“How many more children need to get seriously ill or die before we take action?”

UK parent Lisa Diaz condemns Boris Johnson’s deadly school reopening drive

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This is the first in a series of interview articles with UK parents and educators opposed to the reckless reopening of schools in the coming weeks. We urge all UK parents, educators and workers who seek to organize opposition to this homicidal policy to join and build the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (UK).

At the start of September, all primary and secondary schools across the United Kingdom will reopen with no COVID-19 mitigation measures whatsoever, threatening a massive surge in cases, hospitalizations and deaths among children, all of whom under age 16 remain unvaccinated. Schools reopened last week in Scotland, which recorded 4,323 new cases Tuesday, a record high overtaking the daily peak of 4,234 in early July’s summer wave. Following the full reopening of schools, universities are set to fully reopen by the end of September.

Under the Conservative government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson is ruthlessly deepening the “herd immunity” strategy based on letting the virus rip through the population. Children and young adults under 25 years old are now experiencing the highest rates of infection and hospitalization of any age group, with hospitalization rates as high as they were in the January surge.

There is enormous opposition among parents and educators to the school reopening drive and the lifting of even the most basic mitigation measures, including mask wearing. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with UK parents who have organized with the group SafeEdForAll about this policy and the broader state of the pandemic.

Lisa Diaz of Wigan, England, is the mother of an 8-year-old and an 11-year-old in primary school. On Sunday, she took part in the WSWS online discussion with leading scientists, “For a Global Strategy to Stop the Pandemic and Save Lives.” The event outlined an eradication strategy in which school closures and other aggressive public health measures are combined with rapid global vaccinations to quickly bring cases down to zero in every corner of the globe.

In the past week, Lisa has attracted a large following on Twitter in response to daily videos that she has posted. The short videos express the sentiments of masses of parents in the UK and worldwide who are terrified about the dangers posed to their children by school reopenings, particularly by the more transmissible and virulent Delta variant.

In her first video, now viewed over 226,000 times and retweeted over 1,800 times, Lisa commented, “In a couple of weeks’ time, I’ll be expected to send the two people most important and precious to me in the whole wide world into a class with 30-odd other unvaccinated bodies, no masks, no social distancing, and inadequate ventilation.”

Exposing the lies of state officials about the impact of COVID-19 on children, she said, “It’s a myth that kids don’t catch COVID. [Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency] Jenny Harries said that a child is more likely to be hit by a bus than catch COVID. That was a lie. I know about 30 kids personally who have caught COVID, I don’t know one who’s been hit by a bus. That kids don’t get severely ill with COVID is a lie. Over 1,100 children were admitted to hospital in this country in July alone, five of whom tragically died. So why are we letting this virus just rip amongst children?”

She concluded, “Just like I wouldn’t send them into a burning building, I’m not going to send them into a classroom that’s highly conducive to the spread of COVID-19.”

In her third video, now viewed nearly 100,000 times and shared nearly 1,000 times, Lisa directed her fire squarely at Johnson and Williamson. Noting that school assemblies are being encouraged again, she pointedly asked Williamson, “Can you explain why, in a pandemic, it’s a good idea to shove a couple hundred kids in a hall all together, with no masks, no social distancing, and inadequate ventilation? Can you explain why that’s a good idea?”

Turning to Johnson, who attended the prestigious boarding school Eton College, she asked, “In regards to your old school, Mr. Johnson, I’m just wondering whether the kids in Eton will be all packed 30-odd into a classroom without any masks, social distancing? Will they all be shoulder to shoulder without any adequate ventilation, or is it just the plebs’ [working class] kids like mine that are going to be used in this hybrid immunity experiment?”

The videos have drawn support from parents and educators worldwide who share the same concerns for their children and communities, and loathe capitalist politicians like Johnson and Williamson pursuing the “herd immunity” strategy summed up by Johnson’s outburst last November, “No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!”

Describing her initial experiences during the pandemic last year, Lisa told the WSWS, “I took my children out of school on 10th March 2020 upon seeing the horrific scenes in Italy. At first this wasn’t a problem. However, the tone from the headteacher and Wigan Local Authority changed dramatically in September when school restarted. On 3rd September 2020, I was sent an email from the headteacher from Woodfield Primary school in Wigan with a link to the council website, which stated that I could be fined £2,500, sentenced to community service or a three-month jail sentence. I told them on several occasions about my blood clot disorder making me more vulnerable should I contract COVID. They didn’t care. It was either send them in, deregister or face the consequences.”

Commenting on the present drive to fully reopen schools amid the

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spread of the Delta variant, Lisa noted, “They are providing no remote learning option at all. Even the meager mitigation measures in place last academic year have been removed. No masks, no social distancing, no vaccines for children despite them being approved for children aged 12 plus. The government is actively attempting to infect children to create ‘hybrid immunity.’ It’s deeply unethical. It’s murderous. My son or daughter could be sat next to a child whose parent or sibling has tested positive for COVID-19. There is no need for under 18 to isolate anymore and COVID testing is only advised, not mandatory. Likewise, a double vaccinated teacher could still be teaching my kids, even if their spouse or child is COVID-19 positive. How is this okay?

