



UNISON National Schools Committee Statement – 2 November 2020

Following the government announcement that in England schools and nurseries will remain open during the forthcoming lockdown, UNISON's National Schools Committee met on Monday 2 November and agreed the following statement:

UNISON's National Schools Committee wants the best education possible for children and young people and for schools and nurseries to open in a safe environment. School and nursery staff delivered education, support, food and safe and clean schools for the children of key workers and at-risk children during the first lockdown and worked hard to extend this to all pupils when schools fully re-opened.

We are now very concerned at increasing infections in schools and the risk to pupils and staff. We note the growing calls from scientists (including some on SAGE) that schools should be included in the new lockdown. We also note that areas already under stricter measures, but where schools remain open, have not seen the rapid decline in infections that were hoped for and that ad hoc closures of classes, bubbles or whole schools are taking place across the country.

Therefore, during the new lockdown – to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and the community – schools and nurseries should move back to the arrangements implemented during the first lockdown earlier this year. This would mean keeping schools and nurseries open for children of key workers and vulnerable children, ensuring that they maintain their education and get a hot meal. Online learning should be put in place for all other children – with government providing IT equipment for disadvantaged pupils, so that they can learn from home effectively.

However, as the government intends to push the new measures through parliament on Wednesday, urgent steps are needed now to protect staff and pupils in schools that are open:

These should include:

- Reduce risks by maximising social distancing and implement existing contingency plans for reduced class sizes and home learning (schools already have these plans in place).
- Reduce bubble sizes and introduce rotas to reduce risks.
- Staff remaining within one bubble; so reducing the risk of spread across the school.
- Moving whole bubbles to home learning where a pupil or member of staff develops coronavirus symptoms or receives a positive test.
- Ensure that all school staff have priority access to the test and trace system.
- Require all pupils and staff to wear face coverings while at school (including classrooms) as is policy in other countries e.g. France. Clear face masks to

be made available so that pupils and staff who need to read lips are not disadvantaged. There should be exemptions for pupils and staff who cannot wear face coverings.

- Move all clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), clinically vulnerable (CV), staff over 60 and pregnant staff (3rd trimester) to home working as they are at the highest risk from becoming seriously ill if they catch the virus. CEV and CV staff who cannot work from home to stay at home on full pay.
- Individual risk assessments for staff in other higher risk groups, such as Black staff, older male staff and those with weight issues, who are at increased risk of adverse outcomes if they contract the virus. Staff identified as being at particular risk should also be allowed to work from home.
- Permit and encourage staff (and pupils aged 16 and over) to use the NHS COVID app in school, including classrooms, as per DfE guidance
- Stronger measures on school transport and at the school gates to stop mixing, ensure social distancing and the wearing of face coverings.
- Increase funding to schools to cover the increased costs of cleaning.