

QUESTIONS ASKED AT SCHOOLS MEMBERS MEETING 26th JANUARY 2021

Thank you to all those who submitted questions, the answers are below.

Please contact schoolsteamlondon@gmb.org.uk for further advice and to be put in contact with your local Branch or Regional Organiser.

Useful Documents

Working from Home Advice

Ventilation Guide

Lateral Flow Tests (and template letter to Head Teacher)

Working from Home Expenses template letter

Collective Grievance template letter

All updates and bulletins are available on our GMB London website www.gmblondon.org.uk/workplace

- 1. What is the intake on crossing bubbles? This is causing me anxiety.**
Bubbles are a control measure designed to reduce risk of transmission. A bubble reduces interactions by containment and crossing between bubbles needs to be risk assessed and explained.
- 2. Where have these guidance and letter templates been sent to?**
All guidance, emails and templates are available on GMB London Regional website www.gmblondon.org.uk/workplace
- 3. You mention about staff being on a rota to minimise risk. What is the stance in this with regards to Nursery? Our keyworker groups are on a rota so staff are in a week off a week but those in Nursery are in full time.**
If the numbers in nursery are at their usual level, it may be difficult to put staff on a rota. The risk assessment should however be updated to reflect the new variant and control measures reviewed.
- 4. Can we get this presentation at end of the seminar in emails?**
The slides are available at www.gmblondon.org.uk
- 5. What is the maximum bubble size?**
Unfortunately, there is currently no maximum number for bubbles but GMB has written to all Head Teachers asking for the previous limit of 15 from March 2020 to be reinstated. If you have concerns about the size of a bubble, this should be raised as a Health & Safety concern.

6. Surely the less people you have contact with the less the risk. I don't feel safe and have raised this?
Absolutely! Schools should be operating on minimal numbers and rota systems to reduce risks.

7. We don't have a GMB rep in our school. It is difficult to get response from the local branch as they might be busy. Any suggestions?

Apologies if you have not been able to get through to your local branch. You can contact 0208-2028272 to get the details of your local office and Regional Organiser or you can email schoolsteamlondon@gmb.org.uk who will either help you or direct your issue to the Regional Organiser.

8. Is there a current limit on bubble sizes in school?

Unfortunately, there is currently no maximum number for bubbles but GMB has written to all Head Teachers asking for the previous limit of 15 from March 2020 to be reinstated. If you have concerns about the size of a bubble, this should be raised as a Health & Safety concern.

9. What is GMB doing to support early years settings who are being told to open fully? I work in a Nursery School in London, currently only open for keyworker/vulnerable children as staff submitted Section 44 letters, but we are being put under pressure to open fully due to funding.

GMB is supporting early years members in raising their concerns and getting risk assessments reviewed and updated. Additionally, GMB London has written to all Local Authorities stating that staff in early years and nursery settings should be afforded the same protections as other education workers.

10. Why are support staff teaching onsite pupils and taking more risks than teachers?

This is not fair and should not be happening. GMB has written to all Directors of Education highlighting this unfair system and will continue to challenge Head Teachers who are placing unreasonable and unfair burden on support staff. If this is happening, coming together as a group to raise your concern at this is the best way forward. By submitting a collective grievance, the Head Teacher has to address the matter and provide explanation for doing so.

11. What size should the bubble be including the children & staff?

There is no set or maximum bubbles size. Bubbles should however reduce risk of transmission and exposure and therefore should be kept to a minimum to ensure bubbles are an effective control measure.

12. CV people won't get vaccine until cat 6; what happens if schools reopen before we've been vaccinated?

Whenever schools reopen fully, risk assessments will need to once again be completed and this includes individual risk assessment, with the input of Occupational Health if need be, for Clinically Vulnerable Staff. Vaccination will not prevent people from developing COVID-19 and it is therefore important that infection rates are reduced so there is less virus in the community. Vaccination does not give immunity and does not prevent transmission- it prevents the more serious illness that results in hospitalisation and fatality.

13. What is our role in school during pandemic according to the guidelines?

Schools are open to vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Support staff should only be in school in a capacity of supporting this provision. DfE guidance allows Head Teachers to ask Teaching Assistants to cover teaching if they feel an individual is competent to do so but it is important you feel comfortable, confident and safe carrying out any duties asked of you. If you are asked to work from home you should be provided with the equipment to do so.

14. Are teachers assistants classed as support staff as well?

Yes

15. Can you have more than one rep in the school?

It is really dependent on the size of the membership within the school. There are examples of having more than one rep in school where GMB has a large number of members and sometimes members feel happier sharing the role with someone else. This is something that could be discussed further with your branch and or Regional Organiser.

