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Covid-19 pandemic in France

The “resumption” of all the dangers in National Education

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The return of pupils in the first two years of secondary education in the so-called “green” regions began on Monday 18 May. [1] And we are a long way from “the return to school of the dropouts”: it is even the opposite!

In schools located in lower-income neighbourhoods, the return has taken place with “classes” sometimes reduced to two or three students, in an atmosphere that oscillates between that of a hospital and that of a prison, despite the windows that must remain wide open at all times (even if it is cold or if there is noise outside).

What “health protocol”?

No or very little recreation, no possibility of physical contact, no touching of books or dictionaries, no use of pens or scissors, no school dinners, no collective sports, no educational outings, but “traffic directions”, flagging tape everywhere, litres of hydroalcoholic gel behind every door, masked and distant teachers, who are themselves stressed and not very enthusiastic.

This “return” does not in any way allow the re-appropriation of a collective place of learning to students assigned to the same place for several hours, often made inaudible by wearing the compulsory mask and worried about not respecting “distancing procedures” and correct hand washing! The expression “health protocol” is no doubt envisaged by the Ministry of Education and its academic or departmental branches as something “reassuring” for staff, students and their parents, but it is just the opposite.

This protocol is impossible to apply without transforming schools into barracks and conceals major flaws in relation to the spread of the virus. The masks provided to college staff and students are not personal protective masks (FFP2 for example), and they are not even surgical masks. They are so-called “general public” masks, whose instructions clearly state, “filtration efficiency greater than 90% for particles of 3 microns emitted by the person wearing the mask”. This is proof that wearers of the mask are not protected.

Take back whatever it costs?

The reason why is not difficult to understand as soon as you use one of these masks, which seem as fragile as education minister Blanquer's honesty. There is what is called a significant “leak rate”: the masks are not airtight on the face, and while part of the air breathed in passes through the mask and is filtered, a possibly significant part passes between the mask and the face. Not to mention the fact that large scale testing was not practiced before putting young people and adults back in contact in educational institutions.

On 18 May Blanquer was forced to admit that 70 schools or establishments reopened since 11 May have experienced cases of Covid, but he had the nerve to affirm that it was not at school that the sick people had caught the virus! [2] Move on (like the virus), there is nothing to see here! The first collective mobilizations took place timidly on Monday: strikes in some nursery schools, where the application of distancing is even less possible than elsewhere, rallies outside academic inspectorates to denounce the unsatisfactory conditions of the “return” and so on. It's a line in the sand to be drawn quickly if we do not want schools to become barracks through which the second

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wave of the epidemic will sweep!

PS:

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[1] In France these are the classes of 6e and 5e in the four year middle school (*collège*) cycle. In the “green zones” – the majority of the country, the red zones are the north-east of the country including the whole Paris agglomeration – lockdown is being lifted at a faster rate. *The Connexion*, 8 May 2020 “[Colour deconfinement map of France: More info and FAQs](#)”.

[2] Primary schools reopened, with severely limited class sizes, throughout the country on 11 May, the first day of *déconfinement*.