

Date: 28 May 2020



Dear Example Firstname,

This email includes:

- Advice for members in primary schools concerned about returning to work on 1 June
- UNISON guidance and template letter for vulnerable employees
- UNISON guidance on early years
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Advice for members in primary schools concerned about returning to work 1 June

UNISON has consistently opposed the expansion of pupil numbers in primary schools in England on 1 June. We believe that it increases the risks to pupils, staff, parents and the wider community. This has been backed up by Independent Sage, a group of eminent scientists, who have said schools will not be safe to open to more pupils on 1 June due to the lack of a comprehensive track, trace

and isolate infrastructure that can be relied on a local level. Further the group has stated that the risk of increasing the spread of the infection reduces by 50% if the wider opening is delayed by just two weeks.

Our campaign has had successes. The government has delayed pupil expansion in secondary schools until 15 June and many local authorities, academies and local schools have decided that 1 June is too early.

Unfortunately, some schools are set to plough ahead on 1 June and increase pupil numbers. To do so legally they must produce a plan and risk assessment to ensure the safety of pupils and staff. Government guidance also says that schools must work with unions on their plans.

Risk assessments and plans are vital, and schools must make them available to staff before it is safe to return.

Steps to take if you are concerned that returning to work will endanger your health or if you believe that the school plans are not adequate

If you or your branch have not been consulted on your employer's risk assessment, or the risk assessment does not meet the standards in the joint union checklist for [primary schools](#) or [special schools](#), UNISON will support you if you believe your health and safety is at serious risk if you go into school on 1 June.

If you have not been re-assured by your employer's plans or believe it is unsafe to return to your workplace on 1 June you should ensure that you have raised all your concerns with your employer and have sought the advice of your branch before declining to go into school; and remembering always that you cannot refuse a reasonable instruction to return to work without a good reason.

We have set out a series of steps for members in this situation to take before 1 June:

1. Urgently contact [your local UNISON branch](#)
2. Ask for a copy of your employer's risk assessment - have you or your union branch been consulted on it? Does it comply with the joint unions' checklist for a safe increase in pupil numbers for [primary schools](#) or [special schools](#)?
3. If not, and you have expressed your concerns to your school, but these have not been addressed and you feel that your health and safety is at serious risk if you attend the workplace on 1 June, [use this template to send](#)

[a letter to your employer](#). Highlight in the letter your specific concerns: provide evidence about specific dangers or threats to the safety of employees at your school, and importantly, stress your willingness to work from home – or in some other safe way – and your willingness to have further discussions about a safe return to work.

4. If other members feel the same, you and they can ask your UNISON branch to write a letter on your behalf. Ask your branch for a copy of what they have sent.
5. Please be certain that you have tried everything possible to solve your situation before considering submitting one of these letters.

Throughout this process it is important you speak to your UNISON branch before taking any further steps. We understand this is a stressful time and we are committed to doing all we can to support you. We would like to thank NAHT, the main heads union, who have many members in primary schools, and have advised their members to be supportive and work together with staff during this difficult time.

[Your template letter](#)

UNISON guidance and template letter for vulnerable employees

We have produced a [guide for members in vulnerable groups](#) and template letter wording to send to head teachers explaining personal circumstances. The guide covers those classed as clinically extremely vulnerable or vulnerable, employees who live with/care for someone in a vulnerable group, black employees, older employees (over 60), employees who have childcare responsibilities, and employees who are feeling anxious.

[Guidance for vulnerable employees](#)

UNISON guidance on early years

We have updated our FAQs with specific guidance for members working in early years. This can be found on our [dedicated webpage for Covid-19 issues](#) in the FAQ section under 'Early years/nurseries'.

[Read the early years FAQs](#)

Joint union checklist for secondary schools

UNISON and other unions have produced a [health and safety planning guide for secondary schools](#).

This union guide follows recently published [Department for Education guidance for secondary schools](#). It is designed to help UNISON members and branches ask employers questions about health and safety at school, following the government's announcement of potential wider opening from 15 June.

[Joint union checklist for secondary schools](#)

FAQs for you

Remember we have a full set of FAQs on our dedicated page of advice for school support staff. We will be adding further FAQs in the coming days. Whenever there are new developments, come here for advice you can trust.

[Read the FAQs](#)

Get the latest news

We post regular updates on our dedicated Facebook page for UNISON members working in schools. Staff from all over the UK share advice, support each

other and respond to the latest news, so please do join us there.

[Follow us on Facebook](#)

If you need help and advice, please [contact your local branch](#). We know that many of you are anxious and worried. Please be assured that nothing is more important to us than your safety, and that of the pupils and families you support. We will keep working to protect you and we will keep you updated in this fast moving situation.

Best wishes,

Jon Richards
UNISON Head of Education