16. We are asked not to use mask while working with children. How can we protect ourselves? Seeing that we are not included in the vaccine group.

If you are working in close proximity or dealing with the personal care of children, you should be provided with the correct PPE. It is important to remember the distinction between PPE face masks and face coverings. PPE face masks protect the wearer and face coverings are used to protect those around the wearer. If you are working with children who rely on lip reading, then it is not appropriate to wear a face covering.

17. Working 4 days a week having 1 day working from home. How can we address this?

If you are unhappy with the working arrangement that has been put in place, then you should raise this with your Head Teacher and put forward collectively what you would like to be in place.

18. Should I be given the opportunity to wfh the same as my colleagues. I'm a school librarian and have been put on a rota to supervise students every day in the classroom.

If you do not usually supervise groups of children and teaching is not part of your job description then unless you are happy to do so, this should not be required of you. If your role as librarian is not currently required and there are no other reasonable essential duties for you, then you should be paid to work from home where possible or paid to stay at home until schools fully reopen again.

19. Before this lockdown there were year group bubble made but when a covid case happened only the class bubble closed is this how it should work?

Head Teachers have a responsibility to identify close contacts for the purpose of self isolation. If only a class bubble was closed it was probably because only the class met the definition of close contacts.

20. As an older member of staff, 61 years, I am concerned about returning to work before vaccination

When your individual risk assessment was completed it should have considered your age and looked at any additional risk posed to you. Duties and exposure should have then been considered in light of

this. Although the vaccine should offer protection from serious illness or complications from Covid-19, it does not make you immune and care will still need to be taken.

21. Should support staff be asked to do other jobs at work than supporting a child during pandemic?

Staff should not be attending school to carry out non-essential duties not directly related to the provision of education for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. For example, staff should not be attending school for gardening, tidying cupboards, arranging displays or decorating. If this is happening in your school, you need to raise it as a matter of urgency and please let us know and we will follow up. Local Education Authorities have been clear that this should not be happening.

22. Should a Ta lead a bubble on new arrivals from abroad with 15 children on a scale 3?

There are several issues here. Firstly, only Level 3 TAs and above should be taking a class and they should only be doing so by mutual agreement and with proper teaching support in place. Teachers always have the support of TAs so TAs should also be supported in the same way. If you are working on your own with 15 children, you need to feel safe and confident to do so and know of protocols in place to deal with emergencies or issues that could arise. The Government has strict guidelines in place about who needs to self-isolate after travel and these should be adhered to at all times.

23. My office has no ventilation whatsoever. I have asked about having an external source of ventilation (pre-covid time) and kept getting the brush off about having this done. Please could you give me advice on what I can do?

As ventilation is one of the most important measures against Covid-19, you should be working in a room that is properly ventilated. This needs to be raised with your Head Teacher and needs to be part of your risk assessment. There is useful guidance on the HSE website about [Ventilation and air conditioning during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic - HSE news](#) and GMB London also has important advice on its website www.gmblondon.org.uk/support.

24. Children were in their year group bubbles but staff could move in-between? Was this practice ok?

Interactions should be kept to a minimum and control measures such as social distancing must be adhered to. Any movement between bubbles needs to be recorded and risk assessed.

25. Should there be two bubbles in a lunch hall at once?

This is dependent on several factors and would need to be risk assessed. For example, how many children, how big the hall is, whether the groups interact with one another. Any concerns you have about health and safety are valid and should be raised. All staff should have seen the risk assessments and have been asked to contribute to them. If you have not seen the risk assessment, please do so and let us know if your Head Teacher will not share these with you.

26. What is the correct interval i.e. number of days for staff moving between bubbles? I have been told by my school it is 48hours for a school bubble.

There is no official guidance on this as ideally there should be no movement between bubbles. The 48 hours is likely based on the infectious period of Covid-19 being 48 hours before symptoms show.

27. In my workplace, bubbles keep on getting mixed up. Can they really do that?

The purpose of bubbles is to reduce the risk of transmission so mixing bubbles of children defeats their purpose. Any mixing should be risk assessed and recorded.

28. I am a fs2 TA, since schools closure I have been placed in nursery with nursery and reception children together, we have 2 staff bubbles taking it in turns to work 1 week and 1 week off, however the other staff bubble have had 6 adults test positive at weekend and 2 more possible and 1 positive child, we are now expected to work across bubble to cover absent staff, is this safe.

In light of 6 adults testing positive, the school needs to urgently review the risk assessments to see what control measures could be introduced to prevent such an outbreak happening again. Practices and protocols need to be reviewed to see if a different way of working may be better in the future especially crossover working between bubbles and the impact this can have on perpetuating staff shortages and number of close contacts and interactions.

