

Collective Grievance Outcome
30 April 2021

Dear EIS member

Last night, CEC sent the following to all HTs and BMs:

Dear colleague,

We have been working in partnership with the EIS to rapidly address concerns raised by some colleagues in relation to a full time return to schools and covid health and safety measures. We wanted to take this opportunity to reassure you that that we are fully in line with the relevant national guidance for schools settings. We appreciate, however, that some colleagues remain concerned and so we would like to remind everyone that, where needed, individual risk assessments should be re-visited to take account of any changes or concerns relating to an individual's circumstances.

We also recognise that these individual risk assessments are a Scottish Government backed process, essentially to identify and explore physical risks. For some colleagues there could be psychological stress, which should also be explored and discussed using an individual risk assessment to guide the conversation. Your line manager can discuss this with you, if that would be helpful, and whether there are any additional measures that may be appropriate for your specific circumstances, for example; where it is deemed necessary, for your safety, a FFP2 (Filtering Face Piece) level 2 mask maybe provided.

We're hoping that you feel supported in your place of work and would remind you to talk through any concerns with your line manager or your Union Representative (if you are a member).

Kind regards and once again, thanks for your continued support

Lorna French (Interim Head of Schools & Lifelong Service) and Alison Murphy (Local Association Secretary, EIS)

As you can see, this email is a direct response to the strength of feeling expressed by the very many members who signed our collective grievance at the beginning of the holiday. CEC is acknowledging the stress many are feeling because of the pandemic, and recognising that FFP2 masks may provide a way for some members to cope better with that stress. This is a highly significant move, and one that has happened because we worked together to show them how important this was to members. Hopefully this, in combination with other measures, such as the CO₂ monitors to check ventilation, will help to ensure that in-school work is made as safe as possible.

I have already been in touch with reps to discuss some of the detail of how we hope this will work in practice - obviously we will need to monitor implementation to ensure that this

mitigation is made available to those staff who would benefit from it. I note that CEC has said that psychological distress can be explored using a conversation that is guided by a risk assessment - it is to be hoped that the emphasis is on the conversation, and that no one (particularly SLT) is overburdened by bureaucracy in implementing this.

I should probably let members know a bit more background to this process, just for full information and transparency. CEC sent the executive a formal response to our collective grievance, ruling it incompetent on the grounds that it sought to challenge existing policy and procedure but acknowledging member concerns and looking to address these - that resulted in what were classed as informal discussions, and gave us the outcome outlined above. Given the satisfactory nature of the final outcome, the Executive have decided not to challenge the decision on competency at this time, but we have written to CEC to express our grave concerns about the wider implications behind that decision, pointed out the many problems caused by such a ruling, and saying that were a similar approach to be taken in the future we would look to challenge very robustly. If any member wants to know more about the background to all this, do get in touch...

This is a positive outcome, and there are several other areas where CEC has responded constructively to concerns raised by the EIS (supporting those with long covid, continuing to support WFH for +28 week pregnant staff, good use of individual risk assessments for previously shielding staff, the project on ventilation with Napier Uni etc). All this shows the power of the union to make gains for members, when we work collectively. There are, of course, many other areas where we are continuing to fight for much needed improvements - conditions for supply teachers, and the shortage of permanent, or even long term temporary, posts are key concerns, as is workload (both generally and in relation to the Alternative Certification Model). Be assured that we'll continue to campaign on these, and many other, issues, and if that all members continue to be actively involved in the union, we will have a much greater chance of ongoing success.

I do hope you can enjoy the long weekend. Stay safe and well and, as always, let's keep on being kind to each other.

Alison