



Schools & Academies in England

Member Update – 8th May 2020

On the potential wider opening of schools

GMB have been at the forefront in challenging the government to prioritise safety over a rushed lifting of the lockdown. We anticipate an announcement on schools and your union has been making strong representation for safe systems of work. Your protection at work is our number one priority. The government says we must follow the science and our message is simple. Show us the science to give us the confidence that schools can open more widely safely.

GMB Members are telling us how concerned they are about their personal safety, that of their families, and also of their colleagues and pupils.

GMB succeeded in arranging an emergency meeting this week of all the major education unions, including GMB, NAHT, NASUWT, NEU, UNISON, and UNITE. United education voices coming together to speak as one is crucial, and We have managed to agree a joint union position to put to government in advance of an expected statement this weekend.

Joint Union Statement

The Joint Unions that represent over millions of workers across education have written to the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, to express our concerns and have set out a list of key tests that need to be met .

The reopening of schools will require agreement by employers and trade unions on a range of procedures to make sure schools are safe for everyone. These will include robust risk assessments in advance of schools reopening and the conduct of these assessments will be supported through the provision of clear national advice and guidance.

Ultimately the reopening of our schools will depend greatly on ensuring that families and carers are fully confident that allowing their children to return to school is safe. We fully understand that the majority of our members don't yet feel confident. However, the unions believe that meeting the following key tests will help to achieve this.

Key tests

- There must be clear scientific published evidence that trends in transmission of Covid-19 will not be adversely impacted by the reopening phase and that schools are also safe to reopen. Government should also be in a position to assess that pupils, parents/carers and staff are confident that this is the case.
- There should no increase in pupil numbers until the full rollout of the government's "test, trace and isolate policy" with testing targets consistently met over a number of weeks. A wider reopening before such a regime is in place would be completely unviable and would risk increased transmission levels, and ultimately deaths.



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- A phased approach kept under constant review with no expectation that the majority of pupils will return before September if the science shows that this is not safe.
- There must be agreement between government, employers and unions that operational practices and procedures in schools meet minimum quantifiable standards, in particular regarding social distancing, hygiene and cleansing practices, a secure supply of appropriate PPE to all school settings to be available where required, including clear guidance on situations where physical contact with pupils cannot be avoided, and regular robust risk assessments.
- Enhanced school cleaning with additional resources subject to risk assessment and all necessary PPE to keep them safe.
- A phased return of pupils will be necessary and this will need to meet tests that the most vulnerable pupils are being prioritised and that the phased approach supports maintaining a safe environment and reduced transmission levels.
- School leadership teams, and unions, should take decisions locally to close schools in cases of local outbreaks/upsurge in Covid-19 cases. Schools will need local data as part of the government's testing and tracing strategy.
- Clear strategies for safeguarding the most vulnerable pupils and staff, including those who should be isolating or working from home, those with underlying conditions who are not in the shielded group and those who live with vulnerable people.
- An assessment of the impact of wider school reopening on other key public services, in particular public transport and the risks for increased transmission rates in that context.
- A clear commitment to collective negotiations with school unions on reopening and instances of local Covid-19 outbreaks or increased transmission levels.

GMB understands what a worrying time this is for you as school staff and understand your concerns for pupils.

GMB union is your union in schools and is leading the call for safe work systems so you can get on with your job educating pupils and not worrying about your safety.

We need your help to help strengthen our call, so please do the following:

1. Share the joint statement from the GMB and other education unions with colleagues.
<https://www.gmb.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC%20joint%20unions%20Safe%20schools%20letter.pdf>
2. Become a GMB rep, we are still recruiting new representatives throughout the lockdown so if you haven't got one in your workplace get involved. Details can be found at:
<https://www.gmb.org.uk/become-workplace-representative>
3. Recruit a GMB member - colleagues not in a union? Invite them to sign up at:
www.gmb.org.uk/join