29. One school I know of have all TAs in and all teachers at home is this practice ok?

This is clearly unfair and should be addressed by means of a collective grievance. Expecting teaching assistants to work with little or no teaching support within the working environment is unacceptable. The collective grievance template is available at www.gmblondon.org.uk/workplace

30. Should there be 2 adults with 4 pupils in one bubble? Teachers come in half day but support staff has to stay all day unnecessarily?

Support staff should not be in school unnecessarily. Staff should only be in school if they are required for the provision of education to vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

31. Why are there so many more children in school this time around?

The Government has widened the definition of key workers but Head Teachers have the ultimate decision over numbers in attendance based on their risk assessments. Head Teachers may have to limit numbers because they have a duty of care to ensure a safe working environment for their staff.

32. If you are working in school should you be marking?

The issue of marking is an individual one based on your individual role. If you are being required to do marking where you have not done so previously it is reasonable to bring raise this. The school will probably have its own policy on marking and you can refer to this. You should be fully trained and comfortable with any duties being placed upon you.

33. Does a whole year bubble isolate if one class has a case?

Head Teachers have a responsibility to identify close contacts for the purpose of self-isolation. The decision on who needs to self- isolate will be based on interactions and contacts and therefore the answer to this question will be dependent on these.

34. If you have been off with Covid do they need to provide a risk assessment before I return.

You should have already seen a risk assessment. If you have not, you should ask to see this. At your return to work interview, there should be an opportunity for you to discuss any issues you may have

and this would be an appropriate time to raise any health and safety concerns you may have about how the risk from Covid-19 is managed.

35. I raised couple of points to be added in the risk assessment. HT promised he will but no action done. What is the next step?

If your points have not been accepted or considered you should raise this in writing with the Head Teacher, asking for an explanation of why your points have been dismissed. If you do not get a response, or are unhappy with the reply, please speak to your Rep or Branch about this and they will be able to advise on the Grievance Process which would be your next step.

41. Google classroom for the children who are at home regardless of how many children you have or support staff are in your bubble

If you are being given an unreasonable and unmanageable workload this needs to be raised with the Head Teacher. This can be raised collectively by using the collective grievance template.

42. What is a personal risk assessment? I have filled a risk assessment that has been sent out to all staff in school. Is it different? I come under moderately vulnerable category.

An individual (or personal) risk assessment looks at you, your medical history, your family responsibilities if you live with or care for someone who is CEV and your specific role i.e. the tasks you perform and who you perform those tasks with e.g. you may work with a pupil with challenging behaviour and this needs to be looked at individually.

43. What about staff that are refusing to take tests?

The use of Lateral Flow Tests in schools is currently voluntary.

44. Joining/ mixing bubbles? Gov document says 'teachers and staff can operate across different groups'. Can we refuse to cross bubbles? (I'm over 60 feel uncomfortable doing so)

Your individual risk assessment should detail if you are required to cross between bubbles and assess this risk. The risk assessment should take into account any increased vulnerability due to age and seek to remove or mitigate the risk. You should highlight any concerns you have about your safety.

45. Hi, if a staff member has tested positive from lateral flow test and the bubble has been told to go home. Can the senior leadership ask the TAs working in that bubble be asked to come in?

If TAs in the same bubble as the children have not been told to self isolate then this certainly needs looking at. The question should be asked as to how close contacts have been identified and why pupils are close contacts and staff are not. Schools are not allowed to require staff to use LFT daily in place of self isolation.

46. We still do not have the flow test, that were told were coming and put on the risk assessment! What can we do to access them?

This needs to be raised with your Head Teacher as it means the risk assessments are inaccurate.

47. When you stated in Barnet that only allowed up to 17 children in a bubble then issue with 4 adults etc. Where does it state how many children should be in class this lockdown? Is it HT decision or has govt stated specifically?

There is no maximum number for bubbles and there is not specific guidance on bubble sizes in lockdown. GMB has asked for the bubble size to be capped at 15 as it was last March.

48. Should other children who are not classed as keyworker or vulnerable children be allowed to attend school?

The Head Teacher has the authority to decide who attends school.

49. I am an agency staff. My school has all agency staffs in every day, whereas permanent support staffs are on rota or shielding.

As an employee of the agency you will have different terms and conditions to permanent staff in schools. Schools may need to use agencies if they have significant numbers of clinically vulnerable staff who cannot attend the workplace. If a school no longer requires agency staff, it can just end the assignment. As an agency worker you can choose when you work and when you are available and therefore a school would not need to place you on a rota with their permanent staff as you are not their employee.

