

# Redbridge NEU Retired Teachers` Newsletter Summer 2020

## 10 THINGS THAT WE'VE LEARNT MORE CLEARLY FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS



**1. There's a relatively stable, inverse relationship between people's usefulness to society and their pay:** with a few exceptions, such as doctors, those who are most essential, such as care workers, get paid the least, while those who are least essential, such as hedge fund managers, get paid the most.

**2. Contrary to Theresa May's claim, governments do have a 'magic money tree':** so that in this crisis, for example, governments can borrow money or simply print more, and it isn't of vital importance to balance the budget. Thus, the austerity programme of the last 10 years was at best unnecessary and at worst a spiteful attack on the less well-off and the public sector in general.

**3. Neo-liberalism (private sector good/public sector bad) can never be the organizing principle of a civilized society:** this destructive ideology should now be dead and buried, although the majority of the present cabinet are known disciples of it.

**4. Tory hypocrisy is enough to take your breath away:** yes, let's all clap our key workers each week, but it's a bit rich coming from a government that has relentlessly launched a 'dirty war' on the NHS through years of underfunding, back-door privatisation and pitifully low wages for its staff, and has a wannabe Churchill PM who neither attended any of the initial emergency meetings nor heeded his own advice on staying safe.

**5. The NHS and, indeed, society at large is sustained, not drained, by immigrants:** so that 'taking back control' by keeping more of them out, is likely to be an act of stunning self-harm.

**6. Depriving the NHS of resources over a long period is not the best preparation for a disaster:**

during 10 years of austerity, public spending on health care was budgeted to increase by about 1% a year in real terms, whereas an increase of 4% was needed just to meet the cost pressures of an ageing population and of implementing technological advance.

**7. Of the 3 main threats facing the UK (and all humanity) - global warming, global pandemic and nuclear war - our government has only prioritized the latter:** the first two were bound to happen, but have been grossly underfunded, whereas the nuclear threat, arguably more imaginary than real, has been grossly overfunded.

**8. Brexit ideology has been extremely damaging to our wellbeing:** the government's crazed obsession with Brexit meant that it shut itself out of the joint procurement of vital medical supplies, including PPE for health and social care workers, with the 27 members of the EU.

**9. Human beings are not inherently selfish:** despite Margaret Thatcher's claim that 'there is no such thing as society'. So, greed and self-interest do not have to be the basis on which our economy is run.

**10. We're not all in this together:** and ongoing Tory cuts to benefits and services have helped to facilitate a death rate from the virus in less affluent areas which is twice that of the more affluent.

**Henry Tiller**



## Birthday in Lockdown

I thought that I would be spending my birthday with my family. However, 'lockdown' put a stop to that. So, on the 4th April I went off early to Aldi and bought myself a birthday cake to cheer me up.

Later that morning I received a phone call from my eldest son, Michael, to say that a parcel would be delivered before lunch time. I pondered over what it could be. Later, whilst looking out the window I saw my daughter-in-law, who appeared to be hiding. I couldn't see her car or my son and wondered what she was doing. I banged on the glass and she pointed to my front door. There, on the step, was my birthday present - a gift book with lots of treats and a home-made lemon cake.

Apparently, I had spoilt their surprise - they were going to ring me and ask me to look to see if my delivery had come. Anyway, it was great to see them, and we chatted at a distance for about fifteen minutes before they went on to my parents' house as it was their 66th wedding anniversary.

Just after lunchtime I received a call from my sister-in-law saying that my brother and herself were going to pop round with some home-made food for me. To my surprise, I was presented with a huge home-made sponge cake, complete with candle.

So, that sunny afternoon I spent sitting in the garden, eating cake and drinking coke. My birthday, despite lock-down, had turned out to be a good one after all.

You might want to know what happened to all that cake? Well, I gave half the lemon cake to Michael, half of the sponge cake back to my sister-in-law to give to my parents to eat themselves. The one I had bought, I cut up and put in the freezer.

