

CORONAVIRUS (COVID19)



NORTHERN IRELAND RE-OPENING SCHOOLS GUIDANCE

NEW SCHOOL DAY

VERSION 2

Published 13 August 2020



Department of
Education

www.education-ni.gov.uk

Ministerial Foreword

The New School Day guidance published by my Department on 19 June 2020 was always envisaged as 'agile' and subject to review and revision to reflect the prevailing public health position and up to date scientific advice.

My strategic objective has always been to achieve maximum face-to-face in class teaching time for all pupils, where safe to do so, at the earliest opportunity. One of my primary concerns is the potential long term educational impact on children and young people as a result of a prolonged disruption to face to face teaching. However, this is not a return to business as usual.

This New School Day guidance is written with a view to providing a framework for the restart of schools, with a return of priority cohorts from 24 August 2020 and a return for all children and young people during the week commencing 31 August 2020. It has been co-designed by my Department, school leaders and key partners. I would like to put on my record my sincere thanks to those who supported the development of this guidance, in particular those who formed a Practitioners' Group, and provided advice and guidance to my officials. Their insight has been invaluable.

I have consistently stated that the re-opening of schools will be led by evidence, this remains the case. This guidance has been informed by advice provided by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor and SAGE based on the scientific and public health advice available at the time of writing.

I acknowledge that there will be staff, pupils and parents who may feel a level of anxiety around the return to school and it is important that we work together to assure them that while the more normal return to school carries an element of risk, schools are taking all steps possible to keep the school a safe an environment for children and young people, staff and parents. However, schools cannot deliver this safe environment alone – we all have a duty of care to wider society.

The successful return to school not only requires school leaders to deploy effective measures to manage risk but the continued support of parents, pupils and wider society to be vigilant and act responsibly within the overarching public health guidelines. We must not become complacent when COVID-19 is still in our communities.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication and commitment in what I know has been a challenging time. I have no doubt that every school will continue to rise to the challenge and continue to deliver for our children and young people, who I know are at the heart of everything you do.



**PETER WEIR MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Executive Summary - The Basics of a “New School Day”

How to Use this Guidance

Section 1 - Social Distancing

- (i) Methods of Social Distancing
- (ii) Practical approach to use of indoor spaces
- (iii) Decreasing Physical Interaction
- (iv) Circulation and Transitions
- (v) Social Time and Dining
- (vi) Space Utilisation

Section 2 - Hygiene / Physical Protection

- (i) Personal Hygiene / Handwashing
- (ii) Cleaning
- (iii) Use of Personal Protective Equipment / Face Coverings

Section 3 - School Transport

Section 4 - School Meals Catering Services

Section 5 - Curriculum Delivery

Section 6 - Workforce

- (i) Workforce Attendance
- (ii) Staff who have symptoms of COVID-19
- (iii) Workforce Planning Issues

Section 7 - Pupil Attendance

Section 8 - What to do if someone develops symptoms of COVID-19 on site

Section 9 - Communications

Section 10 - Supplementary Guidance for Residential Boarding/Hostel Accommodation in Educational Facilities

Background

This guidance has been developed for education settings, to support a safe reopening of schools in line with the Northern Ireland Executive's "[Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision-Making](#)" published on 12 May 2020. This updated guidance was prepared in August 2020 and is based on the scientific evidence as at 8 August 2020. It will be kept continually under review as the science and public health guidance changes.

The aims of this guidance are to:

- provide clarity with regard to practical approaches for a safe reopening of schools; and
- in so doing, promote consistency of approach across Northern Ireland, whilst ensuring appropriate local flexibility for education settings and staff to adapt and adopt approaches that best suit their communities' needs and seek to maximise the safety of staff, children, young people and their families.

The guidance is written with a view to providing a framework for the restart of schools, with a return of priority cohorts from 24 August 2020 (as previously advised) and a return for all children and young people during the week commencing 31 August 2020. Public health advice at the time of school opening will always prevail over this guidance.

