

Whistle-blowers speak out as German authorities cover up coronavirus cases at schools and day-care centres

By Martin Nowak and Gregor Link
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By the end of the summer holidays, hundreds of teaching and care facilities in Germany had been infected. But the school and health authorities, as well as the federal and state governments, with the support of the trade unions, are doing everything in their power to continue the life-threatening policy of opening schools for regular operations and to cover up outbreaks.

A report in *Der Spiegel* quoted a letter from a Hamburg teacher to the German Education and Science Union (GEW) saying, “The number of suspected cases has increased in the last week and children were sent home in scores every day. It is not known whether any of these were tested at all, and which of them were positive, as there was no obligation to inform the public.”

Another writes, “Since Monday, an upper school pupil has also been affected, who is in hospital and has to be ventilated with a severe course of the illness. It is depressing for everyone when a fellow pupil is fighting for his life. For days on end. The outcome is still unclear.”

Der Spiegel also reports the case of Theodor-Heuss-Realschule in Dortmund, where there had been a positive coronavirus case a fortnight ago. On the instructions of the authorities, the school management had only sent those sitting adjacent to the infected pupils into domestic quarantine. Further information was not provided by the authorities. *Der Spiegel* continued, “In the new school year, several schools across Germany had to close down completely or individual classes and years were sent into quarantine. How many schools nationwide are affected is not recorded statistically by the authorities.”

In the fight against the pandemic and for full transparency concerning the infection process, however, educators are also confronted with the trade unions themselves. A recent survey the GEW (education sector union) showed that more than 70 percent of their members felt “not sufficiently protected” from the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, and a majority were in favour of the compulsory wearing of masks in the classroom. *Der Spiegel* summarises the GEW’s position, which has always vehemently rejected compulsory mask-wearing in class, by saying that a further closure of schools “must be avoided if possible.”

Patrizia*, an after-school teacher from a large city in Baden-Württemberg, in an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, drew a stark picture of the consequences of the ruthless opening of schools in regular operation which highlights the

“back-to-work” policy of the ruling elites in every country.

“I am working at an integration institution, a so-called ‘focal point school’ with over 300 children from socially deprived families, 98 percent of whom depend on bonus cards. Originally, we were 22 caregivers in the after-school care centre.” Due to the catastrophic understaffing, Patrizia’s facility, a small, old all-day school with a separate after-school care building, had already served notice of the overload staff faced in the past, but the provider then only hired a single replacement teacher, who is currently on sick leave.

“The provider’s own employees regularly resign because it is far too much to do for one person,” explained Patrizia. In the meantime, three of her colleagues have suffered burn-out. “Many other colleagues belong to the risk group and have therefore been given time off or with doing office work from home. This means that we are currently only nine educators in total.” When Patrizia’s team recently decided to shorten the opening hours so as not to have to fully cover late and early duty, the school authorities immediately intervened. Such an emergency measure, it was said, was “not legal” because “the parents had paid for the child-care relationship.”

With an average of 33 children per employee, there can be little conception of a “child-care relationship.” But the same devastating shortages, Patrizia notes, prevail in every corner of the institution. “There is a total lack of hygiene! We do not even have an active cleaning service. If we educators didn’t disinfect the tables in between times, nothing would be cleaned at the moment—not even the toilets. As a result of coronavirus, the school management has, for the first time, seriously checked whether there is enough soap in the toilets. Because we only received two fabric masks per person from the provider, I had to buy an FFP2 mask at my own expense.”

Protection against aerosols—the most important form of spreading the coronavirus—is also not guaranteed. “In our classrooms, a plexiglass panel hangs in front of the teacher’s desk and there are stickers on the floor to help keep social distance, but this is impossible due to the lack of staff.” The teachers are not allowed to use the FFP2 mask. For the same reason, says Patrizia, there is also a mixing of the different groups of children, despite the sometimes time-delayed breaks.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly stated, under

these conditions—which prevail at institutions throughout Germany and Europe—schools and day-care centres become veritable breeding grounds for the coronavirus. The politically criminal role played by the school and health authorities of the federal states in covering up new infections, intimidating critical educators and enforcing regular operations against all warnings and resistance was already evident at Patricia’s facility immediately after the summer holidays during the first days of classes last week.