50. If I am a member of SLT, should I get paid for it? I have asked for it to be added on to my job description but told no.

If the SLT duties form a significant part of your role you should request a job evaluation.

51. What is GMB take on Long Service owed during COVID-19? Should they be written off...? and how often are rooms to be sanitised?

For staff eligible long service awards should still be awarded as they are part of continuous service. The Councils policy will set out how the criteria for long service and eligibility for long service awards. Classrooms should be cleaned daily and equipment and surfaces wiped down in between use. Dining halls should be wiped down between different groups of pupils.

52. Within early years I'm guessing you can have 39 kids and 3 staff?

Early Years are still fully open but there is still a requirement for risk assessments. The risk assessment should look at these large sizes and at to see how risk can be reduced and the implications for transmission of Covid-19 and put control measures such as smaller bubbles in place.

53. I want to know what is the yearly pay as I think I am below it.

This document has the Local Government Pay Scales for schools for 2020-21.



LGS Pay 2020-21.pdf

54. So TAs are now expected to cover a class and teach the children who are in so that the teachers can have PPA. Because it isn't a full class, we cannot claim cover supervisor is the correct? Also, all members of staff have been asked to go into school and treat it like a normal day? Not treating it like lockdown at all, it's putting staff at risk unnecessarily; most schools in this area are on a rota.

Teaching Assistants should not be fulfilling the role of a teacher. GMB has advised Teaching Assistants who are being unfairly and unreasonably burdened with teaching responsibilities to submit a collective grievance. Support staff should only be attending school to perform essential duties related to the provision of education for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. If this is not happening, please contact your local Branch or the Schools Team who will raise this with the school.

55. How does GMB support with job evaluation and additional working hours?

GMB has a job evaluation guide for Teaching Assistants. If you would like to discuss how to get your job evaluated, please contact your local Branch or the Schools Team for help with this. In regard to additional hours, the Green Book states that any additional hours that become a regular feature of the post should be incorporated into the substantive contract of employment. If you have been working regular additional hours, these should be reflected in your contract to ensure your statutory rights are protected e.g. for the purpose of sick pay, maternity or redundancy.

56. So with regular hours if we were doing duties before lockdown and then they stop our duties are we entitled to be paid for them?

If you have worked regular additional hours, these should have been incorporated into your contract. If they have not been and you are now suffering a financial loss because of lockdown, this is something which should be raised. Please contact your local Branch or the Schools Team for assistance.

57. While bubbles are on some people who are part time are doing one full week but home for three weeks or every other week is this ok?

If you are only contracted to work part time, then you cannot be required to work full time. Any changing of hours should be by mutual agreement.

58. Can TA/ support staff ask for contract to be changed to SEN 1-2-1 contract if they are working with a child with ECHP on daily basis?

If the work you carry out every day is different to your job description then this needs to be addressed. It is very important that the role you perform is accurately reflected especially in case there is a restructure or redundancy situation. If your role is markedly different to what you are actually doing, raise this with your Head Teacher.

59. If I am self isolating with no symptoms, am I required to work remotely.

If your role can be carried out at home then you can be required to work from home. If your role cannot be carried out at home, you will be at home on full pay for the duration of the self-isolation period and only be put on to sick pay should you develop symptoms or test positive for Covid-19.

60. Is there a limit to how cold our classroom is? We are all wearing coats and freezing including the children?

61. The minimum working room temperature is 16C but in schools this is usually 18C. The heating should be increased to offset the ventilation to make sure classrooms are a comfortable temperature. This needs to be raised as a health and safety issue.

62. I don't feel comfortable being around anyone who has not taken a test as they could be asymptomatic. I don't feel safe around them I think it is unfair they they're not taking one. I am clinically vulnerable.

Your individual risk assessment should introduce measures recognising your clinical vulnerability. It is very important people do not feel a false sense of security from Lateral Flow Tests. Lateral Flow tests are voluntary, they are not totally reliable as they can produce false negative results and their effectiveness is reduced when used by non medical professionals. The control measures such as social distancing, cleaning and bubbles are the most effective way of reducing transmission and a recent article in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) stated that people testing negative at school with LFT felt a false sense of security that made them less likely to adhere to the control measures in place

63. I'm advised to shield from the government so I'm working full time from home. Is there funding to support me with electricity, phone and printing bills?

Your school can pay you £6 per week, tax free, if you are working from home for either all or part of the week. Here is a letter you can send to your Head Teacher asking for this.