The guidance, developed as part of an overall Restart Programme, has been co-designed by the Department of Education and school leaders. A consultation group comprising Managing Authorities, sectoral support bodies and trades unions has also met as part of an ongoing process of engagement that began in March 2020. This guidance is informed by the cumulative body of work undertaken by these groups. The guidance has also been informed by advice provided by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor based on the scientific and public health advice available at the time of writing. It should be read and applied in conjunction with the latest public health guidance available [here](#).

Where this guidance states that Managing Authorities and schools:

- "should" do something, there is a clear expectation, that it should be done; and
- "may" or "may wish" to do something, the relevant sections have been included as examples of relevant practice that can be considered if appropriate. Local variations are likely.

Nothing in this guidance affects the legal obligations of education settings with regard to health and safety and public health. Education settings must continue to adhere to all such duties when implementing this guidance. Under the Coronavirus Act 2020, they must have regard to the advice relating to coronavirus from the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland. In the event of any conflict between any applicable legislation (including health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation must prevail.

Further Guidance

While the principles will be similar across all settings, it is recognised that the pre-school sector may require additional guidance. The guidance published in June 2020 is also being updated and will be available on the Department's website [here](#).

Since June 2020, the position in Northern Ireland has changed and it is the view of this Department and the Department of Health that the resumption of more normal patterns of operation and attendance of schools by early September is appropriate because of:-

- the low levels of COVID-19 community transmission;
- the on-going impact on the wellbeing of our children and young people including our most vulnerable learners of not being in school;
- the negative impact of continued disruption on educational standards, attainment and delivery of qualifications;
- the potential inequity of provision across pupils in Northern Ireland and in comparison to counterparts in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland;
- the practical benefits that re-opening schools will have on wider society, including allowing parents to return to work; and
- the experience and approach in other jurisdictions.

Summary of Key Scientific and Public Health Advice

To promote transparency with regard to the scientific, public health and wider policy judgements that have informed the approach set out in this guidance, the guidance links to published scientific and public health advice.

A recent paper prepared by the Children's Task and Finish Group (TFC) and the Government Office for Science (GOS), published [by SAGE](#) on the 24 July 2020, sets out its assessment of some of the risks of re-opening schools in England in September.

The key messages include:-

- There is relatively low immediate risk to children's health from SARS-CoV-2 (high degree of confidence), with evidence indicating that

children/adolescents have lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection (low confidence) and clinical disease (high confidence) than adults.

- There is some (but limited) evidence that children play a lesser role in transmission than adults.
- In countries where schools have been open for some time, data suggests, in most cases, that school opening has made little difference to community transmission.

The SAGE¹ paper highlights the need to balance the public health risks relating to the re-opening of schools with the risks associated with continuing to keep schools closed (mental health and well-being risks and impact on attainment).

The fight against COVID-19 has had, and will continue for some time to have, profound implications for society as a whole. However, recently there have been fairly low levels of COVID-19 community transmission in Northern Ireland which has allowed the gradual relaxation of restrictions in many areas and guidance for opening of schools has been updated to reflect this position.

Re-opening of Education Settings

The Department of Education's (DE) Education Restart Programme identifies five interrelated key priorities as the means by which the safe return to school will be delivered. Work-stream 5, "New School Day," focuses on the development of working arrangements and guidance essential to re-opening of schools for day one operations.

However, the "journey back to normality" for the education system will not be one where schools operate on a "business as usual" basis from day one - it will require guidance for, and co-designed by, school practitioners and education stakeholders.

This paper, the "New School Day" guidance, provides useful information on key risk mitigation strategies such as regular cleaning, adjusting physical layouts in classrooms, use of segmentation (or bubbles) and ensuring maximum distancing between older pupils (within the age group and with others) and with adults (with other adults and with pupils).

It sets out the key considerations for this journey, which will at all times proceed in parallel to Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance on management of the COVID-19 response and the Northern Ireland Executive's "[Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision-Making](#)" published on 12 May 2020.

