

Schools in Sydney, Australia's largest city, reopen to mass in-person learning

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A major step in the bipartisan drive to “reopen” the Australian economy and force the population to “live with the virus” took place on Monday, when over 500,000 school students and their educators were herded back to in-person learning across Sydney, the country’s most populous city, along with hundreds of thousands more elsewhere in New South Wales (NSW).

Masses of unvaccinated children travelled on packed buses and trains and then sat crowded in unventilated, crumbling classrooms where the inadequate mitigation measures laid down by government authorities against the highly-contagious virus are completely unviable.

The class nature of the pandemic was once again underscored. Some of Sydney’s elite private schools, fearing COVID outbreaks of the virus under the government’s reckless classroom return, have made their own arrangements, including postponing senior classes until the 2022 school year.

One of the first acts of Dominic Perrottet, the newly-installed premier of New South Wales, was to accelerate the school reopening by a week. This was despite the fact that, even though learning has primarily been online since early in the current outbreak, a third of all infections have been among teenagers and children.

In the first two weeks in October, 56 schools in the state were closed due to COVID-19 cases, when they were primarily attended only by the children of essential workers. Last week, 40 schools were closed after senior students, along with kindergarten and year one, returned.

On Monday, the first day with all year cohorts present, 16 schools were closed down, a number that has since grown to at least 20. Statistics from NSW Health show that nearly 600 children under the age of nine tested positive to the virus in the past week.

The reopening flies in the face of all epidemiological science and will result in mass infections and deaths. It has nothing to do with the well-being of children and their educational needs and everything to do with ensuring children’s parents are able to attend their workplaces to keep corporate profits flowing.

Perrottet is being hailed in the corporate press for “setting a cracking pace” and leading the reopening of the economy, with the school resumption acting as a spearhead for the rapid lifting of all other safety restrictions.

As part of this campaign, basic mitigation measures are being wound back. The public reporting of public exposure sites visited by people who are COVID-positive, has been scrapped in Sydney. The definition of close contacts is being watered down, in line with the demands of major employers, and the contact tracing regime is scaled back. Such is the determination to “normalise” COVID transmission in schools that teachers have been told they have no right to know if a child in their classroom has been infected, on the bogus pretext of protecting privacy.

While the corporate press hailed the school return, there is widespread opposition among parents and teachers, a growing number of whom are aware that similar policies have resulted in mass child infections internationally.

In the United Kingdom, for instance, close to 40,000 children aged 2-16 are currently living with the debilitating symptoms of Long COVID, and 90 were tragically killed by the coronavirus. In the US, over 160 children have died over the past two months and hundreds of thousands have been infected.

Principled medical experts, in opposition to the official mantra that schools are safe, are continuing to report on the deadly consequences of the ruling class

program.

A study published in the Harvard Gazette this month revealed that children could not only carry high loads of the infectious virus and spread the current disease but were potential “reservoirs” for the evolution of new variants. Lead author, Lael Yonker, director of the Massachusetts General Hospital said, “....(Y)ou think of a hospital and of all the precautions taken to treat severely ill adults, but the viral loads of these hospitalized patients are significantly lower than a ‘healthy child’ who is walking around with a high SARS-CoV-2 viral load.”

Almost one in five parents have refused to send their children back to school, with Sydney attendance rates on the first day back reported as 82 per cent. NSW parents are also challenging the education department over its refusal to install air purifiers in classrooms, with some parents and citizens groups raising thousands of dollars to purchase their own.

Ignoring expert advice that air filtration systems are critical in stopping the virus from running rampant through unvaccinated children, the state education department has ruled out installing CO2 monitors or high-efficiency particulate absorbing (HEPA) filters, insisting that teachers open windows and doors. This has sparked anger among teachers, one posting on social media that 84 of her school’s 99 windows were unable to be opened.

On Facebook pages, teachers are directing their outrage at the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) which has taken no action to safeguard the health and safety of the state’s public school teachers. It has organised no meetings to discuss, let alone oppose, the return to school.

When the resumption was first announced last August, the NSWTF “cautiously welcomed” the plan. The union has since complained that the government has done nothing to ensure all teachers were vaccinated in time for the reopening. But such comments are aimed at covering up the NSWTF’s own responsibility for this state of affairs, given it has done everything it can to ensure the reopening proceeds.

One teacher posted, “Federation’s lack of any meaningful response during the pandemic has been beyond frustrating. I don’t understand why we still pay you. We should refuse to go back until all students over 12 are fully vaxxed, all ventilation equipment has been

replaced and our salaries significantly increased. Anything less is a cop out. Teachers last as always. I’m out of the union. I’ll spend the money elsewhere where it actually does something for me. Thanks for nothing.”

Another wrote, “So what is the NSW Teachers Federation going to do to protect its members from being cannon fodder and being fed to the COVID lion den. The points about ventilation should be as well as outdoor classrooms, rapid testing and those of us who are double vaccinated should get some compensation for holding the fort online and face-to-face. Take it to a vote... Why is it okay to expect vaccinated teachers to get the Delta variant of COVID as a normal part of their teaching life. Teachers matter.”

The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) has consistently fought against the dangerous school reopening drive demanded by governments, both Liberal and Labor, federal and state. It has sought to expose the central role played by the teachers’ unions and their pseudo-left accomplices in permitting this dangerous agenda to proceed.

The CFPE calls for the building of rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, to begin the widest discussion among teachers, school workers, parents and the working class, on how to protect children’s health and lives, including by organising action for school shutdowns in all areas where the virus is circulating in the community.

Contact the CFPE here:

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