WFH Schools
Members - January 20

Alternatively, you can apply to HMRC at [Claim tax relief for your job expenses: Working from home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-tax-relief-for-your-job-expenses-working-from-home)

64. Due to several adults receiving trace and trace to isolate the school are 'recommending' to turn app off then back on as you leave, what is your view?

This is the advice from DfE

"The app is intended for use by anyone aged 16 and over if they choose to do so. For some young people, including some with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), parents will need to decide whether or not their use of the app is appropriate. This aligns with wider NHS services which are generally offered to those aged 16 and over as routine. This means that some students in year 11, the majority of students in years 12 and 13, students in further education (FE) and higher education (HE), as well as some children attending out-of-school settings, are eligible to use the app and benefit from its features. Staff members are also able to use the app."

If your phone is just being left in a locker or staffroom, then it would be practical to turn the App off during this time.

65. Also, when someone has been tested positive I feel they should tell us who they are by name in case we have been in contact with them and need to self-isolate. i.e. sat with them at lunchtime. We are told when someone has. And the individuals get sent a separate email. But I still think we should be told who it is.

Medical confidentiality prevents identifying those who test positive. Head Teachers will identify close contacts.

66. What if you have been refused an individual risk assessment despite having an extremely critical vulnerable partner who was shielded last year?

Schools should not be refusing to carry out individual risk assessments. It is an Employers' legal responsibility to complete risk assessments. Please contact us if this has happened to you.

- 67. In early years we are expected to go in for all children, currently we are only on open to key families and vulnerable families as many gave in section 44 letters but feels like we are daily in threat of the head teacher opening up to all. What else can we do to show how serious about the risks of opening up to all?**

Section 44 letters should not be used as a blanket approach to addressing health and safety issues at work. If you are unhappy with a particular practice or any element of the risk assessment, you should raise this in writing setting out your concerns. If this is not addressed a grievance will need to be submitted and you can contact us for help and assistance with this.

- 68. I have been told that it is a GDPR issue to call parents and ask them "Are you a keyworker?" "what days do you work as a keyworker?" "Are there any days where there is someone at home, that could look after your child?" and that the parents have already told us by sending their children in. Is this correct?**

This is a matter for the Head Teacher and this approach could potentially put support staff in inflammatory and difficult positions with parents. Head Teachers have the overall responsibility to determine how many children are admitted to the school.

- 69. If your partner or family member has covid and you have to isolate. If you are an LSA and asked to work from home. What is the LSA position in terms of requirement to work and look after their sick family member? Will the LSA get paid if the LSA is not the one who is sick and has not tested positive and if so how long are they entitled to full pay?**

If you have to self-isolate for 10 days, you can be required to work from home for this period of self-isolation if your role allows. If you develop symptoms or test positive you will then move onto sick pay in accordance with the terms of your contract. If you are unable to work from home when self-isolating because of caring responsibilities, you will need to speak to your Head Teacher about this.

- 70. If you have had to self isolate for 10 days and you have had full pay, if you have to then self isolate in the future for another 10 days are you still entitled to full pay?**

You will receive full pay every time you have to self isolate. This provision is set out in the Green Book, under Paragraph 10.9 of the Green book which provides for full pay in the event of contact with infectious diseases and does not have a maximum days allowed. This absence, along with Covid-19 itself is exempt from any sickness absence trigger procedures in accordance with LGA guidance.

- 71. I'm a ta in a special education school, we are completely over staffed most class rooms in the school have no students in yet staff have been asked to come in regardless and make work for the students at home. Management have been struggling to find work for the staff who don't have students. So most staff are doing nothing all day. To me this is unnecessary risk during a pandemic. Why are staff being asked to come in to sit in a class room all day?**

Staff should not be in school if they are not fulfilling essential duties directly related to the provision of education for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

72. While teachers are at home, we are asked to mark children work from google classroom and to make phone calls to parents whose children are not doing the work all this task while children are in class and we are expected to deliver lessons.

Teaching Assistants should not be fulfilling the role of a teacher. GMB has advised Teaching Assistants who are being unfairly and unreasonably burdened with teaching responsibilities to submit a collective grievance. Support staff should only be attending school to perform essential duties related to the provision of education for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. If this is not happening, please contact your local Branch or the Schools Team who will raise this with the school.

73. Our risk assessment states that there is no bubble size requirement is this correct?

Yes. There is no maximum bubble size but GMB is asking Head Teachers to revert to the maximum bubble size of 15 as per March last year.