“On the Monday after the school holidays, there were suspicious cases because positive cases were reported in several families, but since the parents concerned were still waiting for their test results at that time, all children had come to school. On Tuesday, four children were indeed confirmed to be infected.”

After a joint consultation with her colleagues and the school management, Patrizia went home feeling “run ragged.” “The school refuses to react,” she reports, “the headmistress reports false data to the health authority and keeps quiet about the mixing of the children’s groups, which is a consequence of the lack of staff. Only the ‘formally’ responsible teachers and group educators are to be quarantined, although, in reality, we all come into contact with different groups every day. A colleague of mine has strong symptoms. I have also had myself tested.”

Patrizia and her colleagues explicitly pointed out to the school management that all teachers are to be considered contacts of infected persons. However, although they jointly refused to put further children and colleagues in danger with their regular presence under these conditions, a general quarantine was only granted after a member of staff personally presented herself to the health authorities and described the real situation.

“Meanwhile, the teachers in our facility continue to work as they are and do not go into quarantine,” she added. “If the authorities and the school management had had their way, we would not have been quarantined either. At the same time, the isolation period itself has been reduced to a few days, so that all staff were expected back to work as of Monday. “In my opinion, the health authorities are not working properly. They do not look at the situation on the ground at all. I don’t think they have ever heard of aerosols.”

After her courageous move, Patrizia and her colleagues were confronted with fierce accusations from the school management and some parents. “The psychological strain on us is immense,” she said, “I give us two weeks, then we can have ourselves committed. If we do nothing, it will go on forever. The bad thing is that it’s the same all over Baden-Württemberg. We are not allowed to talk to the press, we are not allowed to make political statements. It’s in our employment contract and there has already been trouble because of it.”

Given the policy of deliberately underfunding educational institutions for decades, the refusal of the responsible health authorities to conduct mass testing and their reluctant implementation of quarantine measures, Patrizia concluded, “I think the whole thing is politically intended, the coronavirus cases ‘must not be’.”

This assessment is now being confirmed by more and more parents and educators from all over Germany. Sandra*, whose son attends a grammar school in Bochum, told the WSWS about her

fight against the cover-up by the school and health authorities.

“This is now the fourth infected person at our grammar school,” she says, “but lessons are still going on. The health department even refuses to register contact persons correctly. They are simply not documented unless the people affected or the schools name them by name. The newly formed team at the health authority works without a contact address, without a telephone number, without an email address and without a face. This opaque ‘secret team’ is now in charge of research and policymaking, but is allowed to remain completely out of the public eye.”

Sandra herself is a qualified social education worker and social worker and worked in schools before the pandemic began. “As it turned out, in the meantime, my son has had contact with children of an affected age group. He has ambiguous symptoms but was not named [as a contact person] by the school, so it is not recorded. When I asked the city council, they sent me a kind of standard letter with ostensibly personal passages.”

In the letter, excerpts of which Sandra published in a Facebook group, it says that her son is “not subject to any contact category and no further action needs to be taken.” Although Sandra is free to have her symptomatic child “tested for coronavirus via a general practitioner,” the health insurer “cannot judge” whether “a test is covered by health insurance.” In general, Sandra should best “do nothing.”

If her son became infected, Sandra said, she now had written proof that the authorities considered “no further measures” to be “necessary” to prevent infection and mass outbreaks. “If my son has coronavirus—as the test will show—he may be treated as a ‘school infector’ instead of someone infected by the school.

Meanwhile, the paediatrician refused to “charge the test to the health insurance company,” because “my son does not have coronavirus, because otherwise, the health authority would have carried out the test.” And this even though it had been the health insurance company that had referred her to “a general practitioner” for a test in the first place.

The cover-up of coronavirus cases in schools and day-care centres makes it clear that the governments at state and federal level and authorities are in no way concerned about the welfare of the child. They want to keep childcare open at all costs to avoid absenteeism and to secure the profits of the corporations. Action committees for safe education are being founded all over the world to combat this policy of death. We call on readers to register now and tell us about their own experiences.

** We have changed Patrizia and Sandra’s names at their request.*

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<http://www.wsws.org>