

Support grows for UK safe schools campaigner Lisa Diaz amid widespread child infections

Thomas Scripps
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SafeEdForAll (Safe Education For All) campaigner Lisa Diaz is under threat from Woodfield Primary School and Wigan's Labour-run council for her principled stand against the dangers posed to children by COVID-19. In a blatant act of intimidation, she has been threatened with prosecution, a fine of up to £2,500, and the Family Court for keeping her daughter out of school.

Lisa has responded with a letter making clear her position. She writes: "I take issue with the phrase 'absent from school without satisfactory reason.' There is a very long paper trail as to why Helena has not been in attendance. The school's risk assessment does not mitigate the spread of Covid transmission to the lowest practical level. I have offered to help the school improve school safety on numerous occasions."

In an indication of the widespread support for her stand, Lisa was interviewed this week by the *Metro*, which has print circulation of over one million. She told the paper, "Schools are like Covid petri dishes and that's completely and utterly unacceptable."

Many reposted the article on social media with messages of support. Dee called Lisa a "brave and tenacious mother who has shown integrity, scientific understanding and parental responsibility throughout. She's a trail blazer and many of us are very grateful to her."

Chrissie commented, "You and other caring and loving parents have been treated so unfairly by an uncaring, dangerous government."

Rebecca added, "There's also no support from govt or @UKLabour for families that include a member that is CV [clinically vulnerable] or CEV [clinically extremely vulnerable] schooling their children at home to protect other members of the family. Over 7,000 children have lost a parent to Covid-19 so far."

Francis wrote, "British Parents are having to go to court to protect their children from a Pandemic because their government doesn't want to. Obscene."

Workers are responding to Lisa's fight in recognition of the crisis underway in schools, as the Delta variant continues to run like wildfire through the young population and the Omicron variant threatens an even worse surge.

According to the government's figures, there were 208,000 children absent from school on November 25. Of these, 111,000 were absent with a confirmed case of COVID-19, 81,000 with a suspected infection and around 5,500 due to partial or full school closures.

Despite the government setting the infection threshold for any school closures extremely high, several have recently been forced to send some or all pupils home. Two weeks ago, St Mary's Primary School in Herefordshire, Aldridge Enterprise Studio in Lancashire, and Beeston Hall School in Norfolk were all fully closed due to COVID.

Llangynidr Primary School in Wales and Down Ampney Primary School in Gloucestershire closed last week, and several classes were sent home at Ann Edwards Primary School and Winchcombe Abbey Primary School, also in Gloucestershire, and Brackla Primary School in Wales.

This week, Ysgol Dyffryn Cledlyn in Wales has closed completely.

Tens of thousands of children are being infected with the virus every week. Public Health England (PHE) reports that, in the two weeks to November 28, 183,447 infections were recorded in the 0-19 age group. The majority of these young people, sent back to unsafe classrooms in September, have not had the opportunity to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.

Of the infections reported by PHE, 79,368 were among children aged 9 and younger, who have no access to vaccines. The remaining 104,079 are among young people aged 10-19. Any infected person in that group under 12 will, again, have had no opportunity to be inoculated.

The government's woeful vaccine rollout among children means that fewer than half of those aged 12-15 eligible for the jab have received it. PHE's COVID-19 vaccine surveillance report reveals that, by November 28, just over

40 percent of children aged 12-15 had received their single initially allowed dose. In some London boroughs, according to NHS [National Health Service] England, the figure is around 20 percent. The percentage for first doses for 16–17-year-olds nationally is less than 60 percent and fewer than 20 percent have received their second jab.

PHE's infection numbers only account for recorded cases. The reality is far worse. According to the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) coronavirus infection survey, an estimated 4.2 percent of all children aged 2 to school Year 6 would have tested positive between October 17 and November 27, one in 24. In the same period, 3.5 percent of children in school year 7 to 11 would have tested positive, one in 29.

These infections are producing a steady toll of long-term illness, paediatric hospitalisations and deaths. The latest ONS Long COVID survey, dealing with the four-week period up to October 31, reports that there are 77,000 children aged 2-16 with Long COVID—a 68 percent increase in the eight weeks after schools reopened. Of these, 36,000 had suffered symptoms for more than three months and 14,000 for more than a year.

In England, in just the two weeks to November 27, there were 513 hospitalisations of children with COVID-19, taking the total across the pandemic to 12,077. Twenty-nine percent of those have taken place in the three months since schools reopened this September.

So far 115 children have been killed by the virus.

Almost all this impact is currently the result of the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2, but that is set to change rapidly. Government advisers estimate daily new cases of the Omicron variant are doubling every three days in the UK, with more than 1,000 infected daily already. Early indications from South Africa, where almost all cases are now of the Omicron variant, are deeply concerning. Hospitalisations of young people are taking place at a much higher rate than in the previous Delta wave.

As Omicron begins to circulate in the UK, schools are again proving to be key vectors of viral transmission. Some of the UK's earliest detected cases of the new variant were linked with Larchwood Primary School in Essex and Heymann Primary School in Nottingham.

On Monday, Hatch Warren Junior School in Hampshire was also connected with an Omicron case and began testing staff and pupils. Todholm Primary in Scotland and the St. Marguerite, St. Nicholas and St. Mary Choir and Orchestra primary schools in London all closed the same day in connection with the new variant.

The rapid spread among children poses a knock-on risk to families and education workers. Northern Ireland's Public Health Agency reported 1,250 COVID infections among

school staff in the four weeks to November 28. Based on the Department for Education's reporting that 2 percent of teaching staff and 1.9 percent of teaching assistants were absent for COVID-related reasons on November 25, roughly 23,000 school workers nationally were either infected with COVID or required to isolate because of potential close contact.

Under these conditions, those who claim a responsibility for defending the working class should be doing everything in their power to bring this industrial-scale criminality to an end. But the trade unions refuse to do so, facilitating the government's programme of mass infection.

Their inaction is only underscored by the "Protect Pupils, Protect Education" event organised by the Unison, NASWUT, GMB and Unite unions for tomorrow.

Just one week before schools are due to close for the holidays, the unions organise a "day of action". And this consists of encouraging people to post pictures to social media and tweet their MP.

As for their demands, these are limited to providing air filtration, requiring face coverings in all areas of secondary schools, support payments for close contacts required to isolate and better contact tracing.

These organisations supposedly collectively represent some 2.5 million workers, hundreds of thousands of those in education.

The main education union, the National Education Union (NEU), and the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), are notably absent from even this deeply cynical token event. They have made even less pretence of opposition, advising the government to adopt the most minor, inconsequential measures, not in order to defeat the pandemic and save lives but to minimise "educational disruption."



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