74. What is the situation with HLTA's? Are they expected to cover while the teachers are out?

Whilst HLTAs do have some teaching responsibilities this should not mean they are working in an unsupported environment and being unfairly and unreasonably burdened. If any HLTAs are unhappy with the expectation being placed upon them, this can be addressed by means of collective grievance. Also, teachers always have the support of TAs so HLTAs should also be supported in the same way. If you are working on your own, you need to feel safe and confident to do so and know of protocols in place to deal with emergencies or issues that could arise. You can contact your local Branch or the Schools Team who will raise this with the school.

75. We've also been asked to do online interventions?

You should only be carrying out interventions if you feel adequately trained and comfortable to do so. If interventions have not previously been part of your duties, it is perfectly reasonable to highlight your issue.

76. Would a child who has been bullied in their previous school come under our schools care policy and therefore be allowed to come into school every day even though their parents are not keyworkers?

This is a matter for the Head Teacher.

77. What is the size of bubbles? Our numbers increase weekly and not all students with key worker parents or vulnerable.

Head Teachers ultimately decide how many children can attend school. There is no maximum bubble size but everything has to be illustrated and explained on risk assessments.

78. What about vaccinations for support staff in special education who are dealing with intimate care & invasive medical needs?

Vaccinations do not provide immunity. Any support staff providing personal and medical care should be provided with proper PPE and this will not change even after the vaccination programme because vaccination prevents the more serious complications of Covid-19 but not the transmission of it.

79. My school is saying I can cross bubble if there is a weekend in between. Is that right?

There is no official guidance on this as ideally there should be no movement between bubbles. The weekend, or 48 hours is likely to be based on the infectious period of Covid-19 being 48 hours before symptoms show.

80. I'm asthmatic and stayed home last time, this time I work from home am and in school pm. I'm office staff and have been told I cannot work from home because my job is front office.

Your risk assessment should explain this changed position. Ask your Head Teacher to explain why the school has taken a different approach this time, given the new variant is more easily transmitted.

81. I have raised this cross bubble issue to HT. He said he will include in the risk assessment but he never did.

This should be followed up in writing. If your points have not been accepted or considered you should raise this in writing with the Head Teacher, asking for an explanation of why your points have been dismissed. If you do not get a response, or are unhappy with the reply, please speak to your Rep or Branch about this and they will be able to advise on the Grievance Process which would be your next step.

82. As a TA working 1:1 with a special need child, I have been required to provide 4 hourly live session to my student, from 9 - 1pm. I haven't got any training and feel overwhelmed with this task as I have to find resources myself! Is this my responsibility?

You need to raise this with your Head Teacher. If all TAs are in this position, you can submit a collective grievance. Alternatively, put your concerns in writing outlining your concerns and requesting immediate support. There should not be an unfair burden of teaching placed on TAs.

83. I'm asked to work Mon- Thurs covering bubble 1, then Friday with a bubble 2. This is due to part time staff not working Friday. How is a situation like this handled?

This crossover between bubbles needs to be part of the risk assessment and recorded.

84. Is it ok to cross bubbles in early years e.g. reception and nursery?

Crossover between bubbles is permitted by DfE Guidance. As bubbles are designed to reduce the risk of transmission GMB believes their integrity should be respected. Any crossover working needs to be risk assessed and explained.

85. Can you remind members about GMB's advice about Support Staff being redeployed to support mass testing in schools?

GMB London produced guidance on Lateral Flow Tests



Lateral Flow Tests -
11th January 2021.pd

86. The school are saying the reason they have bubbles is for track and trace only.

Bubbles make track and trace easier but their original purpose was to reduce the risk of transmission by containing groups of pupils and staff by minimising contact and interactions.

87. So, you can have a bubble of a full class of 30?

Yes. But with schools not fully open, this number will hopefully be reduced.

88. What is the number for bubbles with supposed key workers children? We currently have 29 children yr 3 and 4 staff in one key worker class.

There is no maximum bubble size. Head Teachers should look at ways of reducing transmission on the risk assessment and it may be that you want to suggest reducing bubble sizes where you have examples such as this.

89. We have been made to do lunch duties supervising year groups. We have been told that the clause in our contract aob as deemed by headteacher covers this. Is this ok?

If you are still having your breaks and this duty is risk assessed as part of your role, then it is ok for the Head Teacher to ask for temporary help with this. If there is any additional training for the role e.g. first aid, then this needs to be provided

90. We have been told that adults can cross bubbles and only children cannot?

Ideally, no one should be crossing bubbles. If staff are crossing bubbles, this can and should be recorded.

91. So can you confirm if you work part time should you stay in the same class each time you come to work each week or can they move you around to different ages each week?

Whether working full time or part time, staff should have a regular place in class to reduce risk of transmission. Risk assessments should be demonstrating how the school is minimising risk and ad hoc, irregular placements in different classes should be explained on the risk assessment.

