

UK Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee passes resolution supporting October 1 school strike

Our reporters
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The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (UK) passed a resolution this week in support of parent and SafeEdForAll member Lisa Diaz's call for a school strike tomorrow, October 1.

The resolution reads: "The Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (UK) fully supports the call made by parent Lisa Diaz for a parents' strike on October 1. It is an important initial step taken to oppose the herd immunity strategy of the Johnson government, supported by the Labour Party and trade unions.

"Over 59,000 British children were reported infected with COVID-19 in the first two weeks of school reopenings, and over 45,000 more had suspected cases. The equivalent of a class of children is being hospitalised by the virus every day. Close to 90 children in the UK have already been killed and an estimated 38,000 aged 2–16 are currently living with Long COVID.

"With school absences on the rise and some schools implementing their own contact tracing and isolation systems, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi has threatened that the government 'won't stand back and let attendance fall.'

"This is a global issue—in the US, both children and educators are dying of COVID-19 at a rate of at least three per day nationwide.

"The Committee will do everything we can to mobilise support for the October 1 action and calls on parents, educators and all workers to do the same."

James, a teacher in a secondary school and a member of the committee, told the WSWS about his experience of the return to school:

"The [academy] trust said that there were going to be no measures apart from hand sanitizer. The first day back we had a whole staff meeting where we all sat in the same hall for the entire day, without mitigation measures. And that was a directive from above, from the Multi Academy Trust. It felt bizarre considering how careful I and my family have been in our everyday lives.

"The kids were back in classes as usual. There have been assemblies with the whole year group sitting together in rows. There was nothing in place in terms of mitigations for the first

four weeks of term. We've now had so many cases of students off sick with COVID that the school had to contact Public Health England. They suggested we bring back mask wearing in 'high-traffic areas' of the school, which does not include classrooms!

"I've been teaching half-sized classes for the last two weeks. Some of my colleagues have had just four or five kids in a class out of 30. We have a couple of teaching assistants off, a couple of staff off.

"There's no tracing of close contacts within the school anymore. They're missing loads of contacts who could possibly be infected and spreading the virus as well. It's ripping through the school.

"Staff have been very considerate of each other. But we've been left to fend for ourselves. The idea is that it's down to you to protect yourself, which just isn't feasible in a pandemic. The school has a responsibility for our health and safety. We do our best to follow guidance, but it's not mandatory, it's inadequate and schools interpret it very differently. We've not been given PPE. We've all had to provide our own masks."

Asked about the trade unions, James replied, "They've been non-existent. They've sent emails about looking forward to getting back to school. The message we're getting from the unions is that there will be 'challenges' this year, 'but we'll get through it'.

"The huge action that shut schools in January was down to individual teachers refusing to go into unsafe schools, it wasn't down to the unions at all. Teachers are still fully aware that what we're doing is not safe, but the unions have made it clear they support the reopening and will oppose any action taken for school workers' safety. Members have been left high and dry. If they can't support us through a pandemic how can they support us in any other way?"

Lisa's call for a school strike, James said, "Is hugely significant. What she's doing is waging a principled fight to protect lives. I think beyond the impact of the strike itself, it will raise awareness and join likeminded people together, internationally as well, because this is an international issue.

"It's the only action being organised. I think what Lisa has

done has really highlighted how Labour, the unions and the media are totally in line with the government.

“And that’s a powerful argument for rank-and-file committees, which represent a break from the unions and the Labour Party. They are the only way to fight in the situation we find ourselves in. Only the independent action of the working class can make a difference in the fight against COVID and the herd immunity agenda.”

A parent who works with the committee, who asked to remain anonymous, gave her thoughts on the strike and the situation in schools: “I was on strike anyway. I signed the parent declaration form [declaring parents’ refusal to send their children into unsafe schools] over the summer as I cannot send my high-risk child back to a school environment which is not safe, and there have been cases within the school already. I personally messaged Safe Education For All’s petition/parent declaration single-handedly to 1,000s of people on Twitter and Facebook.”

The latest government advice, updated September 27, makes it mandatory for all children to attend school, stating: “Clinical studies have shown that children and young people, including those previously considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), are at very low risk of serious illness if they catch the virus. The UK Clinical Review Panel has recommended that no children and young people under the age of 18 should be considered CEV and under-18s should be removed from the shielded patient list. The chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency and head of NHS Test and Trace has written to parents of these children to inform them.”

This parent questioned the validity of the studies referred to, saying, “How do they know it’s safe owing to the fact [that] CEV/CV children have been shielding?”

“I truly believe in the parent declaration that our children should not be in school without masks, HEPA filtration units and CO2 monitors, with remote learning for vulnerable families until the infection rates come right down, without the fear of fines and prosecutions and referrals to social services.

“[Prime Minister] Boris Johnson and his cabinet and the inept opposition in this country have let children down very badly. They are the most innocent in society and are least protected. Children have not yet been vaccinated. It should be the adults’ turn to protect the children with universal mask-wearing, social distancing and all scientifically recognised mitigations in schools and the isolation of close contacts.

“What type of society do we live in when the adults get vaccinated and then remove all restrictions and allow children to become infected with a novel virus? We are yet to understand why?”

“Children have the same right to be protected as adults. This government and their libertarian ideologies and capitalist ways! Now this has become the pandemic of the children, where children will lose their lives and future health, and maybe that health will never truly recover.”

Peter, a grandfather, contacted the WSWS to say, “[Prime Minister Boris] Johnson has failed to address the issue of COVID in schools. In this, he has been aided and abetted by many in the Labour Party, the trade unions and the local authorities. The prevailing ‘jobsworth’ mentality of they who must be obeyed is more characteristic of autocracies such as Putin’s Russia than of democracies. Truth will triumph; the sooner, the better.”

Shamir, a school worker, told us, “I am supporting Lisa Diaz’s national school strike on October 1 because I believe deliberately infecting children with a novel virus to pursue herd immunity is morally reprehensible and a crime against humanity. As a Teaching Assistant (TA)/Learning Support Assistant (LSA), my first and foremost concern is the safeguarding of children—no school should be open without adequate mitigations.

“As Professor Shou-Ti Chiou explained on Citizens TV’s emergency international summit, children deserve the same care and respect society affords adults and the elderly. To use them to spread the virus to reach herd immunity through natural mass infection is beyond reprehensible.

“Also, spare a thought for TAs/LSAs and ancillary staff like dinner ladies and cleaners who have all been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

“With even the minimal mitigations removed from schools in the UK, the ruling classes are pursuing profits over the health of our children, and are being actively supported by the trade unions, mainstream media, and all the major political parties.

“Parents like Lisa and #SafeEdForAll are being gaslighted by the government and their scientists claiming children ‘do not get sick from COVID’ despite tens of thousands of 2-16-year-olds suffering from Long COVID and potentially lifelong disabilities. Various studies have warned that even mild symptoms could result in early onset dementia, Parkinson’s, diabetes and multi-organ damage.

“I believe the national strike called for by Lisa, which is now gathering international support from concerned parents and teaching staff, is an important first step in fighting back against the ruling classes. We won’t be supported by the unions, or the major political parties who insist unsafe schools remain open. The media will belittle concerned parents like Lisa. We can only defeat this monstrous, barbaric policy to infect our children with COVID by taking action ourselves.”



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