Dear Head Teacher

GMB is writing to express serious concerns at the failure to respect the integrity of the ‘bubbles’ within your school. Our members have brought to our attention that they are being required to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(eg work in more than one bubble*).

Whilst it is not the intention of GMB to try to instruct you how to manage the operation of your school, it is the responsibility of GMB to ensure our members are protected at work and that Health and Safety Law is being upheld and implemented. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states that Managers mustdo everything reasonably possible to protect their staff, risk assess every role and once risks have been identified, put in as effective protection as possible.

As you are aware, the introduction of ‘bubbles’ is central to the Governments Guidance for the wider reopening of schools. The purpose of bubbles is to ensure there is no interaction between different groups of staff and children and it is this establishment of bubbles which would be key in the management of any cases of a positive test for COVID-19, as it would allow for the isolation of a bubble rather than the whole schools setting. By requiring staff to work in more than one bubble, you are showing disregard for the clear protective measure designed to help reduce the potential transmission of COVID-19 by keeping the same children and staff together.

The DfE Guidance details “Practical steps to reduce risk” and these include adjusting timings of the school day, working out arrangements for breaks or play times so that ideally only one group of maximum 15 children is in the same play area at any one time and arranging for assemblies to take place with individual groups in their allocated classroom spaces rather than bringing children from different classes together into one hall or large space. The Guidance states “The overriding aim is to reduce contact between different groups.” By requiring staff to work in more than one bubble, the purpose of the bubble is lost and the overriding aim of DfE is lost.

Whilst acknowledging social distancing is not always going to be possible with younger children, it still remains important to reduce contact between people as far as possible. Fundamental to reducing transmission risk, is ensuring children, young people and staff only mix in a small, consistent group and that small group stays away from other people and groups. Given that the DfE Guidance is clear about minimising contact between groups, it is unfathomable to GMB that you are expecting staff to compromise the integrity of the bubbles set up within your school.

Many GMB members had reasonable concerns and anxieties about returning to work and took reassurance from the measures being proposed. It is not acceptable for our members to be put under extra pressure because the School is not following the guidance set out. GMB hopes that you will now reconsider your requirements for staff to work in more than one bubble and would like to take this opportunity to remind you that our members have the right to be safe at work and under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, have the right to step away from a job that puts them at "serious and imminent danger". GMB will be bringing this matter to the Local Authority as it has the over -riding responsibility for Governance and ensuring compliance with all Health and Safety legislation.

Yours