

School Based Member Survey Briefing 7

Comments from members in Secondary Schools – November 2020

Within the EIS November survey, thousands of comments from teachers were collected on issues such as behaviour in the classroom, their health, and wider safety concerns about working in schools. This is the seventh in a series of briefings, that the EIS will issue to the Scottish Government outlining the experiences of EIS members. Some comments have been redacted to ensure they do not identify individual schools or members.

Key Issues

- 124 comments were left by members who identified themselves as a Headteacher or a Depute Headteacher in their response to the survey (not all are included in this briefing)
- Senior leaders highlighted that they are doing their best to implement the guidance to keep their schools safe, but there are just too many pupils in class and in communal areas
- Some members suggested that the transmission within their school is not being reported
- There was widespread concern over the wellbeing of school staff who feel under pressure with their workload and are anxious about teaching with so many pupils in class full time

“Everyone is working hard to do their best but maintaining physical distancing of 2m between children and staff is impossible in primary schools when the classes are in fully regardless of any risk assessment.”

“The amount of additional pressure and workload on head teachers is disgraceful. Now working 7 days a week as on call constantly with no time back or recognition. Schools are not safe.”

“It is impossible to maintain staffing levels even without isolation periods for staff when the system for calculating your staffing and management structure is outdated and does not take account of school specific circumstances particularly in areas of high deprivation. NCCT and pupil support has a huge impact on the school senior leadership team particularly when trying to maintain bubbles. It is impossible to do your 'day job' when covering everything from NCCT to lunch duty whilst being on call 24/7 for COVID. We let staff take their NCCT at home and encourage them to work remotely as much as possible. Leadership teams don't get the same consideration. Approaches to school leadership and management structures needs a rethink if we are truly to have a positive impact on outcomes for learners.”

“Quite concerned about the way in which the public health team is dealing with confirmed cases in school. Parent can report that child has tested positive before 9am yet it takes until 3pm for any decision to be made about the class/staff isolating.”

“I am in Highland where fortunately infection rates are very low at the moment, however I am very concerned for my colleagues in authorities where they have levels 3 and 4 and therefore feel that as a union we should be prepared to support and take any necessary action to protect those who are facing this danger of higher infection rates in their schools.”

“In my role it is impossible to remain 2 m away. Emotions are running high with staff and children about the rise in tiers but NO OTHER MEASURES being put in place, unlike the rest of the country!”

“As a Headteacher I believe staff in schools are doing an incredible job. The responsibility to deliver high quality learning experiences, adjust and adapt plans in response to changing SQA guidelines whilst simultaneously doing so many things to mitigate against Covid infection, is nothing short of miraculous. SG seems to want to support schools and often say schools are being prioritised. It does not always feel like that on the ground. We have approximately 1.1% additional teaching staff, no additional support staff and still face the same level of expectation to produce outcomes. We have been told not to offer staff a flu jab, on cost and equity grounds. We are being asked to add very labour-intensive Health Protection test and trace operations into our normal working regime. We are being expected to cover the full curriculum and provide all normal supports for all students, despite some key partners not being able to come into our schools. On 18.11.20 we still do not know key information from SQA including the deadline for submission of evidence and the contingency plan if H and AH exams do not go ahead. This certainly does not feel like schools are 'being prioritised.'”

“I believe that schools should stay open wherever possible but there needs to be recognition that children, particularly those who are more vulnerable, will inevitably make it impossible at points to follow risk assessment precautions. This needs to be acknowledged as an inescapable consequence of schools being open. I would also like to see additional support from the government for childcare for teacher’s children who have been required to isolate so that we are not penalised financially or put under any more stress than is absolutely necessary.”

