

A photograph of a female teacher with long brown hair, wearing a light pink button-down shirt, leaning over a desk to help a young boy. The boy, with short dark hair and wearing a light blue school shirt, is focused on writing with a blue pencil on a piece of paper. The background is a classroom with colorful posters on the wall, including one that says 'It's Wet' and another with a world map. The image is partially obscured by a large orange diagonal graphic on the right side.

GMB

LONDON
REGION

Health and Safety

GMB is committed to working with schools and academies to improve health and safety standards. GMB ensures its members receive the health and safety rights they are entitled to.



Tolerating Abuse is Not Part of Your Job

School support staff are more likely to experience violence at work than almost any other group of workers in the UK. Nobody should be expected to tolerate any form of abuse, physical or verbal, and it is your right to speak up and speak out.

You have a legal right to work in a safe environment. Your employer has a duty of care to protect your wellbeing and welfare. GMB is campaigning for zero tolerance to violence and abuse against school support staff. We raise awareness, push for better protections, and ensure your voice is heard.

If you are experiencing abuse at work, contact schoolsteam@london@gmb.org.uk for confidential advice.

Lone Working & Its Risks

A lone worker is anyone carrying out their duties without close or direct supervision, which can increase risks because no one is immediately available to assist.

In schools, lone working can mean:

- Covering classes alone
- Providing personal care
- Supervising exclusion rooms
- Working during school closure periods

The risks include:

- Being vulnerable to malicious allegations
- Exposure to violence from pupils
- Stress and isolation
- Lack of support in emergencies

Many members report feeling unsafe in these situations. Lone working risks are not an individual problem – they are a workplace issue that can be addressed collectively with the support of GMB members.

Protecting You at Work

Duty of Care

Every school and academy has a legal duty to provide a safe working environment for staff.

This means:

- Identifying potential hazards and risks
- Taking action to remove or reduce them
- Supporting staff affected by incidents or unsafe conditions

If your employer is failing to meet this duty, GMB will support you and work to ensure you are safe and protected at work.

Stress

Many school support staff experience stress and or anxiety because of their work. Excessive workload, lack of support, abuse, and ever-changing responsibilities can all lead to high stress levels.

Employers must take workplace stress seriously. This includes:

- Monitoring and addressing causes of stress
- Providing proper training and staffing levels
- Making reasonable adjustments where needed
- Ensuring Risk Assessments are completed

Stress is a workplace issue that must be managed. If you are experiencing stress or any other negative effects because of your work, speak to your manager or GMB rep.

Assaults and Allegations

School staff can be at risk of both physical assaults and malicious allegations.

Clear policies must be in place to:

- Prevent such incidents where possible
- Investigate any allegation fairly and promptly
- Provide support to affected staff

As a GMB member, you have access to free legal advice and representation in these situations. Also, if the police are involved in any allegation, you will be provided with a legal representative.

Violence at Work

Violence is never “part of the job.” Even if it comes from pupils, it must be treated as a serious incident or risk.

Employers are legally required to:

- Carry out risk assessments for foreseeable violence
- Share these assessments with staff
- Take steps to reduce the risk and protect workers

If you're told to accept violent behaviour as part of your role, contact GMB immediately.

Asbestos

Many older school buildings contain asbestos. It is dangerous if disturbed.

Your employer must:

- Keep an up-to-date asbestos register
- Mark and isolate asbestos areas
- Ensure no work disturbs asbestos without strict safety measures

Outside Visits & Trips

Any off-site activity must have a full risk assessment in advance.

This should include:

- Staff-to-pupil ratios
- Emergency procedures
- First aid provision
- Specific risks for the location or activity

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments identify hazards, evaluate the likelihood of harm, and set out measures to control risks. Not only do Risk Assessments (RA) identify risk of physical harm, but also emotional and psychological harms.

They:

- Must be shared with staff before work begins
- Should be updated after any incident
- Can reduce risk but never eliminate it entirely
- Must invite staff to contribute, especially if the RA concerns a particular pupil who they may know well



Protecting School Staff Support

School support staff are often treated differently from other workers when it comes to violence and abuse policies. In many schools, the perpetrators are pupils – but that does not mean abuse should be tolerated. If you are working with pupils with challenging or complex behaviours, make sure you have seen the risk assessments.

GMB's Campaign

We are fighting for zero tolerance to violence and abuse in schools, ensuring all staff are protected and supported.

Abuse is not part of the job

The Law Protects You

- **Health & Safety at Work Act 1974** – Your employer must ensure a healthy, safe environment and control risks of violence.
- **Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999** – Employers must assess the risk of violence and take action to remove or reduce it.

Key Points

- Being harmed at work is never “part of the job,” even if the harm comes from children.
- Risk assessments must be completed, shared, and updated after incidents.
- You have the right to contribute to risk assessments.

If You're at Risk or Harmed at Work

- See the risk assessment for pupils with challenging behaviour.
- Report all incidents so risks can be updated.
- For injury claims, call Unionline on **0300 333 0303**.