

Government must act right away to prevent disruption in schools



Support staff, teachers, school leaders and families are uniting today to urge the government to better protect pupils and staff

Support staff, teachers, school leaders and families are uniting to urge the government to better protect pupils and staff from Covid in schools in the lead up to Christmas.

With increased uncertainty due to increasing cases of the Omicron variant and classroom absences rising, four education unions – UNISON, GMB, Unite and NASUWT – are calling on the government to act without delay to minimise disruption by introducing additional safety measures.



The unions want ministers to provide schools with air filtration devices for use wherever airflow problems are detected and make face masks mandatory in all areas of secondary schools.

They want to see full pay for staff who need to isolate due to Covid and are calling for extra resources for schools to contact pupils and families who have been close to a positive case, as NHS Test and Trace no longer does this routinely in schools.



The four unions have organised a day of online activities to encourage staff, parents and pupils to lobby politicians to persuade the government to bring in these extra measures to reduce the risk of growing Covid spread. They will be writing to their MPs, tweeting and posting photos on social media with speech bubbles with the slogans *Protect education* and *Protect pupils*.

School-aged children have the highest rate of infection of any group which has led to more than 200,000 pupils being absent from schools for Covid-related reasons on 25 November. Additionally, 77,000 children aged 2 to 16 are suffering with long Covid*. Concerned parents and campaign groups will be joining the day of action.

Education staff are also more likely to test positive for Covid than the general population leading to unsustainable workload pressures and burnout, the unions say.





Avril Chambers, GMB national officer, said:

“With school children having the highest rate of infection and a new variant that appears to be more transmissible, it beggars belief this government insists no additional mitigation measures are needed in schools.

“School staff have kept schools open throughout the pandemic and they deserve to stay safe. Our children deserve not to have their education interrupted any more than it already has been. The minister needs to act now.”

UNISON assistant general secretary Jon Richards, said:

“It’s not too late for ministers to introduce additional measures to protect pupils, staff and their families before Christmas.

“Omicron is spreading fast. If ministers are serious about face-to-face teaching then they need to act immediately so schools are safe for pupils and staff.”





NASUWT general secretary Dr Patrick Roach, said:

“Covid rates in schools have been running at very high levels for most of this term and the emergence of the Omicron variant now threatens a further wave of infections.

“Enhancing the measures around ventilation, face masks and self-isolation are sensible steps that would help control the spread of the virus, and minimise disruption to education.”

Unite national officer Jim Kennedy, said: “School staff are once again on the frontline of the pandemic. The minimum the government should be doing is to bring in extra safety measures to protect them.”

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