

Statement of Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (UK)

Oppose the return to schools: Children and educators' lives matter!

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29 August 2021

Educators, school staff, parents and other workers must mobilise against the unsafe reopening of schools across Britain.

Millions of children and hundreds of thousands of staff return to classrooms from September 1 in England and Wales. Schools in Scotland have already been back for weeks. The result will be an explosion of the virus, death and incalculable damage to the health and well-being of children, educators and the entire working class.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government and that of the Scottish National Party in Holyrood are pursuing a criminal policy of allowing the untrammelled spread of Covid-19 by removing virtually all safety restrictions. Scientists have warned in *The Lancet* that the government was pursuing "herd immunity by mass infection", which will "place 48% of the population (children included) who are not yet fully vaccinated, including the clinically vulnerable and the immunosuppressed, at unacceptable risk."

On Friday, modellers in the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) warned, "It is highly likely that high prevalence [of Covid] will be seen within schools by the end of September 2021." They noted, "This may reflect either community or within-school transmission, and the role of schools in driving wider transmission remains uncertain."

There is no such uncertainty.

Since schools returned in Scotland at the beginning of August, daily cases have risen by over 300 percent, from 1,567 to 6,835. Cases have nearly doubled in the past week, with under-19s accounting for a third of infections and children aged 2-17 recording test positivity rates of 19.9 percent. Public Health Scotland (PHS) found that nearly 15,000 pupils (14,914) were absent from school on August 24 due to Covid, with nearly 18 percent (2,496)

sick with Covid-19 and 11,976 in self-isolation. Over 1,500 Scottish education staff were also absent due to Covid-19 related reasons. Of these 266 teachers and 215 school-based staff either had a positive Covid test or symptoms.

Last September, schools in the UK were among the first to fully reopen. Within months they became a key vector of the virus, leading to a second pandemic wave as infections hit 150,000 daily with deaths more than doubling since the first wave. A second lockdown was imposed in January this year, only because tens of thousands of educators refused to go to work under Section 44 of the Workplace Health and Safety Regulations.

Schools fully reopened again at the end of Easter, with mask mandates removed. Once again, there was a wave of infections. Almost 840,000 children (11.2 percent) in England's state schools were not in class on July 8 because of Covid, with 39,000 testing positive and 35,000 with a suspected infection.

Things will be worse still this time.

The ending of UK-wide safety restrictions on July 19, just as schools broke up, has already led to over 30,000 average daily infections, 26 times greater than this time last year, with over 100 deaths a day. Hospitalisations have already reached almost 7,000.

This term there will be no mask wearing, no "bubbles", and not even the isolation of children and double vaccinated staff who were in close contact with infected individuals. There is no vaccination for children under the age of 16. Moreover, most infections are from the highly transmissible and more deadly Delta variant and new and even more highly infectious variants can emerge able to evade the protection of vaccines.

Millions of parents are horrified at the threat of mass

infections of children, child deaths, and Long Covid.

Contrary to the official lies that Covid has little impact on children and a return to school is essential for their wellbeing, 25 British children have died of Covid and over 10,000 have lost a primary or secondary caregiver to the pandemic. Of an estimated 945,000 people (1.5 percent of the population) who had self-reported Long Covid on July 4, 34,000 were children aged 2–16 years. Research led by the University of Liverpool found that around one in 20 children hospitalised with COVID-19 develop brain or nerve complications, an estimated prevalence of 3.8 percent compared to 0.9 of adults. And these are only some of the terrible effects of Long Covid.

Parents are ready to fight this homicidal agenda. Public Health Scotland's figures revealed that 399 pupils were not in school last week because their parents "chose to keep them away... contrary to public health guidance". Yet worried parents are being treated as criminals, facing harsh fines and the possibility of a prison sentence. A new "Covid hit-squad" has been announced, with "attendance advisers" paid £500 a day who are charged with instructing councils on "the use of enforcement measures."

This catastrophic situation is the joint responsibility of the Conservative government and their de facto coalition partners in Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party and the trade unions, which have systematically demobilised opposition to the reopening of schools and the removal of all measures to minimise the circulation of the virus.

The National Education Union and all other education unions are in favour of schools reopening and a return to face-to-face teaching, providing only that a few mitigation measures are in place. The NEU's press release on the return to schools even heaped praise on the Johnson government for announcing a paltry £25 million for schools to provide CO2 monitors, calling this "a really welcome first step in accepting our argument that funding is needed for good ventilation."

But bitter experience has proved that a policy of "mitigation" alone does not work. It always involves a devil's bargain between the desire of billions of people internationally to save lives and a ruling class that will not allow anything to cut across its gouging of corporate profits out of the backs of the working class.

The spread of the Delta variant has blown apart all claims that masking, social distancing, testing, contact tracing, isolation of infected patients, ventilation, and even vaccinations will alone end the threat posed by the pandemic. Instead, the advocacy of various combinations

of such measures is invariably used to justify a policy of "learning to live with the virus"—of learning to accept mass illness and death.

The only viable strategy is for the eradication of the virus, based on the policies advanced by the foremost epidemiologists, virologists and other scientists throughout the pandemic, a policy of Zero Covid.

Eradication entails the universal deployment of every weapon in the arsenal of measures to combat Covid-19 to stamp out the virus once and for all. This must be a global offensive. Over 6.5 million people in the UK have been infected with Covid since the start of the pandemic, a tenth of the population, and over 156,000 have died. But these tragic statistics are repeated the world over, with 217 million official cases and 4.5 million deaths, a massive underestimate, due to policies such as school reopenings identical to Johnson's agenda implemented by almost every government.

The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee urges parents, educators and students throughout Britain to oppose the return to schools as part of a unified international offensive of the working class. The necessary measures to contain the pandemic, universal testing, contact tracing, isolation of infected patients, masking and vaccinations, must be implemented as part of a broader shutdown of schools and non-essential workplaces to cut off the chain of viral transmission. Such measures, implemented on a world scale, would see the pandemic fully contained and eradicated in a matter of months.

To take up this life and death struggle, join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee today, attend our meetings, and set up a committee in your workplace.



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