“As a Senior Leader, the job is becoming increasingly difficult to manage. There is no strategic work taking place. I am issuing masks to young people who forget their own, supervising two break and two lunch times (To keep BGE and Senior Phase separate), doing regular corridor duty at change of learning block and during lessons (Checking school guidance is being followed). Myself and my senior leadership team are also dealing with the usual day to day issues - behaviour, parents etc. This means I do not get to my e-mails until after school or until I get home. Yesterday I had 102 e-mails when I arrived home. To keep on top of my work I have to do much more at home. This will eventually affect my health. An issue for all school managers across the country. I have paused our school improvement plan to give staff time to focus on COVID related issues such as Google classroom, preparing for blending learning etc. This has helped the staff however, it is only delaying the SIP being implemented. The parent group "Us for them" talk about authorities should ensure staffing is an

appropriate level should there be COVID absences. In an ideal world this is great however, we have no supply teachers and find it difficult to recruit. This means the burden falls on current staffing including SLT. It also leave young people without a subject specialist.”

“All staff are working in a very stressful environment due to working within guidance and are exhausted. Many feel vulnerable and would have appreciated being offered the flu vaccine as some protection against illness this winter. Many are also feeling undervalued as it’s fine for them to work with 30 different families but not for them to visit their own.”

“My desire would be that schools remain open and that our pupils get the service they long for. If the public health situation is severe enough for a level 4 lockdown and all non-essential shops are closed, then serious consideration must be given to risk of staff and pupils in schools. I believe that blended learning is a half-way house and pupils would get a better deal by staff being fully committed to remote learning. The remote learning offer is now far better than what it was in April to June.”

“I feel there needs to be more recognition of the frontline work schools are doing. NHS got applauded for going to work. We have never shut and are now wearing mask masks almost all day - yet no recognition of the fact we are close to pupils and other adults for 7 hours a day. Social distancing is enforced but if a child needs you- we can't ignore them. Risk assessments are becoming more complicated and confusing. I feel if schools are open- all extra school activities and clubs should be shut to protect us. We zone pupils all day- then they mix as soon as out of school- ridiculous! What are we doing all this for? Levels should not be collated this year- either schools will be honest and we will be slated or schools will lie for fear of the backlash – either way – too much stress. Cover for teachers quarantining or ill needs to be addressed – it could be a different supply person every day – how is that safe? So many 'bits' that need looked at.”

“The biggest concern is that schools are too busy. 2m distancing is not practicable but it is possible to have blended learning with limited year groups in at a time.”

“Staff are exhausted and anxious. There may be a limit to how long they can continue under such pressure.”

“We are finding staffing incredibly challenging. I currently have 50% of my teachers off and while we are able to cover the lack of supply teachers available is very concerning. I am concerned about the impact of the staff who are in and the impact long term staff absence is having on our children.”

“It is important that primary schools stay open, especially for young and vulnerable children. The impact of school closure has been immense, especially on children who have not really been infected. What I think should happen is extra full time teaching staff in all school to support in classes, smaller numbers for group teaching and an in-house availability of staff cover. This would be safer as supply staff would then have a base school in the interim crisis.”

"I cannot express how let down I feel by the SG. The lack of transparent reporting, the fact that schools are not talked about or level of cases actually shared within and across authorities is concerning. Local knowledge tells us that there are high levels of in school transmission within the local area. To listen to the DFM talk about hardly any incidences in schools when we know otherwise is not acceptable. The mention also of hiring retired teachers to replace teachers when off with COVID is also extremely concerning. There is a lack of respect or regard for the profession at the moment. To indicate that schools will be open at all costs and no matter what fills me with grave concern. When will the balance to children, their families and school staff tip towards realising how foolish it is to allow people to catch this virus within a school setting? One person, is one person too many. The level of disruption to children's learning at the moment due to positive cases or self-isolating is becoming more damaging than remote or blended learning. No one has any idea of the long-term implications of this. SG have had constant U-turns. To turn their back on surveillance testing and blended learning is unacceptable. I am hoping that this survey has some impact before more people become ill unnecessarily or lose their lives as a result of doing their job or bringing home a deadly virus to their families."