

Sent on behalf of UNISON and GMB

To whom it may concern,

We write in relation to failings at the David Ross Education Trust (DRET) which we believe have placed the health and safety of pupils and staff at serious and imminent risk.

DRET is a national multi-academy trust that runs schools across 3 regions of England— see full list of DRET schools <https://www.dret.co.uk/our-academies/> UNISON and GMB have national recognition with the trust.

The failings by the trust which we believe warrant urgent investigation by the HSE are:

Failure of trust to inform staff, and an accredited health and safety rep, of Covid-19 case in a school

It is our understanding that in the week commencing 18 May a member of staff at the trust's Charnwood College school in Leicestershire was diagnosed with Covid-19 after being present in the school. The trust however, failed to inform all staff at the school (we also don't believe parents were informed). Furthermore, UNISON has an accredited health and safety representative at the school and again the trust failed to inform him of the case. It was only when the unions nationally raised the rumours with the trust about a Covid-19 case at another one of its schools, Malcolm Arnold in Northampton, that the trust informed us about the case at Charnwood college. This was days after the trust knew about the case. We have also since been told by the trust of a case at their Briar Hill Primary school in Northampton.

Following this serious failing the trust promised to consult the unions on an updated reporting procedure before their planned wider reopening of schools on 1st June. Despite repeated chasing by the unions, including on the evening of 31st May, the trust failed to consult on an updated reporting protocol and has today increased pupil numbers in its schools regardless. We are therefore seriously concerned for the health and safety of pupils, and of the wider community in which the trust schools are based.

Failure to consult meaningfully in good time with staff and unions on Risk Assessments

Despite numerous requests from the unions, the trust has failed to provide evidence of consultation at workplace level on Risk Assessments (RA) for the 1st June wider opening. In fact, they only provided a template RA to the unions on Wednesday 27th May; which was during half term when their schools were closed. Further this template was amended on Friday 29th May, which raises the question of how staff could have been informed, consulted and trained on the RA prior to the increase in pupil numbers on Monday 1st June.

The trust has several contractors (catering and some cleaning) operating across its schools. Despite repeated requests it has failed to provide any evidence that the contractors have conducted RAs and for avoidance of doubt the contractors have not been in contact with the unions. In fact, we believe the trust board did not have sight of contractor RAs when it made its decision on 29th May to go ahead with wider reopening of its schools.

We are extremely concerned therefore that the trust has opened its schools to an increasing number of pupils and staff during an epidemic without fully engaging staff and unions on the risk in each school and the measures needed to be taken to mitigate these risks as far as possible

We believe the trust compounded these serious breaches by also failing to fully consider the impact of a lack of a fully rolled out test, trace and isolate infrastructure locally on the health and safety of pupils and staff.

Government has been clear that the responsibility for taking a decision on whether it is safe to increase pupil numbers in schools from 1st June will rest ultimately with schools, therefore they had the flexibility to delay locally. The trade unions have done our very best to work constructively with the trust to help them meet their health and safety obligations. However, we are now left with no alternative as a result of the trust's decision to go ahead with an unsafe increase in pupil numbers than to urge the HSE to commence an urgent investigation. It is clear to us that the health and safety of pupils and staff in DRET schools, and indeed the wider community, is at serious risk.