92. I work as a MDA. We have to move from one bubble to another, is this okay. And we now have to take our class dinner rubbish out? Is it okay to go from one bubble to another?

Any movement between bubbles should be recorded and risk assessed and DfE guidance allows for crossover working between bubbles. If you are taking rubbish out, you should be provided with any necessary PPE such as gloves and aprons.

93. In my school all support staff are in everyday covering groups of no more than 6. All teachers are at home teaching via zoom. Can the school do this?

Support staff should not be responsible for all the teaching in schools and should not be working in an unsupported environment. This can be raised by way of a collective grievance.

94. As a librarian I have to deal with all the bubbles. Not all at once but daily during the day during library lessons.

Your role should be risk assessed and control measures put in place to protect you at work. This risk assessment should be done in consultation with you and give you an opportunity to raise concerns and put forward suggestions you may have.

95. I'm clinically vulnerable (asthma). Teachers are working from home, safe and warm, we TAs are teaching. I'm teaching every day, no rota. Temperature in the classroom is very low, some days as

low as 11C, icy cold draft. With mask on in these conditions I'm suffering and my health is been affected. Children are not following the rules! Is any of these normal? How is this allowed to happen?

These are very typical problems in schools at the moment. 11C is too cold and the heating must be increased to ensure a comfortable working temperature. There is useful guidance on the HSE website about [Ventilation and air conditioning during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic - HSE news](#) and GMB London also has important advice on its website www.gmblondon.org.uk/support.

96. What help should be in place for our mental health at the moment?

All employees should be able to access the schools Employee Assistance Programme which provides services such as counselling. Your school will be able to provide you with details of this.

97. What if there are no teachers on the floor and only support staff teaching we have a deputy head and head teacher that's in the office?

Expecting teaching assistants to work with little or no teaching support within the working environment is unacceptable and support staff should not have the responsibility and burden of teaching being unfairly placed upon them. This can be raised by using the collective grievance template.

98. Why is my school still bringing in agency staff when contracted staff are being asked to come to work and sit in classrooms all day with little or nothing to do?

Staff should not be required to be in school if they are not needed for duties directly related to the provision of education for vulnerable children or the children of key workers. The use of agency staff needs to be risk assessed if they are going into multiple schools.

99. Should TA's be marking work from home?

Some TAs will be working from home. Marking should be in accordance with the schools policy and if TAs did not previously mark work, they should not be taking on this new duty without consultation or agreement.

100. I am off one day a week on the rota. On that day I am expected to contact parents to check on the families and ask questions concerning the home learning to see if they are meeting their targets. Is this acceptable?

You should only be working from home on your designated work days. You should not be working from home on your day off. If the rota allows you to work from home one day a week then this is fine. In relation to the work carried out at home, you should have received appropriate training for this and be provided with the necessary equipment to carry it out.

101. You keep mentioning risk assessment. Isn't it SLT that put that together? Does the HT have to follow Dfe guidelines or can they determine what they feel is appropriate for the risk assessment?

The risk assessment is completed by the Head Teacher or SLT and this should be done with the involvement of staff. The DfE guidelines should be followed where applicable, but Head Teachers have ultimate responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of staff and pupils in their school.

102. If colleagues have worked remotely last year and currently but no health problems, I have asthma but have been expected to go to work all through. Is that correct?

If you feel at risk, you should raise this with the Head Teacher. If you do not understand the criteria being used for deciding who can work from home you can ask for clarification. Your individual risk assessment should have considered your medical history, including asthma and Occupational Health involved if necessary.

103. Is it acceptable for a general TA to be left with 11 children in class all day even after the teacher has done a live lesson which was undertaken out of class, then given an afternoon off for mindfulness due to them being on computer all day but TAs mindfulness is not considered?

Arrangements such as these should be with mutual consent and with proper teaching support in place. Teachers always have the support of TAs so TAs should also be supported in the same way. If you are working on your own with 11 children, you need to feel safe and confident to do so and know of protocols in place to deal with emergencies or issues that could arise. The concerns about mindfulness should apply equally to all staff. TAs may wish to consider raising a collective grievance at the apparent disregard for them.

104. We were told we couldn't car share with colleagues and yet we can go on a bus or get an Uber.

How you travel to work has to be considered. If you are working in a bubble with a colleague then the risk assessment should consider car sharing with that person less of a risk than public transport. Car sharing generally though puts you in close proximity to someone which would make you a close contact in the event of infection. This could have implications for the school if staff all travelled in together and had to self-isolate as a result of travel.

