

GMB

GMB@WORK



GMB campaigning for better health & safety

School support staff

Support staff are taking on duties over and above what they are paid for, are working more hours and are having more contact with pupils. GMB, Britain's General Union, is the union for all school support staff. GMB represents a growing number of school support staff including Caretakers/Site Managers, Playground Assistants, Teaching Assistants, Catering Staff, Special Needs Assistants, Cleaners, Admin Officers, Clerical Assistants, Bursers, Technical & Laboratory Staff, Mid Day Supervisors, Technicians, Nursery Nurses, Co -educators...

Join GMB, the union for all school support staff, and ensure you receive the same protection and advice as thousands of your colleagues.



HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Risk assessments

A risk assessment for the purposes of health, safety and welfare is designed to establish as safe a system of work as possible. (It can sometimes be confused with an assessment of a child, particularly a pupil with behavioural problems or learning difficulties). The assessment should identify any hazard staff may face and look at the likelihood that harm could actually occur. It is not possible to always eliminate the risk completely within a task but it should be possible to reduce the chances of exposure to it.

Stress

Stress is an increasing factor in many schools. Massive organisational changes in recent years have made many jobs much more difficult and stressful. This can be compounded if staff find that by being absent due to stress their job is then under threat.

The HSE have produced some guidance on management standards for work related stress. GMB supports the introduction of these standards and with our wide experience in dealing with stress at work we can offer practical advice and support which can resolve your exposure to stress in the workplace.

Bullying/Harassment

Bullying and harassment can lead to stress related illness, resulting in reduced job performance, absenteeism and a high staff turnover. Victims of bullying can suffer a number of symptoms including anxiety, tension, depression, lack of concentration, headaches etc.

Examples of bullying can include:

- verbal, written and/or visual intimidation—e.g. threats, shouting and swearing at the victim;
- insults to humiliate the victim in front of others or behind the victim's back;
- physical intimidation, including assault;
- isolation and lack of support for difficult tasks, or excessive supervision;
- unfair allocation of work, changing work without consultation to include impossible deadlines; taking credit for the victim's work etc;
- refusing reasonable requests for training or blocking promotion.

GMB is aware that such behaviour does occur in some schools and we are working to eliminate it. GMB will give appropriate advice and support to any member who feels that they are being bullied or harassed.

Assaults and Allegations

It is a sad fact of life that anyone working with children is vulnerable to allegations of assault or violence, either from children or from their parents.

While the safety of children must be paramount at all times, staff also have rights. These include the right to be treated fairly and for a clear and open investigation into any allegations.

GMB offers free legal advice to members who have been assaulted at work, or had allegations made against them. We also have vast experience of representing our members in disciplinary and grievance hearings. Our track record of supporting members and advising on problems at work is second to none—whatever the circumstances. For protection at work, you need GMB.

Slips, Trips & Falls

The most common kind of accident at work is slip and trip injuries. This can be a particular problem for staff working in kitchens and dining rooms, but slips and trips can occur anywhere in schools.

The risk of slip and trip injuries to support staff can be greatly reduced by:

- carrying out risk assessments to consider;
- potential slip and trip hazards such as: spills of liquids, wet floors, unsuitable footwear, rain and snow, uneven surfaces and trailing cables etc;
- tidying up potential obstructions, and;
- where this is not possible, providing warning signs or hazard cones.

Falls often occur when inappropriate equipment is used to access articles or materials stored above head height. The equipment may well be available but stored some distance from where it is required. The correct equipment should always be used as the vast majority of injuries from falls occur at relatively short heights above ground level.

Manual Handling

In schools, manual handling injuries can be caused by carrying heavy weights such as boxes and equipment, from lifting work, and from any work that involves stooping & lifting, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads by hand or by bodily force. If these operations are not carried out safely it can result in injuries to the back, hands, arms and feet.

Employers have a legal duty to avoid the need for manual handling as far as is reasonably practicable. This can be improved by introducing equipment to ease the task. Something as simple as a sack barrow can make a big difference to manual handling injuries. An assessment of the risk of injury from any manual handling must be carried out; and measures must be put in place to reduce the risk of injury from manual handling.

A manual handling assessment may also need to be carried out on the lifting of smaller children.

Asbestos

Many school buildings contain asbestos. As well as being used in boiler-rooms and as pipe-lagging, asbestos can be found in ceiling tiles, wall panels and many other places throughout the premises

If you are not yet a member of GMB JOIN TODAY



GMB is committed to working with schools to improve health and safety standards, and to ensure you receive the health and safety rights you are entitled to

(staff should seek advice when knocking nails into walls for displays, wall decorations etc).

If this asbestos is disturbed or damaged—either accidentally or through routine repairs and maintenance—any asbestos fibres released into the air represent a health risk to anybody who might inhale them, including staff, pupils, parents and visitors.

In May 2004, a new legal duty to manage asbestos in buildings meant that all asbestos containing materials must be identified, and a plan developed to ensure that the risks are controlled. A survey of schools premises must be made to identify where asbestos is present, and be used to ensure work is planned safely. The presence of asbestos should be discreetly marked or otherwise recorded to ensure future work is not undertaken on it without the knowledge that it is asbestos.

Hazardous Substances

It is possible for support staff, routinely or occasionally, to come into contact with hazardous substances either through working with them or through indirect means such as loading and delivery.

There are laws covering work with any potentially hazardous substance. The regulations covering chemicals at work, known as The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2004 (COSHH), state that chemicals should be controlled by:

- carrying out an assessment of the possible risks of using or moving a hazardous substance;
- where possible eliminate the need to use the hazardous substance;
- if this is not possible substitute the hazardous substance with another substances less dangerous;
- as a last resort providing personal protective equipment (ppe).

Infections

Support staff in schools can become exposed to a number of infections either through direct contact with an infected pupil e.g. German Measles or Chicken Pox or contact with potentially infected body fluids when cleaning up vomit or blood e.g. Hepatitis.

Biological hazards such as Hepatitis also come under the COSHH regulations which means that schools should have procedures in place for dealing with infection hazards such as safe disposal of contaminated waste and should provide protective equipment

such as gloves. Our members should be offered Hepatitis injections alongside Tetanus to protect them if they are dealing with bodily fluids eg vomit, spit and being bitten. Schools should also have an infection control policy for infectious diseases such as meningitis and TB. This should help contain infectious diseases from families and the community.

OTHER DUTIES

Increasingly support staff are asked to use their goodwill to take on extra, often unpaid, duties. There are a number of areas where it is important to look at the health and safety implications.

Administration of Medicines – There is no legal duty which requires school staff to administer medication.

Transportation of Pupils— Should your employer wish for you to use your vehicle this should be reflected on your job description, and you must have valid insurance to reflect your duties. There must also be a risk assessment.

Outside Visits/Field Trips – School Support staff required to go on trips with pupils outside school premises should see a full risk assessment beforehand. This should detail the ratio of staff to pupils and emergency procedures.

Supervision at Break Times – A risk assessment should be carried out to assess appropriate levels of staff.

To achieve health and safety improvements requires a strong union. If you are not yet a member of GMB join today and ensure that you're workplace is safer.

REMEMBER IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF GMB WE CAN'T HELP YOU!

Independent research has shown that people who are not in a trade union are 50% MORE LIKELY TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT than those who are in a trade union.

GMB is Britain's general union, and health and safety is top of our agenda. We have 20,000 safety reps who offer advice and help on health and safety problems.

To back up our Reps each of our 10 Regions has a specialist Health and Safety Officer. GMB also has a National Health and Safety Department to support the Regional specialists.