

## School Based Member Survey Briefing 5

### Comments from members in Primary 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 fifth 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

- 3,435 comments were left by members who identified themselves as working in a Primary School in their response to the survey (not all are included in this briefing)
- Many of the comments received by members highlighted that they did not think their schools were clean enough. Many shared experiences of inadequate cleaning, running out of supplies, or having to clean the classrooms themselves.
- Across all sectors, teachers highlighted that social distancing was often impossible within their classrooms. The comments below show the anxieties that those in the primary sector face when trying to keep a safe distance from pupils and other staff members.
- Overall, those in the primary sector talked of feeling unsafe and wanting stronger mitigations, including a move to blended learning in higher protection level areas.

“Cleaning of schools not sufficient in my opinion, especially following cases of Covid. Shortages are not covered, and carpets cleaned once a week is completely unacceptable.”

“Come on...masks only as an additional measure during Level 4? We need to get tough and value our safety. We are cannon fodder used to keep parents at their work. Teachers Lives Matter what about that as an aspiration? Unless you are actually witnessing what it looks like in school currently during Covid you would not believe the lack of protection we receive. Vulnerable and Shielding teachers should ALL be working from home.”

“Blended learning is my preferred option so that a 2m social distance can be maintained and children's learning can continue. An earlier finish to the term may help reduce the transmission. The last two weeks of term involve Christmas activities which will not now be taking place.”

“At the moment I feel very unsafe in my place of work even although all protocols and guidance has been followed by staff we have had an exceptionally high number of staff positive with COVID within the last week. I feel unsafe as it is still being classed as not transmitted within the school, I strongly disagree with this. I also feel that parents have not been well informed of the extent of the spread of COVID within our school. I obviously would love to see schools kept open and I know that is the best option of our children, however to what affect on our staff?”

“Due to the physical size of some primary schools, 2m social distancing is not possible! Also, it is hard for young children to remember to keep a 2m distance from their teacher at all times. Also, teachers sometimes need to be near a child, e.g. if they are upset or to explain work, etc. Therefore I do not feel safe in school, even though I am wearing a mask.”

“Having been told we are moving to level 4 I find it bizarre that blended learning, which was the contingency plan, has not even been discussed by the first minister.”

“I am deeply concerned about the handling of positive cases in staff within my own establishment and the lack of communication or support from the HT in this matter. I do not feel at all protected and with regret I have to say this is having a significant impact on my mental well-being.”

“I am greatly concerned about family members health while working in school as they were shielding and are now required to do some of my childcare.”

“I am still concerned about cleanliness of the school. Janitor only has time to clean around the school once a day, handles and rails. The standard of cleaning has been diminishing year after year. No deep summer clean for 10 years even after structural work or window replacements. So not starting with a good base this year.”

“I appreciate all the work being done by yourselves to keep us safe! I feel really unsure about having schools fully open in tier 4 when previously we were all working from home however I teach early years and physical distancing is not possible or desired so I am unsure whether blended learning would help keep me any safer it is more the coming to a workplace with lots of adults that would feel risky when the majority of the rest of the area are working from home.”

“There is no other workforce being asked to do their jobs with mitigations that are near impossible to apply in a real setting. The main advice is for the teacher to wear a mask if they cannot distance but that protects the children. What protects me? Nothing. I am in a room all day with 29 other households, minimal social distancing and no masks. Every day is a day filled with fear and anxiety and that's before facing the multiple social, emotional and behavioural issues in overcrowded classrooms. Schools should have returned under a blended learning model. Staff are near breaking point and something needs to change - and soon.”

"I cannot understand why schools are not classed as workplaces why FACTS do not apply to schools why my health and the health of my family are not important as other professions why there are so many discrepancies between councils and even schools within the same cluster."

"I don't feel safe at work and I feel that North Lanarkshire are changing their own rules to suit. They don't seem to be following their own protocol. The guidance is very vague and seems to change with every case. There are currently 3 teachers in isolation with 2 testing positive and now 4 children across the school have tested positive, yet not many children are isolating. The school set up makes social distancing very difficult in corridors. The classes are overcrowded which also makes it very difficult to teach while maintaining a 2metre distance. The children have been placed in bubbles but the toilet facilities are not adequate for the amount of children in the school. Primary 4-7 are all using the same toilets. I also have concerns that the children are eating their lunches in class which hasn't been cleaned beforehand. North Lanarkshire have also stated that cleaning has been enhanced yet are giving the cleaning staff no extra time to complete. Classes are also not being deep cleaned after a confirmed positive case. Class teachers are doing this themselves. The staff toilet only gets cleaned once a day and there are only 2 toilets available for over 30 staff."

"I do wonder if it's wise to have teachers travelling from a Level 4 council to teach in a school in Level 2."

"I feel as though classes are overcrowded. I have 22 children but my base is very small. Our school is open plan and although breaks have been staggered and play areas have been separated there is always crossover in the corridor. We're told no more than one group to the carpet at a time but they are climbing over each other during break. If one child is positive then only the children sitting next to them have to self-isolate which is ridiculous considering the fact that they are all in their play area and cloakroom together. We are told that we are wearing masks so we won't have to self-isolate however we are still having to touch their jotters for marking and the jotters are used daily. There is not an option for not marking jotters, indeed they were monitored recently to make sure that we were marking them."

"I feel the Scottish Government and local authority have failed in their duty of care. I am currently ill with the worsening of my heart condition, which has been caused by their negligence. I speak to colleagues all over the world, and it is the shameful that the Scottish Government refuse to implement temperature checks, smaller classes and bubbles, social distancing between pupils, masks for all, proper ventilation, and routine testing to identify asymptomatic pupils and staff. The measures they have put in place so far are far too little and far too late."

