

STEPHEN MORGAN MP



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LONDON SW1A 0AA

## **Stephen's School Call**

Zoom conference for constituents – Wednesday 20 May 2020

### **In attendance:**

- Stephen Morgan, Member of Parliament for Portsmouth South
- Amanda Martin, President of the National Education Union
- Cllr Suzy Horton, Cabinet Member for Education
- 40 attendees including local parents and teachers from across constituency

### **Format:**

- Introductory remarks from Stephen Morgan MP
- 10-12-minute speech from Amanda Martin
- Followed by remarks by Cllr Suzy Horton
- Panel opened up to questions from parents and teachers
- Agreed set of actions to take forward
- Close

### **Key themes raised by attendees:**

- Transparency needed in government decision making
- The need for science-based evidence to support decisions
- Importance of ongoing communication and engagement with parents, teachers, local government and stakeholders
- Need to consider the impact on mental health and the social and psychological wellbeing of young people

### **Stephen's actions to date:**

- Wrote out to all constituency schools at the start of the pandemic
- Lobbied the Education Secretary urging a set of actions around workplace safety, publishing evidence and supporting vulnerable people. This can be seen here: <https://twitter.com/StephenMorganMP/status/1261330620241924097>

**Member of Parliament for Portsmouth South**

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- Submitted a string of parliamentary questions to put pressure on the Government to listen. These can be seen here:  
<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers/?page=1&max=20&questiontype=AllQuestions&house=commons%2clouds&member=4653&dept=60>
- Liaised with local trade unions and teachers over concerns
- Responding to individual casework from parents and constituents with views on Government's plan for children returning to school

### **NEU: 5 tests government must meet for school reopening:**

#### ***Test 1: Much lower numbers of Covid-19 cases***

The new case count must be much lower than it is now, with a sustained downward trend and confidence that new cases are known and counted promptly. And the Government must have extensive arrangements for testing and contact tracing to keep it that way.

#### ***Test 2: A national plan for social distancing***

The Government must have a national plan including parameters for both appropriate physical distancing and levels of social mixing in schools, as well as for appropriate PPE, which will be locally negotiated at school-by-school and local authority level.

#### ***Test 3: Testing, testing, testing!***

Comprehensive access to regular testing for children and staff to ensure our schools and colleges don't become hot spots for Covid-19.

#### ***Test 4: Whole school strategy***

Protocols to be put in place to test a whole school or college when a case occurs and for isolation to be strictly followed.

#### ***Test 5: Protection for the vulnerable***

Vulnerable staff, and staff who live with vulnerable people, must work from home, fulfilling their professional duties to the extent that is possible. Plans must be specifically addressing the protection of vulnerable parents, grandparents and carers.

<https://neu.org.uk/neu-five-tests-government-schools-can-re-open>

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### **Issues with current plans for school reopening:**

#### Decisions based on science:

- 80% of evidence relating to government decision making around schools and education is unpublished. There is no record of SAGE papers for the last month
- There is a lack of modelling around what reopening looks like for schools and what the risks are
- There is a lack of clarity over whether or not children are more susceptible or less susceptible to transmitting Covid-19

#### Workplace safety:

- The safety guidance issued by government lacks detail on a number of critical issues relating to health and safety of staff in schools and colleges.
- It is inconsistent with Government guidance that has already been issued for other workplaces and workers
- Concerns exist on how to ensure that Government guidance is followed and implemented and that there is an acceptance by schools of the priority which must be given to health, safety and welfare
- There are concerns that it is unsafe to make decisions until scientific data is known and published

#### Disparity between the UK's approach and that of international partners approach:

- The UK Government cited other European countries as models for reopening schools in the UK, but these are not comparable contexts.
- Government stated that Denmark and the Netherlands would be looked at as templates, however our death rate and current handling of the situation differ greatly from these two countries
- Countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany are not suitable comparisons.
- Spain and Italy, the only two European countries to experience a higher death rate per capita than the UK, have closed their schools until September.

