Most concerning are reports of outbreaks among school students. Eight pupils at Bannerman High School in Glasgow have tested positive for COVID-19, although none had yet returned to school. Despite the cluster, the school reopened last week.

On Saturday, the *Herald* reported that Bannerman High’s cluster was related to an outbreak among senior management at a McVities biscuit factory in Glasgow, with four managers sent home. Workers at the Tollcross factory have repeatedly raised concerns over unsafe working conditions. One worker tested positive in April.

Two pupils at St Ambrose High and one at St Andrews High, both in Coatbridge, tested positive. Two had returned to school for what was described as a “relatively short period of time.” Two staff at Peterhead Central primary school in Aberdeenshire tested positive prior to the reopening. The school will remain closed for one week.

These outbreaks presage an inevitable surge in COVID-19 cases among pupils, teachers, and other staff, driving wider community transmission.

Numerous scientific reports confirm that school age children can develop symptoms of COVID-19 and transmit the coronavirus to others.

In all, some 19,238 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Scotland, with 2,491 deaths. Excess deaths, most of which can be attributed to COVID-19, run to as many as 4,885, with nearly half in care homes.

The Scottish government accelerated its plans to reopen on August 11, dropping proposals floated in June for a “blended” return which included reduced class sizes and just one or two days of face-to-face classes per week. The government has even encouraged retired teachers to return to work, despite the clear risk to their health. Instead, schools have re-opened with their full complement of pupils and a hotch potch of measures such as staggered start times, social bubbles in playgrounds and one way systems in corridors. How these will operate for any length of time remains to be seen.

Both the SNP and the Labour Party insisted on a full return to school. Former First Minister Jack McConnell of Scottish Labour, now Baron McConnell of Glenscorrodale, led these efforts, and was joined by former SNP health secretary Alex Neil. The pair

© World Socialist Web Site

exploited their position as former teachers to browbeat parents fearful for the safety of their children.

There is huge concern among parents and teachers over the SNP government's measures. A survey of 29,867 teachers by the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teaching union, found that:

* 61 percent felt unsafe or somewhat unsafe about returning to work.

* 83 percent believed that social distancing of 2 metres could not be maintained in schools.

* 80 percent did not believe there was "Transparent and shared evidence that the spread of infection is under control and that schools and educational establishments are safe places to work."

* 74 percent felt that "track and trace" measures, essential for understanding the scope of outbreaks and implementing measures to suppress them, would not be in place when schools reopened.

* 68 percent were not confident, or even somewhat confident, that necessary social distancing measures, risk assessments, and hygiene measures would be ready.

However, reflecting the mis-leadership of the trade unions, the lack of an alternative, and media propaganda and misinformation, 60 percent supported schools reopening, while remaining concerned about the spread of COVID-19. A further 27 percent of teachers opposed re-opening entirely.

A separate survey by the Secondary School Teachers Association (SSTA) found that:

* 65 percent were not or were only slightly confident their workplace was safe.

* 67 percent had little or no confidence that their employer could keep their school safe.

Despite teachers' well-founded concerns, neither union made any attempt to delay or prevent schools from re-opening. Both the SSTA and EIS survey results were only released a few days before the August 11 deadline for reopening.

The unions' efforts were directed towards pressuring the Scottish government and local authorities into marginal changes in safety procedures. They placed full responsibility on individual teachers to look after their own conditions.

EIS General Secretary Larry Flanagan called on teachers to return to school, insisting only that updated risk assessments should be carried out "by the employer and that staff and teacher trade unions are fully consulted on their content."

Throughout the pandemic, the trade unions have been central to ensuring workers are corralled behind the needs of the corporations. Internationally, the reopening of schools is the linchpin of government efforts to force parents back to work, regardless of levels of coronavirus transmission. Schools are being transformed into holding pens, with teachers, students and their families treated as guinea pigs.

More than 2,500 early learning centres and nurseries were reopened by the SNP government in July, despite the impossibility of social distancing.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the claim that the only alternatives on offer to school students, parents, and teachers are either poor schooling from home, or dangerous schooling in class.

We call for teachers, classroom assistants, school staff, bus drivers, parents and school students to form rank-and-file committees. All schools and non-essential workplaces must remain closed until the pandemic threat is over, with full income protection.

The demand for a general strike must be raised to halt the reopening and safeguard teachers and other school staff, pupils, and their families.

We call for a vast expansion of testing and contact tracing to show an R number of less than 0.1 percent before any school reopens—based on carefully considered and impartial scientific advice. Resources, extracted from the bank accounts and private wealth of the super-rich and the major corporations, must be poured into schools and online learning systems to ensure neither students nor education workers suffer until the pandemic is fully suppressed.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**


© World Socialist Web Site