**Sandra Hardman**

## Inclusion v Exclusion: some thoughts on the debate



The week before lockdown my daughter asked if I would talk to her friend, Sarah, a nurse and single parent, who was distraught - her son, Paul, had just been permanently excluded half-way through Year 8. Before retiring I was Head of a 'challenging' mainstream secondary school, of two BESD schools and a of Key-Stage 4 PRU, so I am not without relevant experience. Sarah lives in an outer London borough but the school is just across the border in a home county. (Names changed, obviously)

### The Case of Paul

Paul has emotional and behaviour difficulties, so he has spent much of his school-life standing in corridors, sitting in withdrawal rooms, on part-time timetables or on informal exclusion - all listed to justify the exclusion, together with a long catalogue of other, equally inadequate strategies, under the heading of 'Support Offered'!

During a fixed-term exclusion soon after the start of Year 7 Sarah got him to write down how he was feeling. She knew he wasn't happy but reading how worthless he felt and that he might as well be dead

was a shock. She took him straight to the GP and four months later his first appointment with CAMHS. He now has a diagnosis of ADHD, ODD and has twelve positive indicators of being on the Autistic Spectrum.

A teacher allocated as his mentor, to whom he was meant to go when he was feeling out of control, stated in an email exchange with Sarah that she was just too busy to continue seeing him regularly. He was offered the chance to join a 'Place to B' support group but he, 'just can't' speak in groups.

The Permanent Exclusion was for a 'one-off' serious incident and it states that his SEND is 'not relevant'. No need to worry about all that 'silly' DfE 2017 guidance about vulnerable children then? The incident was either: "*Knowingly and intentionally* taking a weapon into school and using it to threaten others with assault", which is obviously against the school's 'Zero-tolerance' policy.

Permanent Exclusion was strongly advised and was apparently seen as the 'Only way forward' by the Deputy Head, with responsibility for safe-guarding, in order to 'Keep the school community safe'. 'Zero-tolerance' can sound good in policy statements but it just does not allow for the flexibility to deal with individual circumstances – circumstances, for example, in which you play '... a silly game, where you chased a friend who had accidentally pushed you, trying to cut his hair for fun.' You all get over-excited and run along the corridor, shouting at each other and all this gets caught on video camera.

Paul's full account: he was cutting his hair before school and put the scissors in his pocket when he heard his mum coming because she wouldn't be happy if he cut his own hair. He went to put them in his locker when his friend had a joke with him, so he chased him to try to cut his hair for a laugh. The friend's statement agrees with this. Not surprisingly, Paul has a record of silly behaviour.

The school has a lot of pupils to keep in order, lots of targets to meet and an overloaded curriculum to deliver. Paul hinders achieving these targets on a daily basis and the School sees itself as a serious, no-nonsense, academic school. On 'good' days Paul arrives at school early, goes and gets breakfast then 'disappears', never making registration. Does anyone worry about HIS safe-guarding on these days? What does he do all day and how long would it be before he joined up with others less naive than himself and got into serious crime?

Let's face it, Paul can't cope in mainstream secondary school - it's just too big, too confusing, with too many rules he can't keep. The scissors incident is a 'gift' - a convenient opportunity to 'move-out' a problem; it's nice and clean, no ambiguity or blame attached to the school: 'We tried our best but the pupil still managed to get it wrong'.

### **Alternative Strategies**

Does it have to be like this? The statistics about exclusion of pupils with special needs are stark. The majority of children who find their way into a PRU have undiagnosed emotional and learning difficulties. Surely, we should find a way of providing suitable education for these children without needing to punish them by permanently excluding them first.

Permanent exclusion is usually the ultimate sanction in a school's disciplinary policy. Its use is, arguably, a symptom of failure and everyone must take their share of the responsibility. It is definitely a stigma and a burden, which can diminish later life-chances for the pupil concerned. We shouldn't be doing this to any child, let alone one who already has fragile self-esteem and difficulties in coping. Permanently excluding such a child for poor behaviour could be seen as comparable with permanently excluding a child with a physical impairment because they cannot manage to walk

up the stairs to lessons and the school can't afford to install a lift. No one would consider this as anything less than ludicrous but the two kinds of exclusion equally contravene the Disabilities Discrimination Act. It is evident that there must be a change of school or circumstances in the best interest of children with both kinds of impairment.

