

# Ministers ignored BAME parents' concerns for June school reopenings



**Govt pushed ahead with reopening despite most BAME parents against sending children back to school – Cabinet Office polling**

The Government pushed ahead with reopening despite most BAME parents saying they would not send their children back to school, Cabinet Office polling shows



Ministers pushed through the botched June reopening of primary schools despite evidence of anxiety from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) parents and parents on low incomes, according to Cabinet Office polling obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

The planned return for all primary school children was cancelled shortly afterwards, following warnings from school unions that the plan was impractical and that social distancing guidelines were not being met.

Public Health England later found that there had been **thirty outbreaks of Covid-19 in schools** in June.



At the time, **SAGE reported** that 45 per cent of all parents 'definitely would' or 'probably would' send their children back to school if social distancing guidelines were relaxed, based on polling commissioned from YouGov by the Cabinet Office in late April.

However, the full results were not released, and the Cabinet Office classified the figures as 'official sensitive.'

The full data has now been obtained by the GMB union, which represents school support staff, under the Freedom of Information Act.

According to the previously unpublished figures, 42 per cent of BAME parents had said they would not send their children back to school, compared to only 26 per cent who said they would.

Parents on lower incomes were also much less likely to say they would send their children back to school, with 40 per cent saying they would not do so.

Public Health England's review of coronavirus disparities warned in early June that people who were members of ethnic minority groups and those who were on lower incomes were at significantly higher risks of contracting and dying from coronavirus.

It is unusual for polling results that have been publicly quoted to not be released. **British Polling Council rules state** that once survey results have 'entered the public domain,' the full results must be published within two working days.

The Cabinet Office said that while it was now in the public interest to release the results, the response to other questions commissioned from YouGov would not be released as 'disclosure would weaken Ministers' ability to discuss controversial and sensitive topics free from premature public scrutiny.'

GMB is due to give evidence to the APPG on Coronavirus today [Wednesday 09 September].



**Rehana Azam, GMB National Secretary for Public Services, said:**

"Education unions including GMB warned repeatedly that schools were not ready to return, and that important issues including provision of PPE had not been resolved.

"Dozens of school support staff workers have lost their lives, and it is crucial as schools return that their voices are listened to.

"It is outrageous that Ministers pushed ahead with their flawed reopening plan despite knowing the scale of the fear and anxiety in the minority communities that have been hit hardest by this terrible disease.

"They say that the virus does not discriminate, but it is clear that society does – and once again, BAME voices have been marginalised.

"It should not have taken a Freedom of Information request to bring this evidence into the public domain.

"GMB calls on the Government to fully engage with the unions, monitor the return to school carefully, fix the failing track and trace system, and be clear with the public about any new concerns that arise in the days and weeks ahead."

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