

Tower Hamlets NEU Branch

Briefing for NEU Reps

Subject: Coronavirus update: school closure



The purpose of this briefing is to update members on the latest situation and NEU advice, following the government's decision to ask schools to close until further notice, other than for the most vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

It is important to note that the government decision is based on reducing the occupancy rate of school buildings to around 10%, and to increase the number of people working at home.

Government advice is that anyone who can work at home should do so and anyone who can keep their child at home should do so – NHS workers are asking people to stay at home if at all possible.

ALL decisions about school opening and staffing levels should flow from that. It would make no sense for all staff to be at work - that would defeat the object of the exercise, which is to minimise travel and contact.

1. WHO SHOULD BE WORKING FROM HOME?

There are three groups of staff, who should definitely be working from home:

- *those who have developed a consistent cough or fever*
- *those who are in one of the vulnerable groups identified by the government*
- *those who live with, or care for someone, in one of the vulnerable groups*

2. WHICH CHILDREN SHOULD BE IN SCHOOL?

The only children in school from next should be children of key workers, or other vulnerable children, who really can't find an alternative. We are driving down the number of children in school to stop the spread of the virus.

3. ORGANISING CHILDCARE FOR THOSE IN SCHOOL

Once the school has established the number of children who will be attending, the head should determine the minimum number of staff needed to provide safe childcare for them. This may mean asking staff to volunteer or be on a rota. *The NEU is encouraging members to work on a rota in schools - unless they are in one of the government's vulnerable groups, or caring for someone in one of those groups.*

4. WORKING AT HOME

Staff may be asked to work from home. Expectations for those working at home should be reasonable and should be discussed with staff. They should not attempt to replicate the school day and should also take account of individual circumstances.

5. GETTING PAID

All staff should continue to receive full pay, including those who are self-isolating. Supply teachers are in a different position and the NEU is trying to address their situation.

6. EASTER OPENING

The government has said that they want schools to continue with this provision during the Easter holiday. At the moment we have no other information on this but we will address when we know more.

7. KEEPING IN TOUCH

We do recommend that you stay in touch with colleagues and fellow union members. Departments and union groups can set up Zoom meetings and WhatsApp groups. Be a collective and get colleagues to join the NEU.

8. NAHT ADVICE TO HEADTEACHERS

We expect heads to consult with NEU Reps and staff about all matters arising from this crisis – this will only work with the maximum buy-in. This is supported by the NAHT advice to headteachers, *"It will be impossible to build the team response you will need if you rely on compulsion. That will lead to resentment and people will simply stay away using "isolation" to legitimise their absence. This effort cannot be about compulsion. Success will be borne out of mutual respect, understanding and support."*

We are getting hundreds of queries and we are answering them as quickly as we can. We will issue further updates but please do check the NEU website www.neu.org.uk/coronavirus and contact us if you have any concerns about any aspect of this situation.