Our ultimate aim should be to achieve maximum lifelong inclusion for everyone. This would involve a radical game-change in all aspects of society, which cannot be achieved through education alone. However, inclusive education - lifelong, free and freely available to all - is pivotal. The definition of 'mainstream' education should be widened to include a range of provisions, of varying size and focus, suiting various needs, so that pupils can move between them without stigma. This would require major investment in infra-structure but also major attitude-change. We must also look at cultural and class differences. Afro-Caribbean boys figure too highly in permanent exclusion figures and likewise, for less affluent pupils, in truancy figures. Perhaps institutional racism and other prejudices are sometimes factors?

Even when a school has done everything within its capabilities to ensure that its ethos and policies support inclusive day-to-day practice there may still be children who find coping within large institutions incompatible with their needs. They may 'take themselves out', effectively self-excluding. Or, too often, find themselves 'beyond the mental-state threshold' that enables them to control their own behaviour and thus inevitably break traditional codes of conduct. We should hold multi-professional discussions and take action before the need to 'crisis-manage' a difficult situation arises. Let's find a more humane route to suitable education for all.

As for Paul and Sarah, he has been attending a PRU and is doing well so far. Sarah does not want him to return to his mainstream school but would like the

permanent exclusion removed from his record. After lockdown, the Governors' exclusion meeting and then, I expect, an independent appeal meeting, we shall see if sanity and humanity prevail.

**Betty Hales, retired co-ordinator of Education Other than at School and KS4 PRU, LB**



**NEU reps at Seven Kings rightfully celebrating saving the Physical Disability Unit with JC. So proud of our wonderful reps!**

School report



## Jeffrey Home School

Kitchen Table, Nr. Brighton

Number on Roll: 2

Inspection dates April 2020

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection: This inspection:	Good Requires Improvement	2 3
Leadership and management		Shocking	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires Improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires Improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires Improvement	3
Early years provision		Not Applicable	-

### Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

**This is an atrocious school.**

- School leaders have ensured that the school's overall effectiveness has tanked since the last inspection.
- ✓ Pupils enjoy learning. They just don't enjoy lessons. Except making a game where they throw a ball into various cardboard boxes. That one seems to have caught on, at least.
- ✓ The headteacher is eminently qualified but is regularly seen wearing nothing but dressing gowns and underpants. This sets a very poor example to the pupils. Also, in the evening, both members of staff are often observed drinking alcohol in front of the pupils.
- ✓ Pupils are regularly late to lessons, and often leave the class without permission. Absenteeism is a daily occurrence, despite the school only having two pupils on roll. One child was found watching a Netflix soxiet without adult supervision.
- ✓ The school consistently fails to provide lesson objectives, nor does it signal clearly enough in pupils' written work that aural feedback has been given. So, that's something.
- ✓ The Key Stage 2 pupil was recently caught playing Fortnite and claimed it was a Geography project. He was excluded for two weeks.

The school development plan lacks rigour. Our team did not feel 'get everyone showered and dressed by lunchtime' was sufficiently aspirational.

✓ One pupil in Key Stage 4 does not arrive at school until around 1pm, but, when inspectors questioned him he could give no clear reason why he was not at school.

## International Workers' Memorial Day



**Wanstead High School NEU come together on International Workers' Memorial Day to show solidarity and remember workers who have passed due to Covid-19 this year [#iwm](#) [#saveourcarers](#) [#testtesttest](#)**

## Remote learning in lockdown - a teenager's perspective



Lockdown means that education is very different. I think that the biggest benefit from the current remote learning situation is that it is possible for me to follow a routine that I have created. However, it can be difficult to establish that routine in the first place and to work to deadlines that I have set myself. I know that a few of my friends have struggled to keep to a routine and are therefore behind in some of their lessons.

I think that our teachers, at the moment, are trying to make sure they set enough work and as a result are setting too much for us. Our GCSE work is being set as projects at the beginning of each week. Most of this work is revision, so even though our exams are next year, we are not learning the content we need for our GCSE subjects and it is difficult to teach it to ourselves.

I am aware that lower year groups in my school have been following the Oak National Academy schedule for all their lessons. My only time on the website is for Spanish lessons. In theory, they are a very good format for learning. However, I found the content to be quite basic and it isn't teaching me the content I need to be learning. Many schools are currently arranging online lessons over Zoom and Teams, where the students can be taught by their teachers and ask questions in real time. This is an arrangement my school is yet to introduce for the majority of students. I believe that this interaction between teachers and students will allow a clearer and easier way of learning. I have my first online French lesson set for Monday (18th May) on Teams.

