

UK campaigner Lisa Diaz subject to concerted media attack for demanding COVID safe schools

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A torrent of right-wing propaganda is being directed against SafeEdForAll (Safe Education for All) campaigner Lisa Diaz after her appearance yesterday on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* (*GMB*). Her interview was a hatchet job in support of the Conservative government's homicidal demand, backed by the Labour Party and the trade unions, that the working class "learn to live with" an endemic COVID-19.

Lisa was invited to explain why she had kept her young daughter Helena out of school since the start of the pandemic. She gave a clear and accurate picture of the dangers posed to children by the virus and by the unsafe conditions that exist in UK schools. But the real agenda of her hosts, Richard Madeley and Susanna Reid, was to rubbish her concerns. Within minutes of the broadcast, the first in a series of attack pieces was published in major newspapers targeting the leading campaigner for safe schools.

Speaking on the programme, Lisa explained, "Our concern is that COVID harms children. We are seeing a record number of hospitalisations of children with COVID. Independent SAGE said that there have been more hospitalisations in children in the last three weeks than the entire first wave of the pandemic so the narrative that Omicron is mild is just a fairy tale.

"According to UK Health and Security Agency we've had 128 children die from COVID and honestly my greatest fear as a parent is that my children will end up with Long COVID. The Office for National Statistics tell us we've got 117,000 children in the UK who have been living with Long COVID for more than four weeks; 20,000 of these children have been poorly for over a year."

Reid responded by trying to present Lisa as an irrational, overprotective parent, stating, "So basically, you're very frightened". Politely correcting Reid, Lisa replied, "I am informed," explaining that the government was not making clear to parents the dangers facing their children.

Reid pressed on, "We're all informed, but the majority of people are sending their children to school."

Naturally Reid never acknowledged any role being played by government-sponsored misinformation, or the fact that many are sending their children in reluctantly because the need to work, also in unsafe conditions, or the threat of fines leaves them no choice.

Dr Hilary Jones, *GMB*'s health editor, has been presented throughout the pandemic as the rational counterpoint to Reid's bullying co-host Madeley. But he too focused on efforts to play down the danger presented by Omicron to children. He did not "recognise all those figures and statistics," he said, because "NHS England hasn't published many statistics very lately, but then claimed that "only about two percent of hospitalisations are in children under 17"—a lie, the figure is 6 percent, with 747 children hospitalised in the first six days of January. He then admitted "there is some data from South Africa suggesting" Omicron is more severe for children than Delta, but added, "I haven't seen that confirmed."

Jones then despicably cast aspersions that Lisa was mistreating her child by trying to protect her from COVID-19, arguing, "Unless she's keeping her child prisoner at home and the child isn't going out... The child presumably has a life outside of school..."

Madeley couldn't wait for him to finish, and jumped in with "Unless you isolate your daughter at home 24/7, she'll still be at risk of picking it up whether it's going with you to the shops or going for a walk." He added that if Lisa would consent to sending her child to school once she had been double jabbed, "That wouldn't protect her from getting the virus you know."

The *GMB* presenters were piling distortion on distortion with such false comparisons. As Lisa answered, "There are no mitigations in primary schools whatsoever, apart from opening a window and a bit of hygiene theatre." According to a study cited by government scientific advisor Stephen

Reicher in response to Madeley's statement, "The exposure to virus in a classroom or in an office is 1,000 times higher than at a supermarket".

The argument that everyone will come into contact with the virus somewhere and run the risk of infection is premised on accepting the current policy of allowing COVID-19 to spread freely, which Lisa opposes. She answered in the interview, "We need a multi-layered approach. It's not one thing or the other. It's not vaccines or ventilation or masks... We need to be getting community transmission down and we need mitigations in place."

It is this popular, scientific view that the government and its media echo chamber are trying to pillory and overwhelm in the interests of the corporations and the super-rich demanding a business-as-usual economy.

GMB's efforts were swiftly backed by a slew of sneering newspaper reports.

Writing on Lisa's interview, the *Sun* waxed lyrical about a "A string of hugely positive studies show[ing] Omicron is milder than other strains" and "a series of measures in place across schools to keep kids safe", before repeating the government line that "Covid booster jabs protect against Omicron and offer the best chance to get through the pandemic."

The *Daily Mail* introduced Lisa's statement that Omicron has caused record numbers of hospitalisations among children as a "claim", caveated with, "Despite studies showing Omicron is a milder variant".

The *Daily Mirror* added, "From the start of the pandemic scientists have said the symptoms of Covid in children are much milder than those in adults. And it appears the symptoms of Omicron are even milder than previous variants."

The *Mirror's* owners, Reach, one of the largest newspaper groups in the UK, ran similar stories across the Scottish *Daily Record* and local papers like the *Manchester Evening News*.

Abandoning all pretence at objectivity, Reach-owned *MyLondon* ran, "ITV Good Morning Britain viewers blast mother are [sic] 'cruel' for keeping daughter off school for 20 months due to Covid". The article claimed viewers were "up in arms" and that "most were critical of Lisa".

In fact, many comments on the *GMB's* own selective posting of its hatchet job on Twitter were supportive of her and hostile to the presenters. Tweets included, "Thank you [Lisa] for championing UK children's health", "Good for Lisa for putting her point across", "It's good we have people like Lisa speaking up" and "She isn't frightened she is just more aware than anybody else... including Dr Hilary Jones."

Others accused the *GMB* presenters of "spouting

nonsense", "one-sided, factually inaccurate broadcasting", "making "stupid comparisons" and having "no clue about the basic facts about COVID".

One person wrote, "It is utterly ridiculous that 2 years into the pandemic there has been no real attempt to make schools safe" and another, "This government has failed children on too many fronts... The mass infection, living with covid, herd immunity, ride it out policy is not only unscientific its morally abhorrent."

Speaking with the *World Socialist Web Site* after the *GMB* interview, Lisa said, "They don't want the truth to be known because the truth hurts. If people were given the truth, instead of a pack of lies, every parent would be rightly terrified for their kids. So they have to shut the truth down..."

"The parallel with the film *Don't Look Up* is mindboggling. All I am doing is stating the science and what's really going on. It can all be fact checked. But it doesn't fit the narrative. If you admit that large numbers of people are dying, and larger numbers of children, how can you argue that we must 'live with it'? You can't and they know that."

She added, "I know this isn't only about me and my children. This is about what is being done to everyone. More than 170,000 people in this country alone have died. Thousands of people, including children, are suffering from Long COVID."

Millions feel the same way. That this sentiment has found only limited organised expression to this point is down to the absence of any opposition from the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats et al, and the trade unions, who have blocked any movement by the working class as they support school reopenings while calling for a few additional mitigations.

To organise a political fightback, the Educators Rank-And-File Safety Committee, which has fought throughout the pandemic for the formation of independent workplace committees to implement a policy of eliminating COVID-19, has called an emergency meeting tonight, Tuesday, January 11 at 7.00 p.m. GMT, to discuss this fight amid the unprecedented spread of the Omicron variant.

Register for the meeting here.



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