

UK mother faces court for protecting her child from COVID-19 infected schools

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A mother who has kept her vulnerable primary age son off school due to rampant COVID-19 infections has been charged with “failing to ensure regular school attendance” under Section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

Sarah Paxman, a single mother who herself is suffering from the debilitating effects of Long COVID, received the notice from Surrey County Council on February 14. The letter instructs that she has 21 days from receipt to enter her plea.

Eight-year-old Stanley is autistic and attends a specialist school. He suffers from several underlying health conditions, which are potentially life threatening. They include Cold Urticaria, which means that even breathing in cold air for a short period of time has caused him to become unconscious on several occasions. Because of the danger of anaphylaxis, he is required to take a medication four times the adult daily dose and to always have two EpiPens at hand—two at school and two at home.

Sarah has taught her son at home since March 2020. Surrey County Council are aware of her understandable concerns but continue to persecute her regardless. Other parents across the country that have been threatened with fines and prosecution include Lisa Diaz, a mother of two from Wigan and a leading member of the SafeEdForAll (Safe Education for All) campaign group.

Surrey Council's legal threat rejects the scientifically grounded objections made by Sarah to the policy of letting COVID rip in schools. It asserts that she had been reassured “of the safety measures put in place”, including “cancellation of group gatherings such as school assemblies, regular handwashing and the implementation of ‘bubbles’ to adhere to social distancing as much as possible.”

This supposed reassurance was given in September 2021, as the government was insisting schools must remain open, leading to an explosion in cases. Even when Sarah was interviewed under caution in December and

explained that the new Omicron variant was affecting children more than previous variants, with a 20 percent rise in hospital admissions, her concerns were dismissed.

None of these mitigations remain today according to official government guidelines. As of February 24, the legal requirement to self-isolate after a positive test, routine contact tracing and self-isolation payments was ended. School staff and students no longer must test twice weekly and face masks in schools (as elsewhere) are not required. From March 24, all COVID sick pay provisions end and from April 1, so will free testing for the general public.

Surrey council complains, “Miss Paxman has not demonstrated that she had taken reasonable steps to ensure Stanley’s regular school attendance”, when the truth is that neither the council, nor the government, have taken “reasonable steps” to ensure the safety of children and staff.

The threat of persecution arrived just days before Prime Minister Boris Johnson unveiled his grotesquely misnamed “living with Covid strategy”. As the WSWs warned, this should more aptly be named “dying with Covid.”

Contrary to the lying claims that the removal of all protections means “freedom” and a return to “normality”, the government has officially sanctified its policy of mass deaths that was summed up in Johnson's October 2020 outburst, “No more fucking lockdowns. Let the bodies pile high in their thousands.”

The most vulnerable sections of society are the main victims of this eugenicist policy. Officially six million globally have died, of which more than 160,000 are in the UK. Many are elderly and those with underlying health conditions. But children have also been adversely affected, especially by the Omicron variant which has caused the highest rates of hospitalisations among the young since the pandemic began.

In the US, where the Biden administration has lifted most mask restrictions, more than 50,000 died of COVID in February alone and more children are dying than previously in the pandemic. In Europe, where restrictions are also being ended, Italy saw 1,126 children hospitalised in the first days of February, the second highest total ever, after January's figure of 3,071. In the UK, 151 children have died and, despite declining infection numbers (in part due to the abandonment of testing requirements) hospital admission rates in children under 15 years were over one and half times the peak values from January 17, 2021.

England's Chief Medical Officer Sir Chris Whitty has admitted that new COVID variants may cause “significant problems”, including higher rates of hospitalisation, while Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance said, “the virus will continue to evolve, and it will probably be quite fast for the next five years”. Neither have publicly protested the abandonment of COVID-19 mitigations.

Threats of fines and imprisonment against parents refusing to send their children into unsafe classrooms is not because the danger has passed, as is repeated ad nauseum by the media and given credence by the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer speaks of the need to “live well with Covid.” That little distinguishes Labour’s policy from that of Johnson was set out by the party’s health spokesman, Wes Streeting. His flimsy promises (which include maintaining a “strong testing infrastructure, with more tests made here in Britain” and a “volunteer ‘jabs army’”) is predicated on the insistence that “The virus is here to stay.”

As for the education unions, their joint statement complains that the government has withdrawn mitigation measures “prematurely”, leaving “schools and colleges exposed to high case rates and severe educational disruption.” But they reiterate that “Our priority, as always, is to protect education, and this means keeping staff and students *as safe as possible* from the impact of the virus.” [Emphasis added] They propose only advising on the efficacy of vaccinations, risk assessments, ventilation, etc, they know have largely been abandoned by government.

Teachers that have sought to enforce such standards, including a number of union safety reps, have been victimised, with their unions barely lifting a finger in their defence. Nor have the unions come to the aid of parents justifiably concerned for children’s health. In this way they aid the efforts of those like Surrey Council in trying

to cow opposition to a policy that subordinates public health and workers' lives to the profits of the corporate oligarchy.

Sarah told the WSWS that she will be pleading not guilty to the charges:

“No one can make me send my son into an unsafe environment that could prove disastrous for him. I know they are trying to bully me into backing down. They might prefer that I deregister him. I'm sure that if he was deregistered, they wouldn't care less about him. I will not do that. He has an Educational Health Care Plan so his place in school is secured, and I want him in school. But it must be safe and it's not. The government and its pet advisers think they can pronounce the pandemic is over—it's not. The virus isn't interested in what Johnson and others say. It just wants to keep on mutating, and it's been given the freedom to do that.

“It's not only the rate of hospitalisations amongst children, but also the danger of Long COVID that concerns me on top of his pre-existing conditions.

“I will go to court and state my case, which is that there must be proper mitigations, including ventilation in place in schools, and that my son will not be returning until he is fully vaccinated. It can go only two ways: the court find me innocent, which I doubt. Or it finds me guilty, and I'm fined, or even sent to jail. Even if I'm found guilty, I still will not send him in. They can put me in prison to make an example of me, but I will not budge until I feel it is safe enough for him. And I decide that, not the government or council who have never been bothered about our children and definitely aren't now.”



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