There are, of course, other aspects of school that are being affected by the lockdown including contact with friends and extra-curricular activities. I am still able to keep in touch with my friends via WhatsApp, Instagram and other social media platforms but I have missed being able to see them in person. We have occasionally made FaceTime calls, which is more effective for conversations than texting and means we can see each other.

At school I am involved in lots of extra-curricular activities, which of course I can't take part in any more. The Student Leadership Team interviews were supposed to take place before Easter but have been postponed until September. This means that anyone who gets a place on the team would have less than the full year meant to be fulfilled in the role. This has some advantages - for example, if a student had taken on the role, in the current situation a certain amount of pressure would be taken off them and they could focus on their schoolwork.

The Duke of Edinburgh challenge has also been postponed. The expedition meant to take place during the Easter holidays is now pushed to September. All of the volunteering and activities

that lead to the expedition have been cut short and will be finished after lockdown, which takes away the objective of the challenge, which is to commit to an activity for at least three months.

Lots of trips, including my exchange to Murcia, have been cancelled, although this opportunity to improve my Spanish speaking could be carried out online and over social media.

Not being in school provides the opportunity to work on hobbies that would otherwise not be experimented with. The monotony of being at home constantly also provides the opportunity to spend lots of time on my phone and on social media, so it's important to take breaks from it. I ended up doing this by deleting the Instagram app from my phone. For many students, their home is not a suitable place for learning and may not be a good environment to spend most of their time, and in that sense I am very lucky to have my own room and space.

Overall, I think that remote learning is an effective way of teaching if done correctly. The ability to create your own routine provides the opportunity to get to know how you work best as an individual. However, I also believe that contact with teachers during the week is the key for learning new content and this can be achieved through classes via Teams or Zoom. Outside of lockdown, online or part online schooling could be an effective way of learning, with a mixture of home learning and student-teacher contact. With the additional option of being able to see friends outside of school, partly remote learning might be the way forward!

**Lois Dolan (Year 10)**



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## Coronavirus and Schools

**Controversy around the opening of schools in June continues.**

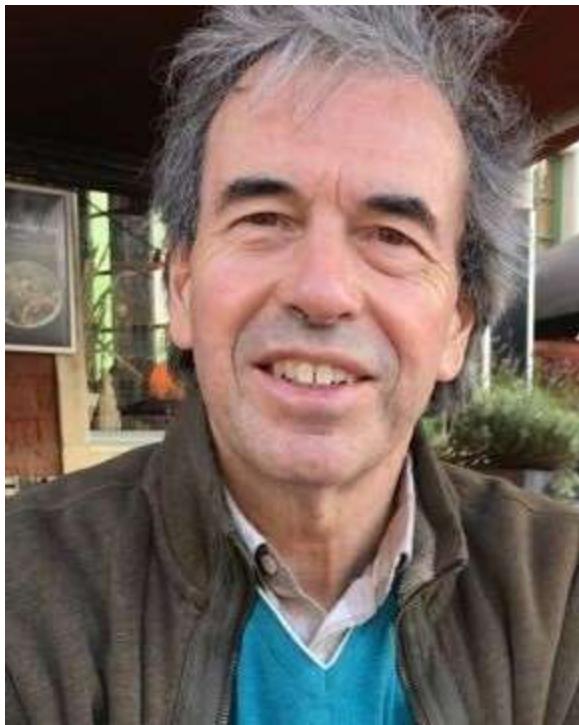
**We publish below three contributions relevant to the debate.**

### **Lies, Damned Lies and “Following the Science”?**

***Nigel May (Past President of Redbridge NEU) Reflects on the Covid-19 Epidemic and Schools Reopening***

I will attempt to make some sense from the sheer blizzard of facts, alleged facts, data, assertions, political posturing, opinions, and news regarding Covid-19, with particular regard to how it affects or may affect schools, pupils and education staff.

Without going over information that you will all already know, it is reasonable to conclude that this infection, being a new one to which people have no inbuilt immunity, clearly has the potential to be highly infectious, and contracting it has potentially fatal consequences, especially for certain more vulnerable groups.