"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.”

“I feel there has been a real failure to ensure that enhanced cleaning is done and the promised investment hasn't materialised. We had a member of cleaning staff absent which meant 6 classrooms and the pupil toilets weren't cleaned for 2 days. Teaching and support staff cleaned instead to keep ourselves and the children safe. This is a huge issue and, in my opinion, a massive failing on the part of our employer. Staff are buying their own wipes for wiping computers and teaching tables. It's also incredibly difficult to socially distance in a classroom full of 30 young children. All of these things (plus many more) make for a stressful experience every day just now. Staff health needs to be more of a priority.”

“I fully support keeping schools open as long as possible as I worry about some of my pupils being at home for such a long period of time, however, it does feel like the Scottish Govt are not considering the well-being and safety of teachers. People are asked not to go into work if possible, so if it is possible for teachers to do their job remotely, like we did in April-June, it should be done. It seems pointless to have almost a full lockdown but still have so many parents meeting in the playground, so many kids around each other for so long and so many members of staff working together.”

“I personally feel that the health, wellbeing and safety of teachers is not being considered by the Government. Many of us feel very anxious and frightened at this time. Only recently was it made mandatory for staff to wear face masks in school!!!! I believe that in order to keep teachers, pupils, extended staff and our families safe a blended learning approach should be adopted. Then if necessary moving to a fully remote based learning and teaching programme. I love my job and consider it an absolute pleasure to teach. However, at present I feel anxious stressed and rather afraid!!!”

“I think the fact that the government keep talking about how schools are safe because children don't get sick with the virus just shows how little they care for teachers and support staff. They either don't realise that physical distancing is near on impossible in a primary school or they simply don't care. I would love to see people from the government/public health come and spend a week in a school to see what it's really like as I think people would be shocked.”

“I understand the push for schools to remain open but it can not be at the cost of people's safety. If it is not safe for me to meet one member of my family in my own home how can it be safe to spend 6 hours in a classroom with 30 households? Or for my children to spend all day in a class or multiple classes for my senior phase son with no physical distancing. We have had time to make plans for blended learning these should not be ignored at this time. Hubs could be reinstated to provide vulnerable children support whilst others learn remotely.”

“Lack of coherent and transparent information regarding self-isolation following a second parent of a child testing positive. I currently have a child attending my class while their parent is an active Covid case and I feel very unsafe and information on government and NHS websites are not matching what my school management

team are saying. Feel teachers and all those who work within schools are being asked to just get on with things when other professions are being safeguarded.”

“Lack of ventilation is a problem in many classrooms therefore wearing a mask to protect yourself is extremely uncomfortable and increasing headaches/feeling unwell. Very difficult to teach in this situation.”

“My headteacher and SMT are working flat out to ensure our school is as safe as possible but their hands are tied. We have antibac and wipes, staggered entries. Staff are encouraged to wear face masks but since we are not a ‘workplace’ it is not mandatory, but it should be. My classroom does not allow me to use the whiteboard or smart board and still be 2m away. Teaching from a distance is impossible.”

“Needs to more support for teachers. We are completely forgotten as though the virus stops at the door. Windows have to be open so we’re getting sick from the temperature. We can now close windows but that means no air flow. Attitude is that schools are a childcare service. I feel like our own families are forgotten. My children and husband are exposed not only in their own spaces but from me too. Being exposed to at least 50 households each day. WDC have also only allocated 4 flu jabs per primary and yet every secondary school has been completely covered. Ridiculous.”

“On more than one occasion that I know of, families are sending children to school knowing they have symptoms or in fact have a positive test result for Covid-19. This is putting school staff in danger on a daily basis. Motivations need to be put in place to deal with this.”

“Outdoor learning is not a solution to physically distancing pupils appropriately. Being outdoors frequently in poor weather teamed with freezing classrooms due to ventilation is having a negative health impact. Some risk assessment ideas are impractical and result in other health detriments. Also supporting children at home while teaching full time in class has heightened workload.”

“Please support us to feel more safe as NLC are now in Tier 4, I am terrified for my safety and that of my family and children in my class/school.”

“Reducing the number of pupils should level 3 or above happen seems the sensible thing to do to allow less exposure and more air to circulate and more space to be allowed. I can't meet friends in a cafe or visit my family members but I about spend 6 hours in a room per day with my class of 28 plus meet with many more pupils at lunchtimes? It just doesn't make sense.”

“Schools are trying their best to implement safety measures but pupils in primary find this very hard to adhere too, especially understanding that they are meant to remain 2m distance from adults they work with. I am involved in support for learning in 2 schools within Stirling and for many of these pupils, who have SEBN or

ASN, this can be almost impossible to maintain at times. Staff are trying hard, but we cannot regulate what happens within families outside of school and we cannot stop the virus being brought in from outside of school. I am worried that if we were to consider industrial action the frustration of the general public would be vented against us as a profession, but our hands are tied as we are following government guidelines. I believe it is important to keep schools open if possible but not at risk to life of staff, pupils and the families we support. Think the Government were wrong to open pubs before schools, but teachers can end up being the scapegoats. I know when classes in my school had to self-isolate recently the SMT were sworn and shouted at when informing parents.”

“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.”

“Schools should never have returned full time we should have got to grips with blended learning for this year and linked with partner agencies to provide HUB style cover so vulnerable pupils were supported full time. We still don’t seem to have the infrastructure in place to support blended learning and will be playing catch up if/when we have to. Don’t think the impact of education differences since August has been explored fully regarding how pupils/staff are feeling.”

“Previously shielding and pregnant staff should work from home level 4. Can’t mitigate the risk in class of 30.”