

# GMB welcomes U-turn on schools re-opening after PM claimed schools were safe



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GMB, the union for school support staff, has welcomed the Prime Minister's decision to belatedly overrule Education Secretary Gavin Williamson and order school closures to all but key workers and vulnerable children.

The decision comes after sustained pressure by those working in schools for the Prime Minister to respect the science and take action to protect people.

The union said the Government had much work still to do to make schools safe so the goal of full re-opening could be achieved – but that it no longer had any confidence that Education Secretary Gavin Williamson is up to the job or could be trusted to protect the welfare of pupils, staff or the wider community.



**Rehana Azam, GMB National Secretary said:**

“After days of dither and delay in the face of our calls, Boris Johnson has finally woken up from his slumber, come to his senses, overruled the Education Secretary and ordered schools to close to all but key workers and vulnerable children.

“It’s frankly embarrassing that just a day after he took to the airwaves to defend the indefensible and peddled false claims that schools were safe, the Prime Minister is now hastily bolting their doors shut.

“No one wants to disrupt any child’s learning, but this necessary measure would already have been taken days ago if this Government had an ounce of competence, or respect either for the science or those working in schools.

“If the Prime Minister had acted with appropriate speed, a huge amount of stress, panic and the risk of further virus spread could have been avoided. It remains to be seen how much further unnecessary and avoidable damage this has done.

“Our school support staff members have been working throughout the pandemic in schools on emergency provision to support vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers and will continue to be expected do so – but the Government still has much work to do to make schools safe – on PPE including face mask availability, ventilation, strict enforcement of bubbles, support for clinically vulnerable staff and proper testing regimes.

“We no longer have any confidence that the Education Secretary is up to the job or can be trusted to put measures in place to protect the welfare of pupils, staff and the wider community given his mounting record of irresponsibility and ineptitude.



“There has been silence from ministers on ensuring school support staff, as well as teachers, are a priority for vaccine rollout as a step towards fully re-opening schools.

“Vaccine availability for school support staff, who are key workers at high risk of exposure, is about common sense and common decency – and needs to begin now because many schools will remain open for key workers and vulnerable children.”

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