UK’s BBC disparages scientific concerns over the unsafe reopening of schools

Thomas Scripps
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Lisa Diaz, a parent and leading member of the SafeEdForAll (Safe Education For All) campaign group, after an interview she gave to the BBC was used to belittle her scientific concerns over the unsafe reopening of schools.

The BBC article, titled “Mixed emotions as pupils return to school across England” described Lisa as “fearful about the possible health effects [of Covid] on children,” adding, “although studies show they are much less likely to get seriously ill.” It referred to her genetic blood disorder “which makes her particularly concerned” and quoted her saying she was “‘devastated’ by the choice” to keep her kids out of school.

Lisa tweeted in response, with a video —which has received more than 177,000 views and been retweeted over 2,300 times—“Annoyed to be depicted as just an anxious mum in today’s @BBCNews article. Like it’s somehow MY problem for NOT wanting my children to catch a deadly virus which causes multi-organ damage & unknown long-term effects. Typical gaslighting. You should be calling out the Govt [government] not me.”

She was supported by leading US epidemiologist Dr Eric Feigl-Ding, who wrote, “Shameful that @BBCNews is accusing a mother worried about #COVID19 & #LongCovid in kids of being anxious—it’s another way of dismissing someone as ‘alarmist’ & ‘hysterical’.”

Speaking with the WSWS, Lisa explained that she had “mentioned in passing that of course I’m gutted for my son, of course I’m upset, he should be going to school, but I’m not going to send him into a Covid petri dish. That was the context. And they’ve taken it all out of proportion and only quoted those two little bits about my underlying health condition. I do have a condition, and it makes it even more callous the way I’ve been treated, but at the end of the day it’s irrelevant. Even if I was completely healthy it’s still an issue—healthy people die from Covid and get Long Covid.”

For most of her BBC interview, Lisa “focussed on the utter lack of mitigation within schools, how the meagre and measly mitigations that were in place in the last academic year have been rolled back; that there’s going to be no masks, no adequate ventilation, no HEPA air filters, CO2 monitors won’t be ready—though, in any case, that’s like putting a plaster on a gaping wound.”

She also explained how “the government are actively taking measures to encourage, as it were, the virus to spread in schools. They’re no longer isolating close contacts… I said about how they’re encouraging assemblies, about senior leadership in schools being told to only reach out for help when 10 percent of the school population has been infected.”

“I said [UK Prime Minister] Boris Johnson is a liar. He’s using our children in a murderous experiment. And I said these are not my words: this is Professor Michael Baker, an epidemiologist who advises the New Zealand government. I said it’s barbaric. I mentioned again about Boris Johnson lying because he admitted at one point that children are vectors of transmission, that school holidays would offer a firebreak.”

Lisa pointed to the catastrophic situation in the United States and rates of Long Covid and hospitalisation among children. “I said it’s not a benign illness in children and this is a myth that needs obliterating. That it causes potentially lifelong complications, damage to the respiratory tract, the heart, the brain, cognitive impairment. We have no idea the full extent of what we’re dealing with and we won’t know for years to come. I said there’s an increase in hospitalisations, that 1,153 children in England alone had been hospitalised [in July].

“There is nothing controversial about saying you don’t want your child to catch Covid, you don’t want your child to be exposed to risk in school. All I want is for schools to be made safe, if they can be made safe.

“I said what we really need to go for is a Zero Covid policy, because it’s completely unacceptable having nearly a thousand people die in a week. That is not living with Covid, that is dying with Covid. There is so much the government can do to drive cases down. Instead, they’ve no regard for human life, they’re selling it as ‘Freedom Day’ and the

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media are helping to cover it up."

After her treatment in this interview, Lisa made the principled decision to tell the BBC not to use a to-camera piece she had provided to the broadcaster's *Breakfast* news programme, tweeting, "Told @BBCNews that I don't want them to use interview with me in their @BBCBreakfast piece on Monday. I'm not 'fearful', I'm informed. The Government are conducting a dangerous experiment on our kids. And you are complicit."

