

CALLOUS, LIFE-CHANGING DECISIONS BEING MADE BY EMPLOYERS AT A TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS

The **NASUWT** has written to the Secretary of State for Education raising deep concerns about the unacceptable actions some employers are taking at a time of national crisis. The Union has been dealing with hundreds of calls from distressed and anxious teachers where employers are continuing with procedures that will lead to job loss or detrimentally affect teachers' pension provision.

Contracts are being prematurely terminated with immediate loss of salary. Government guidance on unnecessary journeys is being ignored. Teachers are being penalised for self-isolating and in some cases teachers with vulnerable health conditions as defined by Government are being told their condition is only 'mild' and they should be at work.

In these unprecedented times, we have seen the best of employers, showing genuine concern and care for teachers, headteachers and other staff, who are in the frontline providing ongoing support for the children of other key workers and vulnerable children. Regrettably, however, we are also experiencing the worst of employers who

are choosing to ignore the reality of the current situation and callously, unfairly and unjustifiably continuing with practices which are adversely affecting teachers' lives and livelihoods. Teachers rights and entitlements are being trampled over, as these opportunistic employers drive through procedures and processes and make decisions which will lead to job loss and in some cases immediate loss of income as contracts are prematurely terminated.

We have lost count of the number of cases where we have been contacted by highly distressed teachers with underlying health conditions who, according to the Government guidelines, should not be in work but are being subjected to their medical

diagnosis being second guessed by employers. The cases we have been dealing with in the last few days sadly demonstrate that too many employers have lost their humanity when dealing with their staff and not even a national crisis has been able to cause them to change their ways.



CORONAVIRUS SAFETY FAILINGS

Over half of teachers who should have been self-isolating due to Coronavirus have been asked to attend work, a survey by the **NASUWT** has found. A snapshot survey of teachers has found that 51% of teachers who thought either they or someone in their household had Coronavirus were still asked to attend work for at least some time during the week beginning 23 March, the first week that schools were closed to all but the children of key workers and vulnerable children.


A further 39% who are classed as being in a vulnerable group due to underlying health conditions, pregnancy or age said they were also asked to attend for some or all of that same week. While seven in ten teachers said they felt their school was treating them fairly over the pandemic, the survey found a significant number of teachers did not have the facilities or information to keep themselves and other safe while working in schools. Nearly a third (32%) said there was not adequate provision of soap and hot water for handwashing in their school, nearly one in four (39%) said they had not been provided with appropriate guidance on maintaining school distancing by their employer and nearly half (48%) reported a lack of adequate arrangements to frequently clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects in their school.

The survey also found:


- Although the vast majority said their school is operating rota arrangements, only 39% said the rota in their school had been consulted on and agreed with staff;
- Almost all (98%) of teachers said they had been asked to attend school during the Easter holidays;
- Over a third (36%) of teachers reported they had not been provided with the necessary IT equipment by their school to enable them to work from home;
- Less than a quarter (24%) of teachers said they had been consulted on and agreed their work programme with their employer for working from home

At this time of national emergency, teachers are in the frontline of keeping schools open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children whilst also to provide ongoing learning and support for children who are learning at home. It is pleasing to see that the majority of teachers feel they have been treated fairly by their school in the arrangements they have made. However, it is deeply concerning that a smaller, but still significant proportion of schools are failing to protect the health and welfare of their staff.


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HM Government



DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION CORONAVIRUS HELPLINE
for education related queries: anyone working in early years through to universities, plus parents
0800 046 8687
8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday)
DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk



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the voice of teachers
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Insisting that teachers who are either in vulnerable groups or who may have Coronavirus or live with those who have symptoms attend work is simply playing fast and loose with the safety and welfare of those staff. At a time when we all need to be acting responsibly in order to halt the spread of COVID-19 such actions are reckless. It is also deeply concerning that a large number of teachers report that good hygiene is not being followed in their school. Employers have a duty of care to do all that they can to keep workers safe, yet it seems that in too many cases too little protection is being put in place. In these unprecedented times it is deeply concerning to see that the adverse management practices some teachers face when their school is working normally are now following them into their home.