It would also be fair to observe that, whatever the Government in power at the time, ANY Government would have faced severe difficulties and probably made some errors. I don't think many would complain at the Chancellor's support plan (except to possibly observe that in some respects it needs to go further), and the Government have avoided the NHS capacity being overwhelmed.

### Bad Choices

However, there are some serious doubts about the wisdom of some of the decisions made, and how far the Prime Minister was really on top of the problem and giving it the level of attention that it required. Given some aspects of Mr Johnson's previous conduct and record, maybe that should not come as a huge surprise.

Thus, was it wise to allow tens of thousands of punters to descend on Cheltenham for the races or for Johnson and others to attend Rugby internationals? Or to permit several thousand Atletico Madrid fans to go to the Champions' League 2 league match at Anfield? These questions

need to be asked, for whilst these events took place and lockdown was delayed fatally for a week or so, the virus took hold and its spread (the 'R rate') hit dangerous levels.

Add to that the consequences of years' worth of cuts, privatisation and reorganisation going back to Andrew Lansley's ill-advised policies, and the reasons for what happened become all too clear. I would have a little more time and patience for the Government if they were honest enough to admit errors and apologise.

### Bad Outcomes

We now have one of the highest numbers of deaths of any country and are currently fourth in the rate of deaths per thousand of population. The figures for excess deaths suggest that the real figure may be higher – and there's still plenty of opportunity for it to climb higher.

Schools have been closed from the end of Friday 20.3.20. Again, it took far too long for a decision to be made on this. In Italy, they acted with more urgency. Now, without any forewarning or discussion with unions or headteachers, the Government has said schools should reopen for Primary pupils in Years 1, 6 and Reception, with secondary schools bringing in Years 10 & 12 in the last few weeks of term. This is, they reassure us, perfectly safe. Even without PPE. Because that's what the scientific evidence says...

#### Except -

- The scientific evidence put forward by the SAGE Committee is not freely available. It used to be published. Now it isn't – with the exception of some heavily redacted transcripts.
- Dominic Cummings attended and contributed, as did another non-scientist. They "were not members", but you wonder

at political influence on “advice” coming from SAGE.

- Much of the evidence is not absolutely reliable, firstly because there has (unavoidably due to the recent nature of this infection) been no proper scientific review of research done, and secondly because without (so far) any effective Test, Track and Trace system in place, and no reliable means (so far) of telling who has had the infection, there is far from a perfect picture of who has got the infection, who has had it, and how it has spread. South Korea was highly successful because its scientists and epidemiologists had an almost comprehensive overview of what was happening.
- Therefore, any attempts to tell teachers and parents of pupils that it is absolutely safe to return to school face a credibility problem.

‘M.D.’ (aka Dr Phil Hammond), the NHS columnist for *Private Eye* does observe that people’s perception of risk from such health scares greatly exceeds the true level of risk, but since we are still very much in the dark about many aspects of this virus in the UK, parents and teachers’ concern about its potential danger is understandable. There is still a risk of transmission from pupils to school staff, from staff to pupils, between school staff and from pupils or staff to their families at home

**The Full Fact page**  
(<https://fullfact.org/health/covid-19-in-children/>) contains the following observations about what we know:

#### **Can Children get Coronavirus?**

‘Death from Covid-19 is very rare among young people. Of 33,614 deaths of people with Covid-19 registered in England and Wales up to 1 May 2020, only two were in people aged between 1 and 14.’

‘In total.. evidence presented suggests that children can contract the new coronavirus, but rate of infection and severity of illness is significantly lower than in adults.’

#### **Can Children pass Coronavirus on to other people?**

‘The importance of children in transmitting the virus is difficult to establish, in particular given the number of asymptomatic cases’ according to the RCPCH\*. In other words, there will be large numbers of infections we simply don’t know about because a lot of people don’t display symptoms and (under current UK guidance) are unlikely to be tested for the virus.



#### **Letter to an MP: Bob Archer raises teachers’ concerns about the re-opening of schools during the Coronavirus pandemic with Lyn Brown (West Ham)**

Dear Lyn Brown,

I write to you as a retired teacher from your constituency about the wider opening of schools.

Everyone I know wants schools to be open for all children and young people as soon as possible. But I am concerned that the Government’s plan for wider opening of schools is not safe for pupils, parents, school staff and our community.

