

RE Community Conference – Implications of Swine Flu

Medical

From statements to date it appears that there is likely to be a resurgence of swine flu after the start of the school term in September, peaking sometime in October or November. Children under 14 will be particularly at risk. The percentage that is likely to catch it is unclear, although frequently quoted figures suggest up to 33% of the adult population and 50% of the school population.

Schools

The implications for schools in the Autumn Term are as yet unclear. Wholesale school closures are less likely but contingency plans are being made for an online curriculum, which can be used at home.

Effects on teachers and others involved in education

Teachers and others are likely to be affected in at least three ways:

1. The day-to-day school pressures in coping with the implications and effects of the flu virus, including covering for staff absences.
2. At a personal level, in either having caught the flu or in trying to avoid catching it.
3. Through their own children where relevant.

Attendance implications for the conference

An assessment needs to be made of the likely implications of the above on the conference drop out rate. Factors include:

1. Teachers and others are likely to be under much more personal and professional pressure than is normal for October and so are more likely to cut down on 'non-essential' activities.
2. The conference format of over two hundred people in close proximity for a weekend with most of the formal agenda taking place in one hall will not be appealing for those trying to reduce their chances of catching flu.
3. Unlike the teacher weekends where there is a strong personal CPD gain in attending and where we have a well refined method involving Heads signing that they will reimburse the cost of 'no-shows', there are no such pressures to attend this conference. Teachers and others are invited to this conference primarily to advance the cause of RE and not for personal professional benefit.

Implications of possible drop out rates on the conference purposes:

1. The conference is designed to bring together the various elements of the RE community and therefore needs a critical mass to work. Unlike a training conference which is much more likely to work with reduced numbers (it works for those present), the overall purposes of this conference may not be achieved.
2. The majority of drop outs are likely to be just before the event rather than several weeks before and so their places could not be filled by others.
3. Cost. We will be charged for the booking number of 250 and there will be no reduction for cancellations and no-shows. Also most of the other conference costs are fixed and not reducible in the event of the numbers being much lower.

Two choices:

1. Go ahead with the conference as it stands and hope for the best. This will be committing around £100,000.
2. Postpone to either spring or summer 2010. If a decision to postpone is taken by mid-August a cancellation fee of £10,000 is chargeable. This might be waived partially or in whole if the conference is re-scheduled. If a decision to postpone is taken later than mid-August the cancellation fee goes up – 35% up to one month before and very steeply thereafter.

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