

## Core script and collateral for colleagues in NHS regions and systems: tackling anti-vaccination campaigners in schools

Since the start of the vaccine programme, we have seen isolated pockets of disruptive and challenging behaviour from anti-vaccine campaigners, including in schools, often fuelled by online and offline misinformation including posters and letter campaigns as well as in physical protests. This note gives advice and signposts further resources and material for those who are developing local responses.

### 1. What sites can do to deal with misinformation

False and misleading information (misinformation) about the COVID-19 vaccination programme can be confusing or alarming for staff, children and parents alike, and it can be difficult to know how to respond. Local sites who are dealing with this are advised:

- **Not to engage directly:** misinformation narratives and tactics flourish when they are responded to.
- **Acknowledge receipt:** if a response is needed, simply acknowledge receipt of concerns.
- **Reassure:** acknowledge concerns for wellbeing and emphasise and refer to the latest scientific guidance on the issue. Helpful links include:
  - [COVID-19 children's programme guidance and leaflets](#) from Public Health England
  - [Vaccine Knowledge project](#)
  - the World Health Organization's [Mythbusters page](#)
  - the [Check Before You Share Toolkit](#)
  - [Health Publications website](#) to order and download COVID-19 publications
  - information on the [COVID-19 vaccines](#)
  - information on the [COVID-19 vaccination programme](#)

### 2. Lines to help local teams respond to challenging and intimidating behaviour from campaigners

- Some of the behaviours we have seen throughout the rollout of the vaccination programme from a very small number of individuals towards our staff and schools is absolutely unacceptable.
- It is disgraceful that a small number of people think it is acceptable to intimidate or otherwise make life difficult for pupils, parents, teachers and NHS staff who have been through more than enough over the past 18 months.
- Parents will want to make an informed decision, together with their child, about taking up the offer of a vaccine. The last thing they need is to be bombarded with inaccurate, misleading and frankly dangerous misinformation.
- There will also be children at school who are not eligible for a vaccination, trying to learn and catch up on missed school time, as well as those who have already been vaccinated because they are at risk and those who have chosen

not to take up the offer. They do not deserve to be intimidated or made to feel unsafe.

- Consenting is a private matter for children and their parents or those with parental responsibility and we all need to be mindful and respectful of that.

### **3. Recent statement signed off statement which could be used/ adapted by local spokespeople**

“It is disgraceful that a small number of people think it is acceptable to intimidate or make life difficult for pupils, parents, teachers and NHS staff who have been through more than enough over the past 18 months.

“Parents are entitled to make an informed and private decision, together with their child, about taking up the offer of a vaccine if eligible.

“The vaccine is safe and effective and I would urge families to work closely with their schools based vaccination team to get their loved ones vaccinated if they choose to do so ahead of winter.”

### **[4. Newspaper article by Nadhim Zahawi, Education Secretary](#)**

#### **Vaccines are vital for getting our children’s education back on track**

*We need to use all the tools we have to ensure that every child is in school and fulfilling their potential*

As Vaccines Minister, I saw first-hand how a huge national effort led to a world-leading vaccine-delivery programme, with adults in this country vaccinated against Covid at record speed.

Thanks to a colossal drive from Government at a local and national level, and the NHS, medical staff and volunteers, we were able to get jabs in arms, protect people from the virus, manage hospital capacity, and safely reopen schools and our economy.

As a result, life has returned to relative normality far sooner than many of us dared to imagine.

Now, in my new job as Education Secretary, I’m determined to see the same urgency and vigour we’ve witnessed throughout our vaccination programme as we offer the vaccine to children aged 12 and above.

At the core of the Government’s mission is an unwavering commitment to the fundamental right of every child to the best possible education. We owe this to the next generation. But to deliver on that ambition, we need children to be in schools with their teachers, friends and classmates, bouncing ideas off each other and experiencing the joy of learning as a group.

That is why we are giving teenagers the chance to be vaccinated, so we can get more children back into face-to-face education.

Thanks to the commitment of teachers, learning assistants and support staff, alongside legions of nurses and doctors, almost every state-funded school is now open as normal. But while the latest attendance figures show more than 91 per cent of children are in school, we must do everything we can to keep as many in face-to-face learning as possible.

We can't and won't stand back and let attendance fall. The education of our children is simply too important.

As a parent, I have seen first-hand how damaging it can be for children to be out of education, and the great strain it can put on family life. Being in school is not only vital for children's education, but also for their mental health, wellbeing, and development.

Dame Rachel de Souza, England's Children's Commissioner, has said in recent weeks how her Big Ask survey of young people's views found that "children like school" and they "realised how sitting in front of the computer is no proxy for being with a teacher". That's why we've invested billions of pounds in tutoring programmes, extracurricular activities, and further teacher training. We need to use all the tools we have to ensure that every child is in school and fulfilling their potential. Vaccination is key to achieving this.

Schools have gone above and beyond to create spaces and get consent, allowing the health service to deliver jabs and protect us from the virus. They are providing the right information from the health service to make sure children, parents and carers can make an informed decision.

Of course, no child is being forced to have the jab. It is a personal medical choice for children and parents or carers to discuss, and we trust them to do so – and no one should be stigmatised for their decision. But let's be clear: being vaccinated is a good thing, for you and for those around you. It makes you less likely to catch the virus, less likely to pass it on, and far less likely to get seriously ill.

Despite this, a small minority has spread conspiracy theories and campaigned outside schools, targeting teachers and even pupils. This is outrageous. Under no circumstances is it ever acceptable to target teachers or the wider school community.

As Education Secretary, I want teachers and students to know that I will always stand up for them and tackle harassment head on, so teachers can do their vital jobs safely and children can get the education they deserve – regardless of choices made over vaccination. I thank them for their work and all they have done to help get our children back in schools.

The virus is still a very real threat and must be treated with the utmost seriousness, but the wonders of science have allowed us to regain control of our lives through life-saving vaccines. We will always prioritise the health and education of children, and

as we roll the vaccine out to the next generation, I urge everyone to get behind our teachers and the wider school community, and show them how much we appreciate their boundless commitment to keeping our schools open and our children safe.

## **5. Further information**

A package of detail can be found on the:

- [Overview - Security Advice for school-age service providers](#)
- [Annex A: DHSC Vaccine Site Security Guidance](#)
- [Annex B: Reporting protests activity](#)
- [Annex C: Managing Challenging Behaviours Pack](#)
- [Annex D: Protest Security Guidance](#)
- [Annex E: Escalation and Reporting Routes for Misinformation and Anti Vaxx material](#)