

Our ref: KW/ML/May006
Please quote on all correspondence

18th May 2020
e-mail: Keith.williams@gmb.org.uk

For the attention of the Head Teacher
Via email

Dear Head Teacher

Re: Government's plans to increase number of pupils in schools from 1st June

I am writing on behalf of GMB Members, within your school, to highlight the concerns which exist surrounding the Governments proposal for the wider reopening of Schools from the 1st June, which currently appears unsafe and unrealistic. Given the inconsistent and contradictory information which has been produced by the Government, GMB is seeking your assurance of the measures you will be able to put in place to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of our Members.

GMB notes from the Governments '**Planning for Primary Schools**' that it states "**As a result of the huge efforts everyone has made to adhere to strict social distancing measures, the transmission rate of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased**". Therefore, GMB would ask how this will be reconciled and upheld within your school when it reopens when the Governments' '**Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings**' advice states "**We know that, unlike older children and adults, early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain 2 meters apart from each other and staff**". How will this be risk assessed and managed? If social distancing is the reason for the reduction in the transmission rate, the inference is that a lack of social distancing could increase the transmission rate. Whilst understandably a lot of the focus is on transmission from children to adults, there will also be many adults within the workplace who will need to be socially distanced from one another. How will this be implemented?

Specific COVID-19 risk assessments will need to be undertaken as previous risk assessments cannot be used. Risk assessments of all individuals, their roles, tasks and movement around the school are fundamental for any safe reopening. How long do you think it will take to complete all of these risk assessments and would you please confirm that, as required under health and safety legislation, all risk assessments will be subject to consultation with staff? GMB will be advising all members with existing medical conditions, which place them at greater risk from COVID-19, to contact you to request an individual risk assessment to be completed by an Occupational Health Professional. Has Occupational Health indicated whether it will be able to meet the demands of the proposed reopening date?

To protect the safety of staff, risk assessments must be conducted for the pupils also. Just reviewing current risk assessments for pupils may not be appropriate as they may need extending to take account of the new situation relating to the change in the nature of the service provision being made and the provisions of COVID-19 guidance. These pupils include pupils, who have not previously been risk assessed but in the

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new circumstances may pose a risk; pupils who need specific care, which cannot be delivered whilst ensuring social distancing; potentially violent pupils, especially those with a known risk of spitting and/or requiring physical restraint. In such instances PPE will be required and stock of PPE must be available. Would you please confirm what PPE you have obtained and has ongoing provision been secured?

GMB would appreciate reassurance for its Members that the school's pupil behaviour policy will be reviewed, to ensure that it covers COVID-19-related incidents which allows for the school to be able to sanction, up to and including exclusion, pupils who wilfully refuse to adhere to arrangements of social distancing and deliberately cough or spit at pupils or staff, putting them at risk.

Please would you confirm that you have reviewed your contractors' risk assessments in the context of government and public health guidance on COVID-19 and the presence of staff and pupils on site. In relation to contractors, schools should treat all site visitors including contractors, suppliers and deliverers, as if they were employees, ensuring they are offered the same protections and are expected to follow the same rules. In light of this, would you please therefore confirm you will ensure PPE is provided by the contractors within your schools and that should any member of contracted staff have an issue, you will assist in getting this addressed.

You will be aware the Cleaning and Hygiene Requirements, set out in '**Coronavirus (COVID-19), implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings**' (11th May) are extensive. It states particular attention must be given to frequently touched areas and surfaces, such as bathrooms and door handles. All cleaning must be carried out whilst wearing disposable gloves and aprons and then be double-bagged, stored securely for 72 hours then thrown away in the regular rubbish. Many members are concerned they will be expected to carry out cleaning duties and GMB is seeking your assurance that cleaning duties will only be carried out by fully trained and equipped cleaning staff. Has the school secured a guaranteed supply of handwashing and sanitising products or ensured contractors have?

At present the proposal is only for school to reopen to Nursery, Reception Year 1 and Year 6 pupils (in addition to key worker and vulnerable children). Given this, would you please confirm there will be adequate teaching staff available to lead the small groups of 15 pupils and that Teaching Assistants, with the exception of HLTAs, will not be expected to lead these.

For many members who are either themselves vulnerable, or live with someone who is vulnerable, the thought of returning to work, when the rate of infection and daily fatality rate is still high, is alarming. Please would you confirm that our members, who fall within this category, will still be allowed to work from home, as the most recent NJC Guidance (15th May 2020) states:

"For employees who live with but don't 'care' for relatives in the vulnerable groups the NJC guidance is clear that all options for working at home should be considered (including redeployment if practicable). The employer has a duty of care to the employee, so if the employee cannot work at home and the employer insists that they should attend the workplace, the onus is on the employer to do everything possible to mitigate risk of the employee 'taking the virus home' to their vulnerable relative."

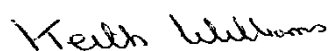
Many GMB BAME members are particularly scared and anxious at the prospect of returning to work. As you may be aware, BAME workers appear to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and therefore need reassurance that the specific risks to them will be addressed, and PPE if necessary, will be provided.

Have local plans for testing, tracing and isolating been put in place by the School and has this been shared with Staff? As all COVID-19 measures are designed to reduce exposure, would you please confirm that our members will not be required to work any additional hours, unless they volunteer to do so, as more time in school equates to a greater risk.

GMB understands that you too will have your own concerns about the safety of reopening schools from the 1st June and would like to know whether you believe it will be possible for you to safely reopen your school on 1st June or do you have a different timescale? GMB, along with other education unions, is addressing all safety concerns to Government and GMB and its' Members want to see an increase in the number of pupils in school but only as soon as it has been proven safe to do so. The potential consequences, of getting the timing of the wider reopening of schools' wrong are devastating and GMB does not believe 1st June is a realistic date for all health and safety issues to be addressed and looks forward to receiving your response to this.

Once GMB has received your response, we will share it with our Members and would then welcome entering into collective discussion with you on the measures that need to be taken, to protect our Members, to allow for a safe increase in pupil numbers. Thank you for your assistance with this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Keith Williams
Senior Organiser