



National Education Union

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Joint General Secretaries

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The Rt Hon Boris Johnson
10 Downing Street
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17 March 2020

Dear Prime Minister

We write again following your announcements yesterday and our letter of Saturday.

In that letter we pointed to an apparent contradiction between bans on large gatherings and a refusal to close schools.

We also said we thought that it was important to engage with all the science and appealed for more information to be released on the modelling and on the effects on vulnerable school and college teachers, other staff and parents.

We have not yet seen that further information.

You announced yesterday that vulnerable people are to confine themselves for 12 weeks from this weekend.

On our understanding this includes:

- pregnant women.

and those who are suffering from:

- chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis;
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure;
- chronic kidney disease;
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis;
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy;
- diabetes;
- problems with their spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if they have had their spleen removed;
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy;
- being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above).

We assume that on this basis teachers and other school and college staff who have these conditions or who are caring for people with those conditions, or who are over 70 should self-isolate.

We intend to advise all our members in these categories or caring for people in them to stop attending schools and colleges from next Monday at the latest. Some will do so earlier.

We also assume that the children of parents with those conditions should also avoid school or college.

This will make the running of schools all the more complicated.

Given your failure to release modelling comparing different scenarios of school closures, we are now forced to call on you to close schools, at least for some time and at least in some areas.

We know that very many of our members who aren't in the categories of heightened risk would be willing to volunteer to play a role in helping our society get through this crisis.

We suggest during a period of full school closure that teachers and school leaders could work on plans for more limited opening to:

- ensure that we can look after the children of parents who must do the work our society needs - including NHS staff, food and distribution workers, police, prison and fire brigade staff and those who are working to produce medical equipment, including hopefully industries being repurposed to produce ventilators;
- ensure that children on free school meals or otherwise in food poverty can eat nutritious meals;
- support other children in need.

Of course, this could not be a full opening and it would mean substantial changes from the way schools are normally run - but we believe schools could be important community hubs. This in turn requires that SATs are abandoned and that you produce proposals on the inevitable widespread disruption to GCSE and A-level exams.

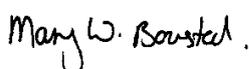
Supply teachers would also be willing to help in such ways and in any event need your support during school closure or self-isolation.

We look forward to your engagement with these ideas and we remain, as before, ready to meet with you and the Secretary of State for education.

Given the number of staff and pupils that will now be off school, teachers and leaders will simply have to exercise their professional discretion about whether schools and colleges open and what work is undertaken - and they should do so with your approval.

We will support them in so doing.

Yours sincerely



Mary Bousted
Joint General Secretary



Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretary

CC: Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP