Now is not the time to reopen schools

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Sir, – Jennifer O’Connell thinks that “Denmark has created a template for us” to reopen schools before the summer (“[We need to talk about reopening schools, for everyone’s sake](https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/we-need-to-talk-about-reopening-schools-for-everyone-s-sake-1.4231641)”, Opinion & Analysis, April 18th). She goes on to say the Danes will put desks two metres apart. Simple and brilliant.

Except that in Irish primary schools there are no “desks” and there haven’t been any since I started teaching in 1979 (I retired in 2014). Instead, there are tables designed to seat four children at each. With class sizes usually near 30, good luck with getting all the extra tables you would need and you would need even more luck or space to place them two metres apart!

Getting small children to be socially distant is a non-runner.

Closing the schools early was a key early step in shutting down one major source of infection. Just when we may be getting where we want to be in the fight against this virus, reopening the schools would be a seriously retrograde step. – Yours, etc,

NORA HAMILL,

Killester,

Dublin 5.

Sir, – Jennifer O’Connell describes children’s experience of the Covid-19 pandemic as “unrelentingly awful” due, among other things, to being “locked out of school for five weeks”. She calculates that if Leaving Cert students do not return to school until late September they will have missed six months of school. Your columnist seems to have forgotten about school holidays. In fact, since the closure of schools on March 12th, schoolchildren have missed just 14½ days of school, not five weeks, and even if schools remained closed until next September, the total number of school days lost would be 62 for primary schools and for secondary schools just 44. On March 18th, in her article “Sole weapon to defeat coronavirus is our safe togetherness”, Jennifer O’Connell made a convincing argument for the “extreme measures” which had been taken by our Government at that time, saying “there is no other way” and “if we don’t take these drastic actions no one will be safe”. I agree, but it seems that your columnist has changed her mind. – Yours, etc,

KATHERINE QUIRKE,

Dún Laoghaire,

Co Dublin.