

Over one million UK children kept off school in face of government threats and propaganda

By Harvey Thompson and Tania Kent
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Around 12 percent of school pupils, over one million children, have not returned since the full reopening of schools imposed by the government from the beginning of this month. The majority of these are families who have no confidence in the government's claim that "schools are the safest place that children can be."

Parents' concerns for the welfare and safety of their children have been confirmed in the exponential growth in the rise of infections in the past two weeks across the UK and especially in England being fuelled by the reopening of schools

By Thursday evening, 1,118 schools had been hit by coronavirus infections, forcing many to close partially or fully. This number is rising rapidly. Up to 25,000 teachers in England have also been forced out of the classroom and into self-isolation amid a national shortage of COVID-19 tests due to the inability to process them.

Headteachers representing more than 16,000 pupils in Gateshead in north-east England, which has now imposed a local lockdown due to its high infection rate, said the lack of COVID-19 testing would "break" some schools and that their plan for returning children to classrooms had "collapsed" due to the crisis.

The government's test and trace system is in utter shambles. Thousands of anxious applicants to the official website were repeatedly greeted this week with a page informing them, "This service is currently very busy. More tests should be available later." Others fortunate enough to be granted a test appointment are being forced to travel hundreds of miles to a test centre.

In the absence of any coordinated opposition by the Labour Party and the trade unions, who fully endorse the government's "back to work" agenda, resistance is taking a more independent form, such as the development of online parent forums. Boycott Return

To (BRTUS) was formed Schools were still in lockdown. It has sought to draw together and inform all those concerned about the government's unsafe re-opening of the schools. The group reported outbreaks at schools across the UK during the period August 12 to September 7, when the government propaganda media machine was in overdrive to convince parents that schools were "COVID secure".

Many thousands of experiences and concerns relating to school/home life under the shadow of COVID-19—generally purged from the media—have been shared on the BRTUS site. It has also acted as a support network, with some teachers offering help and advice to parents struggling to provide their children with an education during school closures.

The BRTUS group also produced the first map of the UK detailing school closures due to outbreaks of COVID-19. In the absence of any official correlation of cases, this was a vital source of information for parents.

In July, following one month of the partial reopening of schools, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Jennifer Jones, the administrator of the Facebook BRTUS group. Jones had become involved through a friend on Facebook the previous month, due to her sons' situation at a special school. The BRTUS Facebook page then stood at around 4,000 members. As schools reopened from September, membership has risen to over 11,600 and continues to grow daily.

Many parents have voiced their anxiety about the safety of their children and political opposition to the government's herd immunity programme and lack of even minimal protection for children and staff.

Heather comments: "The media slandering people and defending the Government—no matter how the Gov lies and misleads and misinforms—the media attacks

people who are misled not the one dishing out the lies and confusion.”

Terrie writes: “Just been thinking if people can’t get tests for their children, or school staff then surely there’s going to be many more cases. Children in affected ‘bubble’ aren’t going to be sent home because there’s not gonna be any test results to say that a ‘bubble’ needs to isolate. That’s a scary thought and seems that the government want it this way thinking we’re daft enough to believe schools are safe as none will be sending kids home. I’m genuinely worried for school kids and school staff.”

Ann exposed the class basis of the government’s agenda: “The schools have re-opened so parents can get back to offices, so the property portfolio of rich office block owners can keep rental income. This is nothing to do about public health, about which politicians do not care less. However, politicians are so out of touch, they have not realised that firms big and small have seen that technology has advanced so much that it has made home working efficient, so they are giving up rental altogether. They will not return.”

Fatima revealed the tremendous strain and stress on families whose children are being sent home with symptoms: “Feeling v down my 11-year-old daughter been to school just 2 days and then was poorly for the rest of the week, got covid positive test result today. Please pray she gets well soon I’m vv worried.”

Katy wrote: “How many of you have kept your children off school? I have as I really don’t believe it is safe, our children are being used as guinea pigs! How many fines do you receive before having to go to court? My anxiety is through the roof. My children are currently being homeschooled by myself. I feel pushed to potentially put my children’s lives and my family at risk or be forced to be punished by keeping them off. I feel sick with it all. My husband is at high risk, I’m at high risk due to health issues and my one son has extreme asthma. I’ve already lost my Nan.”

The re-opening of schools, early years settings, colleges, and, from next week, universities, which has been described the “UK’s largest annual migration,” will have devastating consequences.

Under the US Trump administration, data released this week by the American Academy of Pediatrics revealed that 500,000 children have now tested positive for COVID-19.

The Socialist Equality Party has consistently warned of the inevitable resurgence in COVID-19 cases and deaths if the ruling class reopens society amid the ongoing pandemic. In opposition to this homicidal policy, we advance the measures necessary to protect lives and keep society safe: the initiation of independent education rank and file committees.

These committees will unite all parents, teachers and school staff, to demand the closures of unsafe schools and adopt safety measures for those forced to continue to work. These committees will unleash the tremendous power that exists in the working class, behind the call for a general strike against school re-openings.

All those concerned with the deadly consequences of the reopening of schools should attend the next online meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee on Saturday, September 19, 2-4 p.m.

To participate please register here.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>