

Tower Hamlets NEU Branch

Briefing for NEU Reps

Subject: Frequently Asked Questions



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 begin wider reopening from June 1st.

The NEU believes that it is not safe to reopen schools, primarily because the numbers of cases is too high and an efficient system of testing and tracing is not in place.

However, many schools are planning to reopen for larger numbers of children, with most taking a cautious and measured approach to the process. To help Reps and members with this, the NEU has produced a checklist for schools, which we expect to be met before more children are brought back to school.

This briefing answers some of the most frequently asked questions from NEU members – for full details of our advice and to download the checklist please visit www.neu.org.uk/coronavirus - if you have any concerns talk to your NEU Rep or contact your local office.

1. Who should remain at home?

The NEU believes that the following staff should remain at home:

- *those who have developed Covid-19 symptoms - a consistent cough or fever or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)*
- *those who are in either of the vulnerable groups identified by the government*
- *those who live with, or care for someone, in either of the vulnerable groups identified by the government*

2. What about Black staff?

There is strong evidence that Covid-19 has a disproportionate impact on Black people. The NEU believes that Black staff who feel that they may be at risk should be allowed to work from home.

3. What should I do if I think I should not be in school?

You should refer to the NEU guidance and discuss this with your head. The NEU guidance includes model letters for you to use, if you think you may be vulnerable and should continue working from home.

4. Can all staff be expected to attend school?

Heads should establish a list of available staff and use this to plan arrangements for reopening to more children. It is not reasonable to expect all staff to be in school for INSET or any other purpose. Government guidelines contain strict measures for contact and social distancing between staff. Contact must be kept to a minimum, therefore staffing should be kept at the minimum to meet the needs of those children attending school.

5. I am pregnant – can my school start maternity leave early?

If you are sick with Covid-19 or have symptoms the school cannot start your maternity leave early. If you are shielding because you are pregnant, and you are within four weeks of the due date, then the school may do this – we would want to persuade your head not to do this, but to allow you to continue working from home.

6. My head has asked me to take unpaid leave

If you are unable to attend work you should tell your head that you are available to work from home – you should not agree to take unpaid leave and should contact the local NEU office.

7. I work part-time – can my head change my days or make me full-time?

Your head cannot change your contract or working days without your agreement.

8. Should teachers or teaching assistants be cleaning classrooms?

No. All areas of the school will need thorough cleaning every day, but this should be done by specialist cleaners, not by teachers or TAs.

9. I believe the school is not safe

The NEU has produced a checklist for Reps and members to use. Your school should be “checklist compliant” before wider reopening. If you have any concerns, discuss them with colleagues and ask your Rep to take the concerns of members to the head. We will support members who wish to refuse to work in an unsafe environment.

There is a full set of guidance, including checklists and model letters on the NEU website www.neu.org.uk/coronavirus