“My worries are not just for myself. I am double vaccinated now, although I know a few people who have still become quite ill despite being fully vaccinated. I worry for my kids. That schools were safe was a lie. That children do not catch COVID is a lie. That children do not transmit COVID is a lie. That children do not get seriously ill from COVID or suffer from Long COVID is a lie.

“The government’s own Office of National Statistics reveal that one in eight primary- and one in seven secondary-aged children who test positive for COVID continue to have symptoms five weeks later. Even those who are initially asymptomatic or have mild symptoms. Fauci himself has sounded the alarm bell for Delta stating we have to protect our children. Pediatric ICU wards across Texas and Florida are at capacity.

“How many more children need to get seriously ill or die before we take action? In July alone, 1,153 children were admitted to hospital in England with COVID, five of whom died. These deaths are entirely preventable. When did children stop being important?”

Commenting on the underlying economic motive behind school reopenings, Lisa said, “The government just wants everyone to believe it’s all over so people will go on living their lives and keep the economy ticking over. People are just collateral damage, including children. So long as mum and dad are back at work, keeping their paymasters profitable, then that’s all that matters.”

Speaking on the role of the Johnson government during the pandemic, Lisa commented, “The UK has had over 150,000 deaths. Those numbers speak for themselves. I have no words to describe Johnson’s handling of the pandemic. Or one word—murderous. Over 700 dead due to COVID in the past week and nothing on the news. We have become numb to death. It’s abhorrent. It didn’t have to be this way. There is an alternative: Zero COVID.

“I would compare England to the Republican-led states such as Texas and Florida, which have the same kind of anti-mask crank nonsense. If it’s a choice between seeing children smile and keeping them out of ICU, I go for the latter. In an ideal world kids wouldn’t wear masks. But we are not in an ideal world. We are in the midst of a pandemic and must do everything we can to protect our children, their teachers, and in turn, the wider community. Nobody is safe until we are all safe. We need to put people before profit and push for Zero COVID which will benefit not only health but in the long term the economy.”

At Sunday’s WSWS webinar with scientists, all of whom have advocated for the eradication of COVID-19, Lisa stated, “Children are being affected more than ever, and I am terrified basically. I don’t know what to do. It’s a choice between deregistering my children from school altogether—so they won’t see their friends anymore and they’ve nothing to look forward to, they’ve nothing to go back to—and sending them in where they will be highly likely to get COVID.”

Lisa asked the scientists whether parents should be keeping their children at home, and they each responded with a resounding “Yes,” noting the extreme dangers posed to children in schools wherever COVID-19 transmission is high.

After receiving these clear responses from Dr. Michael Baker, Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz and Dr. Benjamin Mateus, Lisa thanked them all, stating, “It’s nice to be spoken to and not lied to for a change. I really appreciate you not gaslighting me. That’s what I’m thinking, to just not send my children in, and I’m kind of being made out to be a neurotic mom for that.”

Reflecting on the meeting afterwards, Lisa told the WSWS, “The meeting was excellent. It really brought home just how diabolical and, simply put, murderous the UK government strategy is. The scientists were talking about schools not being safe at this moment even with mitigations in place. But there are no mitigations. There are no masks, no ventilation, no social distancing, no isolation of close contacts of positive cases. The children and staff will be thrown into the COVID petri dish and left to spread it amongst each other before bringing it back home and to their communities.

“How is this living with it? Mass death and long-term disease shouldn’t have to be a way of life. It’s completely infuriating that if the world’s leaders could just put people before profit for a couple of months, we could be rid of this horrible virus altogether.”

She added, “Another stand out point for me was from Dr. Mateus. In answer to my question regarding how many would be infected with the Delta variant if they let it rip in schools and what would be the outcome, he replied that similar unmitigated reopenings across the US South led to 15 percent of pupils and 25 percent of teachers being isolated within the first two weeks of reopening. He said that it wasn’t even a case of everyone being infected, that the issue would be that the system is unworkable because there would not be enough teachers to take lessons.

“Apart from the obvious health implications, how is this level of disruption good educationally? Whichever way you look at it, for health, for education or for the economy, elimination is the only way forward. The meeting confirmed what I was already thinking to do: not send my children in. If Wigan council fines me, I will not pay. They will have to take me to court. If they want to make a martyr of a vulnerable mum with an underlying health condition for protecting herself and children in a pandemic, then so be it.”

When asked about the role of the teachers unions and all the main political parties in allowing schools to reopen, and the need to build rank-and-file committees of parents and educators to stop the drive to reopen schools, Lisa commented, “The unions will only act if there is an appetite among staff. However, strongly worded letters clearly are not getting the unions anywhere. The time for talk and writing letters is over. Our politicians have failed us. If they won’t act to protect our children, their teachers and the wider community, then we need to take matters into our own hands.”

To be continued

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