

Government must apply common sense and postpone schools re-opening



Education Secretary 'at sixes and sevens' over pandemic response

GMB, the union for school support staff, has called on Education Secretary Gavin Williamson to postpone the re-opening of all schools in England until appropriate safeguards can be put in place.

The Education Secretary U-turned yesterday on the Government's initial plan to force London primary schools to re-open, confirming primaries in the capital will remain closed for the start of the new



term after being added to the “contingency areas” list.

GMB said continued differing arrangements across higher tiers was a “dangerous recipe for chaos” and was causing additional stress for parents, pupils and school staff.

An **estimated** 78.4% of the population is now under tier 4 restrictions and a further 21.7% are under tier 3 restrictions as the UK yesterday hit record Covid-19 case levels for the third time in a week. [1]

Analysis of international data suggests that closing schools and universities can reduce the overall reinfection rate – ‘R number’ = by 38%. [2]

GMB represents school support staff including teaching assistants, higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), cover supervisors, nursery nurses, lunchtime supervisors, premises staff, and administrative and finance staff. More than half of those working in schools are not teachers.

The union said it had worked hard with local authorities, multi-academy trusts, and individual schools to ensure rigorous risk assessments and support for children throughout the pandemic, but unless the Education Secretary takes action to reverse his position it would be left with no option other than to take action to defend its members’ safety at work.

Stuart Fegan, GMB National Officer said:

“Gavin Williamson is at sixes and sevens over the re-opening of schools. His shambolic approach is a recipe for chaos and danger. It’s causing huge stress.

“As infection rates rise, we need a consistent approach, not a postcode lottery. The Education Secretary now needs to apply some common sense, make a full U-turn, and delay re-opening all schools in England until proper safeguards are in place.

“No one wants to disrupt any child’s learning but action is needed to protect people and make schools safe. This must include ensuring priority vaccination of all support staff in schools – key workers who are all-too-often forgotten.”

Press office

07958 156846

press.office@gmb.org.uk

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Click to contact your local GMB Region

info@gmb.org.uk