105. Do we have to get the injection?

Whilst it is strongly recommended you take up the offer to be vaccinated, the vaccination programme is voluntary.

106. In special school staff are constantly having to cross bubbles and we are told it's because we don't have enough staff. Management have said they are keeping a list of who has had to cross bubbles but this still feels unsafe.

A record has to be kept of crossover between bubbles and interactions for purpose of contact tracing. If you have particular vulnerabilities, these should be addressed as part of the risk assessment and control measures put in place to protect you. By allowing crossover working to cover staff shortages, new absences can create an even bigger problem because more bubbles need to be covered.

107. I'm living with somebody clinically extremely vulnerable still waiting for heart treatment and he is now shielding I got told I needed to be in school as per government website so am now sick as was very anxious and scared and broke down as if I brought virus home he would not survive but told I was told I needed to be in school fulfilling my contract with the children.

If you can work from home, you should ask to do so given your situation. Your individual risk assessment has to consider your personal circumstances and your Employer has a duty of care to

ensure everything reasonably practicable is done to ensure you do not take the virus home. Please contact us for additional support if you need it.

- 108. I am working all day with 4 different Year groups in a Bubble. These are children I haven't worked with before and am expected to read their teachers daily lessons and support with work and IT issues. Why then am I expected to find time to support other children (from my normal class) online and complete reports/assessments to tight deadlines?**

If you are having an unreasonable workload placed upon you, this must be raised in writing with your Head Teacher setting out why it is not a fair expectation. GMB will support you with this and it may be an issue facing all support staff in your school and you could raise the matter collectively, either informally in writing or through the grievance procedure

- 109. I have children asking me why I'm wearing a mask! And the parents are telling them school is safe?**

If children are not understanding the purpose of masks then the schools needs to deal with this. Parents will be telling their children school is safe so they are happy to attend but children still need to be aware of the precautions they can take e.g. washing hands etc.

- 110. Can bubbles mix in the playground?**

The DfE has stated that pupils passing each other briefly in a corridor or playground (e.g. walking past each other) is a relatively 'low risk', but that schools should try to avoid large groups of pupils mixing together in these spaces at the same time.

- 111. How does BAME staff cope with working in a special school?**

The individual risk assessment should look at all risk factors. There is a BAME risk indicator toolkit available for members to use at [Microsoft Word - GMB BAME RA Tool MB Version 23JUL2020.docx \(gmlondon.org.uk\)](#).

- 112. I am living with someone who is shielding and the work I am doing at school can be done from home but they won't allow me to and have given me my own space in the library. The work I have been given takes me an hour or two then there is nothing else for me to do... should I be made to go in?**

If you can work from home, you should be allowed to do so. If you are working alone and in your own space in school then it is reasonable to ask for an explanation as to why you cannot work from home. If you are not performing duties directly with vulnerable children and key worker children you should not be required in school.

- 113. I need to change my email address to access all the information. I can't remember my log in, can you help when you have a minute. Thanks**

Changes to your membership details can be made by emailing london.membership@gmb.org.uk.

- 114. If we take more than 8 days off in the term it triggers the council policy for procedures against you as I understand even if you have a medical certificate.**

Covid-19 sickness absence and self-isolation are both excluded from the Sickness Absence Management policy and will therefore not trigger any procedures.

115. I have not had a risk assessment for January 2021. Also because of various medical conditions I have, I was not in school during the first lock down last year but I have to be in school since after the first lockdown. I am in the nursery in the morning because in the school have half day nursery, so in the afternoon I have to teach two different groups of children from two different classes.

You should request an individual risk assessment and ask to see the schools risk assessment. The individual risk assessment, which may require input from Occupational Health should be completed as a priority and explanations be given as to why you were permitted to work from home last time and yet you can't this time. Given that the new variant is more infectious and easily transmitted, extra precautions should be taken rather than less.

116. Working in a special school, we cannot use PPE but bubbles are being mixed and TA3s and TA1s being left in class all day teaching as school took us of rota. They are hoping to get everyone in asap and we feel unsupported.

PPE should be available to everyone where it is needed. If you do not have access to required PPE, raise this in writing with the Head Teacher and contact us. Teaching assistants should not have full responsibility for teaching classes and this needs to be raised collectively. TAs should not be working in an unsupported environment with unreasonable workloads being placed upon them.

117. Is there another route that doesn't use the GP as some GPS refuse to sign people off long term with Covid??

Only your GP can sign you off from work.

118. Is there a GMB branch Oxford or is it only a London union?

GMB is a countrywide union divided into 8 different regions. This meeting was for London Region Members. Birmingham and West Midlands Region covers Oxford.