Excessive workload, intimidation and punitive scrutiny are all being faced by teachers by employers who fail to respect teachers' professional judgement and fail to recognise that teachers, like all of us, are trying to manage their professional duties while also dealing with significant strain and worry about their families, their finances and their health. One of the mantras to emerge from this period is that 'we are all in this together' but the callous and reckless actions of some employers demonstrate that this message is little more than an empty slogan for too many teachers.

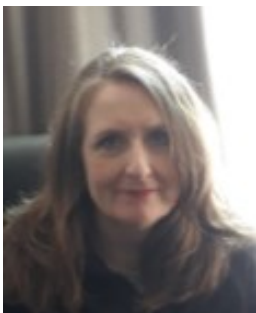
The Wirral NASUWT Local Secretary's Report - Where do I start!

Since the last newsletter went out in March all schools have been closed and, both the buildings and employees within them, have been re-purposed for emergency childcare for the children of key workers.

The main purpose of elected officials of NASUWT is to protect the terms and conditions under which teachers are employed; 195 working days, 1265 directed hours and ensuring adherence to the many policies and procedures that have been negotiated and agreed over the years. **I have to thank all of the elected officials across Wirral, both the local executive and your school representatives**, who have undertaken this role with good humour and a willingness to make the situation work to ensure that key workers can continue to fulfil their roles.

We have worked closely with the Local Authority and Academies across the Borough to provide this service whilst still maintaining our terms and conditions. This was an important part of the process as we have had to be clear that while we were happy to step up and provide this service, we would not tolerate an erosion of our hard fought for terms and conditions. I am pleased to report that most employers have acted with integrity and a great concern for the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees and key worker children. Where there have been issues, we have worked to resolve these on a case by case basis with success. As you can appreciate there were many individual circumstances that were not easily resolved within the guidance from both DfE and LEA and a common sense approach was employed in each of these cases. **I thank employers for their reasonableness.** Some key things to remember:

- Risk Assessments for those in school should be in place.
- No one should be in school unless they are directly involved in the care of students or premises duties essential to the provision.
- If you have volunteered to assist over Easter you should have 8 days identified within your school rotas where you are on holiday. During those days you should not be expected to be a reserve, set work or respond to communications from school. This is essential for maintaining your mental health and wellbeing. I have impressed on employers the need for a healthy and able workforce to be in place when the current crisis ends.
- There was no expectation that schools open for the bank holidays and this includes the bank holidays in May.
- Absences should be reported in the normal way. There is no need for additional documentation to be completed. Schools may wish to record different reasons for absence and the LA has consulted on a form for this purpose. The 111 service gives advice on fit notes due to Covid-19.
- All Unions have agreed that meaningful consultations on redundancies and restructures cannot take place during school closures. These processes involve many face to face meetings and support for members which cannot be offered. Schools choosing to continue these procedures are being reported to the National Union.



Anne Rycroft

In addition to the local disruption there was a massive change to the National Conference due to take place in Birmingham over Easter weekend. The conference is now taking place on the afternoon of Good Friday with a limited number of delegates in each region using video links to undertake the essential business of the Union.

The National Executive nominations process ended on Friday 3rd April. Where more nominations were received than positions available elections need to be held. The elections for 2020-21 have been postponed until after the crisis. District 6, covering the Wirral, will need an election as there were three nominations for the two positions. More information on this will follow.

Remember the NASUWT website is being constantly updated as the situation changes and this should be your first reference point if you have a question.

NASUWT The Teachers' Union **MEMBER SUPPORT ADVICE TEAM**

The dedicated number for all members to access help and advice now has an extremely long waiting period. Members are now being advised to use the e-mail service only:
advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk