

Comments from EIS members on remote and blended learning

Following the EIS November survey, members wrote to the EIS highlighting their views on moving to blended and remote learning in the run up to, and immediately following the Christmas holiday period. Some comments have been redacted to ensure they do not identify individual schools or members.

Key Issues

- Moving to blended or remote learning will help reduce infection spread in the new year
- Members are concerned about being able to safely mix during the holidays, without having 5 days to isolate beforehand
- There are concerns that with schools remaining open full time, right up until the 23rd December, many school staff will have to work over the Christmas period to ensure the track and trace policies are enacted
- A small adjustment in the final few days of term will make an immeasurable difference to staff and pupil wellbeing

“I live alone and am clinically vulnerable. Over the summer I formed a bubble with my elderly, extremely clinically vulnerable parents but since cases started rising at the beginning of Oct, with household members of my pupils testing positive, as a family we took the decision that that could not continue. As such, the only contact I have with my family is from the path. My mum is very unwell and can only stand at the door to talk for a matter of minutes. It is a lonely life for them and for me and I feel I am sacrificing my family for my job.”

“A move to remote learning from 21st December would allow me to quarantine for a fortnight to be sure of not taking the virus in to them. This wouldn't allow me to spend Christmas with them, but it would give me the possibility of spending a few precious days with my family (as a bubble) at the end of the holiday before we need to stay apart again when term recommences. This would mean the world to me and to them”.

“Continuing remote learning for the 3 days in January would help to reduce the viral soup that I will be returning to after the holidays. I am very concerned that we will be exposed to the after-effects of the 5-day socialisation period over the holidays when we return.”

“As infant teachers we are fully embracing play pedagogy with our young learners and following the early years guidance. We are loving being in class with the children, but the fact remains that we are socialising with 20+ other families. Our wee ones are unable to socially distance nor would we want them to. We do believe that face to face teaching is best however those last two days (21st & 22nd) move to remote learning would

give us time to isolate before meeting with our vulnerable family members for Christmas. We are in a minority of authorities as most stopping face to face teaching on the 18th in which these staff members can isolate. This would also lessen the chance of SMT being involved in contact tracing over the Christmas period as they are working so hard already.”

“I have 3 small children of my own and 2 vulnerable parents who are my childcare providers. When is anyone going to give some consideration to the staff who look after our school children? We are on our knees.....we don't have any more to give. After a hellish year don't we all deserve to spend a little time enjoying Christmas with the our families without the fear right up until the 22nd we will have to isolate? Would 2 days at home with blended learning be so detrimental to the majorities? (Yes I am very aware of vulnerable children)! Mental health is apparently an important issue..... most certainly not for us teachers?????”

“I am writing to you today to ask you to register my concerns regarding our upcoming Christmas break.

“It was with disappointment that the SG chose not to allow schools to move to a blended model for the 21st and 22nd December and while I welcomed the relaxing of lockdown tiers over the Christmas period, in reality, for me this won't change the fact that I shouldn't visit with my 80 year-old mum and other family members who are in the vulnerable category for fear of taking the contacts of the many pupils I work with on a daily basis to them.

“As the learning support teacher, working with many different children in very close proximity, it's almost impossible to maintain distance and mask appropriately because of the nature of the work I do.

“A move to a blended model for the last 2 days would at least allow me to visit my mum over that period with a suitable break to minimise risk to her or anyone else I spend time with.”

“I am physically and mentally exhausted at the moment and am looking forward to Christmas as a time to relax a little and recover from the stress. I am now faced with the choice, however, of seeing my family at Christmas and risking the possibility of carrying infection to them or of isolating and not seeing them. Every day I am sitting in a room with 31 upper school children and whilst measures are in place, they are at times impossible to maintain. Children are unpredictable! Should I carry the virus to ANYONE let alone my elderly in-laws I would never be able to live with myself!”

“I also have grave concerns regarding the return of the pupils after the holidays having mixed with any number of people. (With the best will in the world we know that people will break rules!) I will then be in a basic melting pot of germs which I have avoided for the last 9 months in order to protect my family.”

“I am fortunate in that I have a family at home, but I am seeing my colleagues who live totally alone becoming more and more defeated by all of this and by the lack of concern from the government for school staff. At times I feel that we are being viewed as nothing more than a glorified child-minding service.”

“Going to blended learning on the 18th would not have a massive impact on the education of the children... but it would have a huge impact on the mental wellbeing of staff who would be able to isolate, and then confidently visit with their bubble at some point over the holiday period! It would also be considered a gesture of goodwill in a season where it is supposed to be at it's most prominent.”

“I have concerns about not moving to remote learning prior to Christmas. I have concerns that I will receive a telephone call on Christmas Eve telling me that I have to isolate. I have an infants class that is following the ELC guidelines. Infant classes don't socially distance so I would be choosing to take the contacts of 25 other households to Christmas dinner. I love being in school and enjoy face to face teaching with the infants, particularly as we are play based this is difficult to replicate in remote learning. However, there are not many professions that face 25 different households with no social distancing, lack of appropriate PPE or good understanding of hygiene. I have been sneezed on, had snot wiped on my legs and have had children cough on me. My mother-in-law knows about the children that have tested positive in Moorfoot Primary school and the staff that have been affected too. As a result of this she has deemed me too high risk and won't be creating a bubble with me over Christmas. My dad has lots of health issues and is registered disabled. My mum is his carer and also has the same concerns my mother-in-law has. As a result of this she has decided her bubble will be with my two sisters who are not sending their children to school for the last two days due to concerns.”

“My biggest concern and upset is the return to school less than 14 days after families have been allowed to mix. I know from the stories my class tell me that not all are following guidelines as it is. What will it be like over the festive period? If I am not having a bubble to keep my family safe over the festive period why is it ok that I am exposed to 25 different households who have potentially created a bubble with two other households therefore exposing myself and my learning assistant to a possible 75 different households on our return? If we had remote learning for the 6-8th Jan that would give us two weeks clear prior to returning to work.”

“As I have said, it is not that we want a holiday or enjoy being away from face-to-face learning. It is about allowing us the right to be kept safe from potential harm that we would be exposed to with this virus on our return. Teaching through a pandemic is hard work, especially with infants. However, we come to school each day with a smile and try our best. All we ask is that we are kept safe on our return to work.”

“The closure of schools running so close to Christmas is causing me severe anxiety, I, as you know am a single parent family and find this time of year hard enough. Should myself or my son receive a track and trace message through school on these days this will have a huge negative impact on how we spend Christmas. I also have elderly grandparents who won't be able to see my son or myself as we are mixing bubbles so close to the wire. As a parent also I would prefer my son to be effectively isolating for a few days before the relaxations and not risk being contacted by his school where there have been a number of positive cases. Pupils and staff have worked extremely hard over the last few months, it would be unfair to have more pupils/staff than necessary isolating working on track and trace over Christmas Eve/day. This has already been a challenging year for everyone, time with loved ones as safe as possible is important more than ever this year.”

"I have staff who won't make bubbles with family as they are worried about taking Covid in to them. The 6th, 7th and 8th is a bigger concern to more of us as children will be coming back after mixing with 3 bubbles and a class of 33 will have mixed with 99 different families! By going back on the 6th we are at risk with this being brought in as it is under the 2 weeks incubation period. A lot of us have already had to isolate for two weeks. Plus our SMT are exhausted non-stop dealing with track and trace."

"I am in several classes every week, including infant classes that don't socially distance. This would mean that I would be putting family members at risk when meeting with them over the Christmas period, as I will not have any time to isolate as I will be in numerous classes until a few days before Christmas day. Additionally, I am worried about passing the virus on to the 4 classes I am in on the 21st and 22nd, as I would ruin Christmas for those classes and their families if I was to unknowingly catch COVID before the holidays."

"I am concerned about working right up until 22nd as I have an early years class in ASN and children already have colds and sneezing on us. Learning assistants toileting throughout the day too. I have an elderly aunt in a nursing home and praying I can visit her over festive period but won't be able to chance that. Not seen her for 4 months."

"Given that I have parents in their 70's I have decided not to see them on Christmas Day because I'm in school until the 22nd of December. This is upsetting given that I don't know how many more we will have together. As a parent of 3 children, who all attend a secondary school in [redacted], I have also taken the decision not to send them to school on the 21st and 22nd to better protect my family."

"As a consequence of the 5-day easing of restrictions over Christmas I'm anxious about the negative impact this will have on myself, colleagues, and my children. To properly ensure our safety, it is sensible to have a 14-day quarantine period, when we are not in school, before reopening. We have no way of knowing if parents of the children we teach will follow the rules during the Christmas break. Slightly extending the Christmas break will have minimal impact on teaching and learning."

"Finally, I have a serious underlying health condition and returning to school a few days later will better protect my health. Many school staff feel that we are not being listened to and only parent's voices matter."

"Inverclyde Council has a duty of care towards all staff and our health and wellbeing is being adversely affected every day."

"My sister recently passed away very suddenly. We are allowed to bubble up with 2 other families so that will be my parents and my brother in-law and kids. Within our own household we are exposed to 5 different teaching establishments. Having the extended period would reduce the possibility of us having to self-isolate

and therefore not be there to support family members and it would also reduce the risk of us bringing extended households along to an already vulnerable group of people (for various reasons).”

“Closing schools on the 22nd of December removes the choice I would have to meet with an extended family bubble during the Christmas period in line with relaxed restrictions. I am the RCCT teacher for the infant department. Infant classes don't socially distance so I would in essence be choosing to take the contacts of 91 other households home to my family on Christmas day.”

“I am currently off work just now after contracting Covid-19. I am vulnerable (suffering with chronic kidney disease) with a Covid age of 89 and it has been incredibly tough. I was basically bedbound for over a week and I am still extremely fatigued and weak. My kids and husband have had to self-isolate, they are able to return to school and work end of this week.”

“I can only imagine the hurt and stress this would have caused if it had happened next week or the following. I am able to go out again but won't even consider seeing my mum or mother and father-in-law for a while as I still don't feel it's safe. Who's knows for certain how long this virus hangs around.”

“The move to remote learning for the last two days of term would alleviate some of the incredible stress placed on overworked staff who have dealt with this pandemic with courage and professionalism.”

“The Christmas holidays will result in many families mixing and have no doubt this will occur at new year also. To have all the pupils back 5 days later will be another stress to staff. I feel we should be able to enjoy our holidays more, we deserve it.”

“I believe that closing on 22nd removes the choice I would have to meet with an extended family bubble during the relaxation of restrictions. Being in a primary school it is hard to be socially distanced from the children. Yes, I wear a mask and sanitise but having 30 children plus support staff in the room makes this difficult. So, I would be choosing to take the contacts of 31 other households to Christmas dinner. I am also worried for when we return after the holiday after the relaxation of restrictions. January is normally a bad time for flu and colds but coming back into the classroom environment not even 2 weeks after the relaxation period ends worries me. I rely on grandparents for childcare whilst I am at work and asking them to do this in January so soon after Christmas and Hogmanay when many unfortunately will not follow the restrictions gives me anxiety that I could be taking COVID back to my family.”

“The move to blended/remote learning on Monday 21st and Tuesday 22nd December would be greatly appreciated. Working in an infant class where there is no requirement to socially distance would have an impact on my Christmas bubble. Having a gran who lives with me with advanced Alzheimer's Disease I am already risking her health by going into school every day and mixing with 25 other households on a daily basis.

If the remote learning was put into place this would take a huge weight off my shoulders and would give me more confidence in spending that quality time with my Christmas bubble.”

“In the ASN sector we already feel that we are less protected than others. Social distancing between children and adults is impossible, and we are at risk of contracting covid-19 in the workplace every day due to no distancing, as well as increased personal care and medical needs causing us to be exposed to a higher extent than our mainstream colleagues. This is not at all the fault of anyone, but in order for us to be safe and meet family members who we have not seen in person in months, finishing up on the 18th December would provide us with the safety and peace of mind that we will not be putting anyone else at risk. There are staff in school who have worked tirelessly throughout the past year - be that in hubs during term time at the outset of lockdown, planning and completing online and distance learning, and working in hubs during holiday periods to allow a sense of normality and familiarity for our pupils. We would be forever grateful if we were able to have a piece of normality this Christmas by utilising the blended learning approach for the 21st and 22nd Dec, allowing us to keep our families safe, and not worry about passing something on.

- “I teach in primary 1 and within the class there is no social distancing, and we are all sharing resources. I am taking jumpers on and off all day, doing laces and zip etc. I feel I am therefore more at risk of catching Covid as I am in very, very close contact all day with 20 children all from different households.
- “I am working in an infant class and I have 2 children in primary school. Together we are coming into close contact with nearly 100 people a day. So my family's risk of catching Covid, transferring Covid or becoming a close contact of someone with Covid is very high.
- “Both my parents are high risk and have been shielding. We were hoping to spend Christmas with them but I will not be able to do this if we are working right up until the 22nd and with the 2 children still at school as it would be far too dangerous. As I said because we are coming into contact with nearly 100 people a day. The risk is too high.
- “Closing the schools earlier would allow time for our family to isolate so we could spend time with family safely.
- “We have worked under extreme pressure and stress of catching coronavirus every day. When the rest of the country are able to work from home and for those that have had to go to work they have had social distancing in place, screens to help protect them or if they are in contact with another human they are wearing very high standards of PPE. We do not have this in a Primary 1 class. I feel very vulnerable and under stress all the time because I am in such close contact being sneezed on and coughed on all day. Not to mention we are all packed into a classroom for hours on end. So the risk again is very, very high.
- “I honestly can't believe this, but I have a student starting in my class on Friday. A student that is living in the centre of Glasgow and who has been in another primary school last week. 2 weeks before Christmas they are putting students into classrooms from living in parts of the country in a higher tier system. It's an absolute disgrace. These students have to get tested before going home for Christmas but are fine to come into my classroom and put us all at more risk? Although I would be 2 metres distance from her because we are in P1 she will be touching and sharing the same resources. How is this fair or safe for me to visit my mum and dad who are high risk.
- “As a parent and a teacher, I want my children to have a Christmas and not be at risk from being contacted on or around Christmas day to tell us that either 1 of us have coronavirus or have been a

close contact and would have to self-isolate. As we are coming into close contact with nearly 100 people a day the chances of this is much higher.”

“I have real concerns about Christmas mixing, both before and after Christmas. I work in [redacted] and the children in my class are unable to socially distance. They need physical support to complete most activities, or at the very least close contact prompts. Personal care is also needed several times per day for each child. Children sit on staff, and cuddle them, several times per day. Pupils will touch the faces of staff, including with hands that have been in their mouths. Mouthing of resources is common. This is a risk I have accepted for day to day working in my school, however the impact on other family members is concerning me over the Christmas period. I would feel much more comfortable seeing my parents if I, and my 4 children I have in 2 Inverclyde schools, were able to work remotely on the 21st and 22nd December.”

“My concerns at the other end of the break is the very short time we have between New Year’s Day and the return to school. Regardless of the rules, it is certain that at least a few pupils from each class will mix at New Year. This could have a huge impact on isolation periods in January. As a parent of a pupil sitting Highers, with prelims in January, this is obviously a concern to me not only professionally, but also personally.”

“My mother-in-law is on her own and in the over 70 bracket. Most people show symptoms of Covid 19 within 5 to 7 days so having that time will certainly help me feel better about her coming for Christmas day. If we are in up until the 22nd then I will be covering 2 classes that day, one of which is an infant class so no social distancing and the impact of receiving a track and trace call within days of that contact means my mother-in-law would be forced to spend Christmas alone. Therefore, I fully support the move to remote learning for the 21st and 22nd.”

“I am very concerned about having to work up until the 22nd Dec - I have not been in my mum and dad’s house since March 2020 because they are both over 80 and they were shielding.”

“I volunteered to man the school hub in [redacted] and this meant that I was unable to see my parents as the risk was just too great.”

“Since returning to school in August, I have still not visited them in person - as I feel the risk is still too great.”

“If there are any cases of Covid in our school before the holidays – I will not be able to see them at all and I will then spend Christmas Day on my own.”

“I’m hoping to join my brother, sister, mum and dad for my Christmas dinner - I would be more reassured of their safety - if I’d been able to isolate since leaving school on Friday 18th Dec.”

"I have an infant class P2/3 - and with the best will in the world, it is impossible to keep them at a distance."

"After volunteering at the hub - when Inverclyde was the Covid capital of Scotland- and travelling from another safer (at that time) authority -where I live, to put myself at risk. I feel it would only be fair to allow us to work from home these last two days of term."

"I don't think anyone could doubt our commitment- and the great work we have done in settling our children back into school life. This is one small concession that we are asking for."

"My spouse and I are teachers in [redacted] and we have 3 school aged children. Each day we spend six hours in establishments with a combined total of around 1,500 households, sharing common areas/restrooms etc. When this is broken down into bubbles, we are in contact with a combined total of around 125 other households. Considering that we have both worked every school day since lockdown began and volunteered at hubs, we are disappointed in the extreme that a move to remote learning is being ruled out, which would allow us the opportunity to minimise the risk to our loved ones' health and to alleviate their loneliness on Christmas day."

"If we decided to spend some time over Christmas with elderly/vulnerable relatives, we would effectively be playing Russian Roulette with their health. With the decision to keep schools open until Tuesday 22nd December, this is not a risk we are willing to take. In addition, the risk of teachers and pupils contracting Covid in school or having to isolate over the Christmas period is greater than it would be with a period of remote learning."

"In addition to the above, staff morale in both of our establishments is at rock bottom and the level of appreciation that many teachers feel is zero. After an extremely stressful two terms working through a pandemic, hardworking and anxious school staff deserve the opportunity to minimise the risk to their own, and their loved ones' health this Christmas."