



Ministers must bring back safety measures in schools, says unions

02 Sep 2021

The government should re-introduce safety measures in schools, including bubbles, social distancing and face coverings, in light of warnings of the "exponential growth" of coronavirus amongst children when the new academic year begins, say education unions GMB, UNISON and Unite.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) committee has cautioned that it's "highly likely" there will be a high prevalence of the virus for pupils and staff when term starts in England, causing more disruption in learning.

After 18 months of unsettled education, it's vital every effort is made to minimise transmission among pupils – most of whom will not have been vaccinated – in an effort to keep as many as possible in class, says the unions.

Even at this stage, it is not too late to take action and avert significant problems, the union says. The unions have also been calling for improved ventilation to limit further infection spread.



Avril Chambers, GMB National Officer, said:

"The SAGE report simply confirms what we already know - without preventative measures in places, Covid will spread like wildfire in schools.

"The experience of GMB members in Scotland confirms this. Thousands of children have been hospitalised in the UK due to Covid - it's simply not true to say these are low-risk workplaces, full of children who are not affected.

"The Government must act now to prevent an explosion of both acute Covid cases and long-Covid in returning pupils. Schools are still workplaces, and these risks must be reduced to the lowest level possible without delay."

Jon Richards, UNISON assistant general secretary, said:

"We cannot risk another year of disrupted learning. Schools provide a safe space for pupils to build relationships, protect their mental health and further their education.



"Given the dire warning by scientific experts, the government must act swiftly to reintroduce safety measures, including face coverings, as a simple way to reduce transmission

"It's unacceptable to knowingly jeopardise a new term by failing to heed the experts. It's also grossly unfair to abandon unvaccinated children to a highly transmissible virus with potentially serious health risks for them, their families and the wider community."

Jim Kennedy, Unite national officer for local government, said: “The government needs to take every measure possible, such as mask wearing and proper ventilation in schools, to prevent another wave of Covid-19 causing further disruption this autumn to the education of this generation of school students and pupils.

“Education secretary Gavin Williamson has been caught napping on the job far too often in the last 18 months, but he now needs to come forward with a comprehensive package of measures to reassure students, parents, teachers and staff that the government is doing everything it can to keep Covid cases in schools and colleges to the absolute minimum.”

