

Norway primary schools reopen despite parents' anxiety

April 27 2020



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Norway reopened primary schools to the youngest children on Monday after officials claimed the coronavirus was under control, though some parents have expressed concern.

Some 250,000 pupils aged six to 10 started returning to their desks following six weeks of remote learning, a week after nursery schools reopened.

However, class sizes have been limited to 15 students.

The government is readying a plan for reopening the remainder of the schools, Education Minister Guri Melby saying she wanted everyone to return before the summer holidays.

At the Levre school in the residential suburb of Baerum outside Oslo, children streamed back to school in the rain on Monday.

Outside the building, flowers painted on the ground indicated the distance children need to keep from each other, one of several reminders of the threat posed by the illness.

Seven-year-old Tilde was bursting with impatience to reconnect with her friends and teachers.

"She was ready at six o'clock this morning, three hours early. She was so excited to go back. No alarm clock, we didn't need that," her mother Karine Rabbe told AFP.

Signs hung at the entrance saying "Nice to have you back", one poster featuring a child's drawing of a rainbow with the text "Everything will be fine!" in Norwegian.

'Safe as it can be'

But not everyone was at ease with the return.

A Facebook group called "My child should not be a guinea pig for

COVID-19" has garnered almost 30,000 members.

"If it were up to me entirely, I would probably wait a couple of more weeks because I don't think we have all the information we need at this point," Rabbe said.

The school's headmistress Kathrine Wilsher Lohre has been reassuring parents, telling AFP: "There is anxiety in society everywhere. That's why information is very important.

"Under the circumstances, it's as safe as it can be."

She said she expected most of the school's 300 pupils to attend classes on Monday.

Education Minister Melby said there were no nationwide attendance statistics available for Monday but added that she believed "the majority" of parents had chosen to take advantage of the opening.

Schools across Europe were shut in a bid to halt the spread of the new coronavirus—Denmark was the first to resume some classes on April 15.

Germany is scheduled to follow suit on May 4 and France and Switzerland a week later.

Norway has progressively begun lifting restrictions imposed on March 12.

Hair salons and dermatologists have been authorised to open and Health Minister Bent Hoie was among the first to get a trim—in front of a scrum of TV cameras.

But other restrictions remain in place, such as bans on sporting and

cultural events, as well as social distancing and hygiene recommendations.

Norway had confirmed 7,533 cases of the new coronavirus and 193 deaths by Monday.

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Citation: Norway primary schools reopen despite parents' anxiety (2020, April 27) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-kids-school-norway.html>

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