In proposing the phased return of primary pupils

from 1 June onwards, the Government has put forward a reckless timetable. It is not fair on schools and it is not feasible.

I believe the wider opening of schools should happen only when it is safe. I am worried that the Government is trying to shift the responsibility for safety in schools and community health, during a health pandemic, onto individual headteachers without a safe national framework.

The Government is showing a lack of understanding about the dangers of the spread of coronavirus within schools, and outwards from schools to parents, siblings and relatives, and to the wider community. We do not know enough about whether children can transmit the disease to adults.

Giving evidence to the Science and Technology Committee this week, the Department for Education's Chief Scientific Adviser admitted the Government's plan could risk spreading coronavirus since there is a "low degree of confidence" that children transmit the virus less than adults.

I agree with the National Education Union that there should be disclosure in full of the advice relating to the re-opening of schools whether it is from SAGE as a whole, the schools sub division, some other combination of its members or from Public Health England (as suggested by the DfE's Chief Scientific Adviser in his evidence) with any underlying scientific evidence, data or modelling on which that advice is based.

It does not make sense to be planning towards a return from a certain date. It would be far better to be working towards getting safe conditions in place that would permit a safe 'wider opening'.. This is what other countries, including Scotland and Wales, are doing.

I am also concerned that it appears that pupils and

school staff will not be protected by social distancing rules.

I would be grateful if you could raise these concerns with the Secretary of State for Education. As my member of Parliament, I would also be interested to hear your thoughts in response to the concerns I have raised.

## Covid 19: parents and teachers discuss the issue of school opening



**Some 550 Redbridge parents and school staff joined an online Zoom meeting on Thursday evening 21st May to discuss the Government's determination to bring more primary pupils back into full-time education from 1 June.**

Redbridge Council leader, Jas Athwal, and local council education lead member, Elaine Norman, were joined by MPs Sam Tarry (Ilford South) and Wes Streeting (Ilford North) and a panel of speakers, including NEU joint District Secretary Venda Premkumar, local campaigner, Habiba Alli, and other parents.

The chat sidebar on the call produced a lively debate on the stance of education unions who

oppose the Government move until five key targets are met:

### **View from the Council**

Jas Athwal criticised the Government for having made another grand announcement without any thought for the detail. He said it should now be left to schools to decide on how and when to re-open, and that “if a school does decide to choose not to open, we will support that school.” He expressed concern that one of our key tests had not been met: “Tracking and testing have not been put in place” ... and tests should be available in schools.”

Sam Tarry, MP, said ‘I would back the Council, parents and local trade unions, if they said the risk assessments could not meet the Government’s plans’.

This means we can oppose unsafe school openings from June 1st, based on our own understanding of the risks. We commend the SLT at Fairlop school who sent a letter to parents stating that ‘there is a need to be cautious with any plan to reopen... We also need to consult with staff and the local authority to ensure our risk assessments meet the safety requirements for our specific school situation’.

Cranbrook primary school have explained that they ‘cannot commit to the wider opening suggested by the government for the week beginning 1st June and that ‘the wider opening for other children will be done very gradually and not from 1st June.’

### **Preparations for Schools` Opening**

The Director of Education informed us that the vast majority of our schools will, very sensibly, want to hold training days with staff before opening on the week beginning 1st June. It is now up to reps and members in schools to bring the Joint Union Checklist for safe reopening to the table and ensure

full compliance by going through the checklist point by point. If this cannot be done before readmitting Reception, Y1 and Y6, then so be it. We now need as many primary members to come to tonight’s meeting as possible to discuss how this should be done.

Meanwhile, if and when the Government can show us the evidence that the infection has come down to levels where it can be safely controlled, and if and when they can provide schools with testing facilities, we can scale down the level of risk from that point and look forward to full reopening at last.

### **Here is the Checklist of the five tests we should apply before agreeing to schools` re-opening**

#### **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, with 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 specifically address the protection of vulnerable parents, grandparents.

**Thanks to Sandra Hardman and Bob Archer for providing the above article**

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**RRTA Newsletter is keen to receive contributions from all readers of the Newsletter.**

**Please send ideas or completed articles to –**  
**[mikepeters1@ntlworld.com](mailto:mikepeters1@ntlworld.com)**