

Our ref:

Dear Head Teacher

Safe Working in Schools

GMB is writing in relation to ensuring schools are a safe working environment for our members given the huge increase in infection rates and the threat posed by Covid-19 Variant B117 and its increased rate of transmission.

GMB welcomes that the Government has now accepted the concerns of SAGE, which focussed on scientific evidence suggesting it is not safe for schools to be open more broadly and decided that schools should only be open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. The new variant of Covid-19, B117 is more infectious and is responsible for the exceedingly high infection rates since schools closed for the Christmas break and GMB is concerned for the health and safety of its members.

GMB acknowledges the need for provision of school for vulnerable children and the children of key workers but this should not be to the detriment of our members. GMB is therefore requesting all Head Teachers revert to the practices put in place originally when schools closed at the start of the pandemic, including:

- Bubbles kept to a minimum and limited in size to a maximum of 15 pupils
- No crossover working between bubbles
- Rotas put in place for support staff to allow for at home and in-school working so risk, from exposure and transmission, is minimised. *The significant reduction in pupil numbers should allow for both teaching and support staff to work on a rota system and GMB will not accept unfair burden being placed on its members in the absence of teaching staff from school.*

It is now evident, including to SAGE, that control measures originally put in place may no longer be sufficient and therefore GMB is further requesting:

- All risk assessments be updated, reviewed and revised to reflect the new variant of COVID- which has increased transmission and infection rates
- Individual risk assessments be reviewed and CV and CEV staff members referred to Occupational Health before being required to once again attend school.
- The efficacy of control measures e.g. bubbles and proper use of ventilation be reviewed and revised
- PPE to be provided where social distancing is not possible

You will shortly be receiving letters from our members requesting to see the amended risk assessments and our advice to members is that they should be able to see real changes to existing and previous control measures. Further, for those Clinically Vulnerable members of staff, not currently protected by Shielding, GMB is advising they may wish to consider requesting working from home until new risk assessments, with input from OH if need be, are completed taking into consideration the increased infectivity of B117 and their medical condition.

GMB realises the workload and burden this pandemic has placed on Head Teachers but hopes you will be able to give immediate due consideration to protecting our members who are being required to work during lockdown and implement new safer practices and protocols in view of the worsening of the situation.

As I am sure you are aware you have legal duties to protect the health, safety and welfare of your staff and pupils. Those duties arise under the following legislation:-

- Sections 2 and 3 of the Health & Safety Act 1974
- Regulations 3 and 8 of the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Regulation 4 of the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992
- Regulation 4 of the Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Regulation 7 of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002.

GMB will be sharing this letter with its members, who in turn will be making similar requests to you.

While GMB is not taking the same mass approach to use of Section 44 as some other Unions, we will nonetheless advise individual members of their right to do so should they believe the situation and measures within your school present a serious and imminent danger to their health and safety.

Although not a matter for immediate attention, I would like to take this opportunity to raise with you the issue of Lateral Flow Testing in Schools. GMBs' position is that the carrying out of such tests is a medical task and not an educational one and therefore falls outside the scope of the job description for those employed in an educational capacity. Although job descriptions do allow for ad hoc duties, as seen fit by a Manager, GMB does not consider medical testing to fit within this criteria and will be advising Members accordingly. I am happy to discuss this and any other matter with you as GMB firmly believes there should be a pragmatic working relationship between us.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter and I would very much appreciate your confirmation that you are in agreement with the requests made and assurance you will be implementing these measures.

Yours sincerely