She told the WSWS she had taken the decision "having seen this article and how it had been misconstrued and how everything that I'd said had been left out and I was just presented as almost neurotic, as somebody who's just 'fearful'. I'm not saying anything different from people with PhDs in epidemiology. Just because I'm a mum from Wigan, don't patronise me."

Lisa described the media's role during the pandemic as "Absolutely pathetic. There has been a media blackout, radio silence. The media are completely complicit… But the reason why they're doing that is because they're in cahoots with the government—they want bums on seats so parents can get to work. They couldn't care less if my child ends up with debilitating long Covid… In terms of what's gone out in the mainstream media on Sky and the BBC, it's actually criminal. I think it's something like 777 people have died in the last week of Covid. Why is that not all over the news?"

Referring to the work of the WSWS, Lisa said, "you are doing a sterling job. Really, you should be in charge of the BBC!"

Many parents and educators have expressed outrage in the last few days at another BBC article headlined, "Long Covid in children 'nowhere near scale feared'", also posted with the title, "Long Covid in children—time to be reassured". The article cites a University College London study which has found that up to 14 percent of 11-17 years olds had symptoms linked with the Covid-19 virus 15 weeks after infection.

Deepti Gurdasani, a Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology at Queen Mary University, tweeted: "Not sure how this can be described as 'reassuring' at all. 1 in 7 children having persistent symptoms at 15 weeks with ~34,000 children estimated to be affected (very similar to ONS estimates). Quite shocked by some of the media spin I've seen on this."

Lisa commented, "I'm not sure how much worse it can be than playing Russian roulette [with a child's health]—seven to one. We're talking about, 15 weeks afterwards, your child being in pain, and there was a big list of symptoms including debilitating exhaustion, headaches—imagine living with that. It's not okay. How is that 'not as bad'. How much worse do they want it to be? How can they paint this as a good result?

"And this is an ongoing study. This is the tip of the iceberg. We don't know, in five, ten years, what the debilitating symptoms could look like. We don't know [the long-term effects], but we know things are bad at the moment, so let's use the precautionary principle and do everything we can to protect our children.

"Any normal person would say it's not okay for one in seven children to be ill for weeks, and we don't know if they'll ever get better … The government are keen to say we've got to live with it like flu. Covid is nothing like flu."

Referring to another BBC article posted a day later, "Schools aren't infection hubs, says public health boss," Lisa added, "They just lie … It's like saying black is white."

The same article was also criticised by Dr Feigl-Ding, who tweeted, "Seriously, @BBCNews is now a full on @BorisJohnson propaganda mouthpiece machine now. This story is totally bullshit. Experts like @trishgreenhalgh agree." Greenhalgh, Professor of Primary Health Care at Oxford University, said in response to the claim that schools were not transmission hubs, "They are, actually. Why wouldn't they be? Schools bring unvaccinated, mostly unmasked people together for prolonged periods in indoor spaces that are inadequately ventilated."

Speaking about the political situation, Lisa said, "When the government fails to look after us, when the media fails to present the truth—that Covid isn't a benign illness for children, that schools aren't safe—then grassroots pressure groups like mine (SafeEdForAll) and concerned parents have to hold the government to account." She added, "the Labour Party are absolutely pathetic, they're totally complicit as well," and "I'm shocked at the unions as well to be honest. They've got a duty of care to their members. How many more teachers need to die?"

Lisa pointed to reports by the Office for National Statistics that show workers in teaching and education have the highest rates of Long Covid outside of workers in health and social care. She noted, "I think another four children have died in August of Covid and one died on August 31 who was between 0 and 4 years old. Why's that not on the news? And how many plane crashes a week is it that we're looking at now [in terms of overall deaths]? It's not okay and I will never be okay with that many people dying."

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