



4th February 2021

Dear Adrian

**RESTRICTING ATTENDANCE DURING THE NATIONAL LOCKDOWN:
SCHOOLS (revised guidance)**

GMB understands that the Guidance for all Schools in England has been updated. I am writing to set out GMB's objection to the changes made to this guidance without any properly conducted risk assessment of the implications for school support staff and without any dialogue with GMB as the union that represents school support staff.

(Extract below taken from the guidance page 17 "How to group children")

"All teachers and other staff can operate across different groups. Where staff need to move between groups, they should try and keep their distance from pupils and other staff as much as they can, ideally 2 metres from other adults. Again, we recognise this is not likely to be possible with younger children and teachers in primary schools can still work across groups if that is needed".

Since the New Year Lockdown with schools opening to all key workers and vulnerable children it has been the school support staff who have predominately remained in the classrooms undertaking face-to-face contact with pupils.

GMB has had to advise members daily on the duty of head teachers to monitor risk and minimise any issues identified; that headteachers have duties and obligations to all staff equally.

In the recent updated guidance issued by the Dept. it appears that government is now saying that it is fine for staff to work across bubbles. This is a potentially extremely dangerous step, as it allows for asymptotically infectious staff to act as 'super spreaders', and will allow pupils in this position to infect a greater range of staff than just those in the 'bubble'.

This appears to directly contradict all previous advice issued on the creation of 'bubbles', and with infection rates remaining high in the community, and no sign of an effective testing programme in sight, we can only view this a recipe for further outbreaks in schools, especially where social distancing cannot be implemented. This will surely result in more school closures and more disruption to children's education.

It is astounding that such a step has been taken when all previous efforts have focused on stopping the spread of the virus by preventing the mixing of bubbles and groups – we need to know why the guidance has altered and what is the science behind this?

There is no explanation or evidence as to why now in the middle of the current school cycle, that groups should start mixing. We urge you to pull back from this immediately as this revised guidance means that there is a real danger of serious disruption to the ability of school support staff to safely work in the classrooms.

We are requesting an urgent meeting with the dept. to discuss this; if not we will be advising all GMB regions across England to lodge formal concerns that our members' workplace could be unsafe as a result of the revised guidance your dept. has issued.

I await your reply.



REHANA AZAM – GMB NATIONAL SECRETARY