

Southern Regional Schools Committee Meeting – Notes

Date: 17 March 2026

Meeting Type: Southern Regional Schools Committee

Chair: Kim Marshall (Activist SOU)

1. Opening & Attendance

- Meeting opened by **Kim Marshall**, noting Donna Spicer was attending briefly due to time constraints.

2. Update from Donna Spicer (National Schools Committee)

- Acknowledgement and thanks recorded for **Christine Golding**, outgoing delegate.
- National Schools Committee meets **4 times per year**, all in person:
 - 3 meetings in **Euston**.
 - 1 meeting rotating by region (this year: **Belfast — North West & Irish region**).
- Role of National Schools Committee:
 - Reviews **school-related motions** coming through Congress.
 - Provides guidance and actions for Regional Schools Committees.
 - Ensures feedback cycle between national and regional committees.
- **Expectations for delegates:**
 - Must attend 4 meetings/year unless illness or Ofsted prevents attendance.
 - Preferably someone with **EYFS experience**, due to:
 - GMB's focus on organising in EYFS where union density is low.
 - DfE ongoing work on EYFS, where GMB now has a voice.
- Donna leaves after providing context for the election.

3. Election of Delegate to National Schools Committee

Candidates:

- **Emma Fair**
- **Cornelius (Con) O'Brien**

Statements:

- **Emma Fair:**
 - Background: Early Years practitioner; on secondment to GMB.
 - Highlighted challenges in EYFS:
 - Intimate care without clear policies.
 - Pressure to teach phonics to very young children.
 - Administrative burden increasing yearly.
 - Complex needs of incoming children with insufficient support.
 - Declining recruitment due to stress and lack of structure.
 - Wants to campaign for:
 - Better working conditions.
 - Training and proper EY policies.
 - Recognition for Early Years staff.
 - Also committed to wider support staff representation amid changes involving NEU and the forthcoming SSSMB.
- **Con O'Brien:**
 - Withdrew candidacy.
 - Cited Emma's stronger EYFS expertise.
 - Expressed passion for TA issues but felt Emma was best positioned for the role.
 - Offered full support to Emma.

Outcome:

- **Emma Fair elected unopposed** as the Southern Region delegate.

4. Regional Schools Event – 21 March

Presented by: Nick Day

Event Details:

- Location: **Woburn House, London**
- Time: **10:00–16:30** (Registration from 9:30)
- Spaces still available; sign-up contact: **Tom Cowin (GMB)**.

- Travel costs reimbursed; childcare support available on request.
- Participants receive:
 - **GMB Education T-shirt**
 - Resource pack

Agenda Highlights:

- Health & Safety + safeguarding and rise in harm in schools.
- Contract variation issues (session by Alison).
- Running school-level campaigns.
- Update on NEU and national developments.
- Networking opportunities: first regional in-person schools event of this structure.

Notes:

- Recording unlikely due to workshop-based format.
- Presentations (slides) will be shared afterwards.

5. National Schools Event – 18 April

- Deadline for sign-ups had passed, but national lead (Stacey) paused allocations.
- Likely venue: **Leeds** (subject to confirmation).
- Aim:
 - Gather views from a diverse group of school reps nationwide.
 - Focus on **NJC pay**, national organising strategy, and member-led priorities.
- Later confirmation indicates **likely postponement**.

6. Future Guest Speakers – Suggestions

Members suggested inviting:

- Experts on **SEND White Paper reforms**.
- Speakers from **DfE** on policy.
- Campaigning reps from other regions.
- Politicians, including senior Labour figures
- Lay members who've led successful local campaigns.

Nick and Kim noted many suggestions align with current planning.

7. SSSBM (Schools Support Staff Body) – Update

Overview:

- New statutory body replacing **NJC** for school support staff pay & terms.
- Intended to cover **all schools**, including academies.

Key Points:

- Constitution in development; debates ongoing about:
 - Inclusion of **agency workers** (still undecided).
 - Outsourced workers **excluded**.
- Proposed seat allocation under old draft:
 - **Unison 8, GMB 4, Unite 3**.
 - Considered outdated given membership changes.
 - GMB pushing for increased seats; Unite likely to lose one.
- Total body size: **30 members** (15 union + 15 employer reps).
- Academy chains using political leverage, slowing negotiations.
- Significant back-and-forth; progress slower than initially hoped.

Member concerns:

- Scepticism the body will fully deliver promised improvements.
- Fear academisation agenda may undermine its impact.
- Desire for stronger public campaigning and parent engagement.

8. Wider Discussion – Member Concerns

Themes raised strongly by multiple members:

- **Exploitation of support staff**, particularly TAs and HLTAs.
- **Inconsistent safeguarding practices**, sometimes used punitively.
- Lack of **national visibility** for GMB campaigns.
- Need for:
 - Stronger leadership from GMB nationally.
 - Clear **toolkits** and resources comparable to NEU's.

- More officers physically present in schools.
- Greater **parent engagement** to strengthen public support.
- National days of action or visible campaigning.
- Reps urged GMB to address:
 - Low pay and inequality (e.g., London weighting issues).
 - High workload and unreasonable expectations.
 - Lack of training and support for school-based reps.
 - Communication overload from national office.

Nick acknowledged these as valid and welcomed the challenge for better leadership and resources.

9. NJC Pay Update

- Employer meeting set for **24 March**.
- Early indication: more genuine negotiation than in recent years.
- GMB expects to call another meeting soon to discuss pay strategy and potential ballot readiness.

Action for reps: ensure **member contact details** and workplace information are up to date for future ballots.

10. AOB & Close

- Agreement to set next meeting date once NJC timeline clearer.
- Meeting closed with thanks from chair Kim Marshall.