#### Concerns for parents:

- There are concerns that the attainment gap and inequalities will widen further while schools are closed



- The chief inspector of schools in England has said the attainment gap between deprived pupils and their wealthier peers will widen as a result of school closures
- As schools remain closed, the risk to vulnerable children increases. In April, just 5% of vulnerable children entitled to a place in temporary emergency schools were turning up.

Mental health concerns:

- Solent NHS trust along with Mind and other mental health organisations have warned that there could be another pandemic running after Covid-19, this time for mental health
- The results of social distancing, financial trouble and isolation have put mental health under strain
- Teachers returning to a workplace with a high number of people and young children possible unable to adhere to social distancing rules exposes them to a great risk of contracting Covid-19
- This means they have to think seriously about whether they can see at risk members of their family, some of whom will live in their households
- The baseline mental health strain amid the pandemic coupled with these additional pressures mean teachers are at a great risk

Continued engagement with stakeholders and trade unions:

- The Prime Minister's announcements on 10 May of three-year groups returning in one wave, and intention that all primary pupils would be back at school a month before the end of the summer term was not pre issued to unions or teachers
- There is a concern that when announcements are made like this, rushed decision making can take place putting staff at risk
- This makes it difficult for unions to respond meaningfully or consult front line teachers and leaders, meaning they feel cut out of the discussion

**Portsmouth City Council plans for reopening:**

- Schools and academies across Portsmouth are making plans for a phased and cautious increase in the number of children attending school (recognising that about 1100 children are already attending school on any one day in the city - the children of keyworkers and vulnerable children)

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- Some schools will be taking additional children from 1 June, others are using the first week to prepare staff and will take children from 8 June.
- The school experience will be different for returning children. They will be in small groups, including only one or two adults, and will stay in those groups. Their movement around the school will be carefully managed. A huge amount of work is going on in schools to make the arrangements as safe as possible. Our Director of Public Health is working with schools on infection prevention.
- Some schools will be able to take children from all the year groups which may (subject to Government confirmation) be allowed to return. Many will need to prioritise within those groups in order both to continue to teach children of keyworkers and vulnerable children and to support home learning for other children, as well as teach those returning to school

More information can be found here:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/coronavirus-covid-19/schools-and-families-coronavirus-information#reopen>

### **Stephen Morgan MP's views on schools returning**

- There are serious problems with the proposed plan to reopen schools in early June and it does not guarantee safety
- He urges the government to work collaboratively with trade unions and parents' organisations to create a series of practical safety concerns that must be addressed within schools before the government confirms a date for their reopening
- When schools do return, a package of academic and pastoral support will be necessary to ensure that those already disadvantaged going into this crisis are not disproportionately affected
- This could include enhanced pupil premium funding, a national programme of emotional and well-being support to all students and modifications to next year's curriculum and exams

### **Agreed set of actions to take forward:**

- Lobbying government to meet the NEU's 5 tests through parliamentary questions and ministerial engagement
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- Regular communication channels between school staff, trade unions and representatives to ensure joined up and informed lobbying efforts
- Applying pressure to government to implement a strategy for dealing with mental health implications of Covid-19 for i) pupils ii) school staff
- Continued use of parliamentary process including written questions, House of Commons library reports and oral questions to obtain vital evidence and scientific data to then feed back into integrated lobbying efforts

### **Further information**

House of Commons' Library briefing with FAQs:

[https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8915/?utm\\_source=R%26l+%28business+communications%29&utm\\_campaign=6373661cf9-coronavirus webpage mps 21-05-2020&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_4957411bec-6373661cf9-102437857&mc\\_cid=6373661cf9&mc\\_eid=ff1b0d1f10](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8915/?utm_source=R%26l+%28business+communications%29&utm_campaign=6373661cf9-coronavirus+webpage+mps+21-05-2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4957411bec-6373661cf9-102437857&mc_cid=6373661cf9&mc_eid=ff1b0d1f10)

**21 May 2020**

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