

Leaked documents expose UK Labour's fraudulent "concern" for COVID safety in schools

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The COVID pandemic is tearing through UK schools at terrible cost to the health of school children. One in 33 primary school age and one in 12 secondary pupils are currently infected. At least 12 school children have died from COVID since schools went back in September.

SafeEdForAll (Safe Education for All), ShieldUs and TheHive are grassroots campaign groups working collectively to oppose the Conservative government's criminal policy of sending children into unsafe schools in order to keep their parents at work.

In September, the groups approached Labour's Kate Green, Shadow Secretary of State for Education, and Peter Kyle, Shadow Minister for Schools. They hoped the two would be allies in the fight to protect children, given that both MPs had issued statements supporting the retention of limited COVID mitigation measures in schools.

Documents leaked to the *World Socialist Web Site* confirm the pair's statements were manifestly insincere—window dressing for Labour's continued support for school reopenings and part of its "constructive criticism" policy of collusion with Conservative government Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Email correspondence between Sarah Saul, a founding member of SafeEdforAll, and Callum Tipple, Kyle's policy advisor, prove that Green and Kyle's aim was to neutralise the safe schools protest by insisting that the price of entry into Labour's inner sanctum was silence. The correspondence related to a meeting on September 22, 2021.

Prior to the meeting, TheHive prepared notes outlining a course of "simple actions" that would enable the Labour Party "to regain the trust of many who have felt abandoned during the pandemic. We hear from so many parents and school staff who believe that Labour has

failed to offer a credible opposition that protects vulnerable and diverse communities."

These notes were sent to Tipple on September 22, immediately following the meeting. Saul wrote that, following their discussions, she hoped "both Peter and Kate will speak out openly across all social media platforms and condemn the reckless pursuit of unnecessarily and knowingly exposing our school communities to increased risk of infection."

The notes for the meeting insisted that "UK strategy must change from intentional infection of 'low risk' sections of society (a policy of "herd immunity") to one based on the precautionary principle to vaccinate and mitigate.

"No socially responsible society should think that it is morally or legally acceptable to unnecessarily and knowingly expose children, young people, school staff, their families or the communities they live in, to an increased risk of infection."

Hive's notes called for an end to punitive measures against parents choosing to keep their children at home and for a proper programme of remote education until schools are made safe.

Demands included a risk based rather than attendance criteria for measures affecting children, to protect "the school setting from an airborne pathogen." These included effective contact tracing, isolation of pupils and staff in contact with infected people, and the right of parents and staff to be informed of confirmed case.

The campaigners believed they had secured a broad measure of agreement from Green and Kyle. A draft press release was therefore sent to Tipple on September 24, with a cover letter asking for any objections to be forwarded and with the friendly explanation, "We're obviously trying to promote how Labour are pushing for

mitigations in schools to stop unnecessary infections and keep in-person education sustainable and fair to all.”

The draft press release listed 11 key points which “Labour has agreed pledged [sic] to push forward... as part of their work in Covid recovery policy discussions”:

1. Publicly announce and campaign against punitive non-attendance measures.

2. Publicly condemn the removal of CEV [Clinically Extremely Vulnerable] status from those who have clinical vulnerabilities.

3. Send a clear message to the general public, schools & Department for Education that masks are an effective measure used worldwide by all ages to limit transmission in schools and would constitute best practice in the UK.

4. Demand that all schools have an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) assessor visit by the end of half term.

5. Demand that all further Department for Education guidance is firmly grounded in [Health and safety] legislation and scientifically recognised infection control principles.

6. Specifically, raise the issue with school leaders and Department for Education regarding lunchtime provision and mitigations required.

7. Demand that schools conduct contact tracing.

8. Insist that isolations of those who live with a person who has tested positive must still take place.

9. As SARS-CoV2 is a notifiable disease, to demand that schools make parents and staff aware of confirmed cases.

10. Overall demand equity of mitigations and information.

11. Support in preventing any delay in providing the approved vaccines to those who can have and want them.

Campaigners’ assumption that Labour agreed with these reasoned measures was, however, unfounded. Shortly after receiving the draft press release, Tipple made political realities clear, writing indignantly, “We conduct our stakeholder meetings on a private, confidential basis. This is really important to us as it allows us to carry out our job and have frank discussions. We are therefore surprised that you are intending to comment publicly on what we understood to be a private meeting.”

He added, “Kate & Peter are committed to doing everything we can to ensure schools are COVID-safe and welcome your input in this,” but “we did not endorse or promise to promote any of the 11 pledges, and our public positions on COVID-safety remain as they have been stated in the media and Parliament up to this point.”

Tipple’s terse email confirmed that any expression of

sympathy by Green and Kyle for measures to protect children was for private consumption only. Both were acting as seasoned operators, representing a party whose real approach to child safety is epitomised by Sir Keir Starmer’s August 16, 2020 declaration, “My message to the Prime Minister: I don’t just want all children back at school next month, I expect them back at school. No ifs, no buts, no equivocation.”

Saul’s September 24 response to Tipple stated that child safety campaigners “had no idea that any such meetings were to remain secret, private or confidential. At no point were we instructed in this regard prior to, during or after the meeting...”

She explained, “We truly believed that both Peter Kyle and Kate Green would have chosen to be open and transparent about whom they speak to and what is discussed... Indeed, at no time were we informed that we should not comment publicly on the fact that we had met or that the points we raised were favourably received. Mr Kyle said at the end of the meeting with us, as you know, that he would be putting the items we had discussed forward in his discussions during covid recovery policy meetings.”

It is of course one thing to raise a few “suggestions” during policy discussions in the bowels of Westminster, and quite another to take a stand on principle that would put Kyle and Green in conflict with their party and the powerful corporate interests it defends. But the lesson to be learned from this experience goes far beyond understanding the political loyalties of Green and Kyle—right-wingers appointed by Starmer thanks for their efforts in helping to depose former party leader Jeremy Corbyn. It provides a more general guide in assessing the sincerity of all Labourites professing support for measures to combat COVID and other threats to the working class.

This includes those Labour MPs who formally support a “Zero COVID” policy, including “lefts” such as Corbyn, Richard Burgon and Diane Abbott. They should be politically judged not by their futile appeals to Johnson for a change of course, but their refusal to oppose the Labour Party and trade union leaders on whose de facto support the Johnson government depends.



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