It is neither practical, nor indeed would it be helpful, to be prescriptive about the arrangements that every school must follow – flexibility will be key to facilitate planning by schools that best meet local circumstances whilst recognising staff contractual

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies>

arrangements with TNC 2020/1 and relevant JNC circulars. Nonetheless, practical, evidence-based guidance on matters relating to the new school day will provide the structure within which safe planning may proceed.

Starting the Process of Return

Minister of Education, Peter Weir MLA, has stated that Primary 7 (for transition purposes) and Years 12 and 14 in post-primary (to facilitate preparation for key exams) should return to school on 24 August 2020. It is appropriate for vulnerable children² and young people to also be considered as a priority cohort. These priority groups should return on a full time basis in advance of the full return to school for all children and young people during week commencing 31 August 2020.

COVID-19 Risk

The risk of the disease being transmitted is higher the closer the contact, the greater the exposure to respiratory droplets (for example from coughing), or the longer the duration of the contact. A High Risk Contact is a person having had face-to-face contact with a COVID-19 Case within 2 metres for more than 15 minutes, or sharing a small enclosed space (such as a car) for a shorter period. Passing in corridors and short periods of contact does not therefore present a significant risk to staff or pupils so long as face-to-face conversation is avoided. Extra consideration should be given to interactions between adult staff which should be minimised in areas such as staff common rooms.

Social Distancing in Education Settings

The Executive, on 6 August 2020, agreed that the stringent application of **social distancing requirements between pupils will be relaxed from 17 August**. Public Health guidance with respect to social distancing of 2 metres (2m) will remain in place between adults and as far as possible between adults and pupils. Schools should endeavour strenuously to implement as much social distancing as is practical where physical capacity and curriculum delivery permit.

Protective bubbles will be used as a key mitigating action where possible. The protective bubble arrangements will be used to segment pupils into a consistent group or groups as far as is practicable. The approach will vary depending on age group. In pre-school, primary Education Other Than At Schools (EOTAS) centres and special schools, it is envisaged that in most cases a class will act as a single consistent bubble with minimal prolonged interaction with other classes.

² The term “vulnerable” encompasses those children who are in need of protection, or in need, as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Following engagement with public health colleagues, educational practitioners, and a consultation group comprising trades unions, Managing Authorities and sectoral bodies, it is recommended that:-

- Anyone displaying any COVID-19 symptoms must not attend school, with schools vigorously implementing this guidance.
- Primary school children return to full time education with a 'protective bubble' strategy implemented as a key mitigating action. A class will act as a single consistent group or bubble, with minimal prolonged interaction with other classes within the school. Social distancing within classes should be maximised based on physical capacity.
- At Post-Primary level, the nature of curricular delivery makes it more difficult to implement a single consistent class group or bubble. We expect this to be adhered to as much as possible in Years 8 – 10. However, in some schools it is recognised that limited mixing into different class groups to adhere to legal requirements for practical subjects will be necessary.
- For Years 11-14 at Post-Primary schools it is recognised that a single consistent class group will not be possible, as pupils will be in mixed classes (and different classrooms, e.g. for practical classes) based on their choice of examination courses, but schools will be encouraged to keep movement and interactions within these year groups to a minimum. It is recognised some pupils will be accessing provision through Area Learning Communities and the Department would expect a child-centred approach to decision making to ensure pupils are not, if at all possible, disadvantaged. Schools should implement as much social distancing as is possible for these year groups.
- Schools will be asked to avoid prolonged interactions between classes or different year groups (for example in canteens or assembly halls). Schools must also ensure that pupils do not congregate in areas such as toilets, common rooms or study rooms for long periods.
- The use of consistent groups or bubbles is not an "all-or-nothing" approach and will bring public health benefits even if logistics mean that that this measure can be implemented only partially (for example, with groups maintained for the majority of the day but some limited mixing into wider groups permitted for practical subjects, Area Learning Communities or transport).
- Schools should continue to contingency plan for the delivery of remote learning in the event of local or wider school closures, or that a class or group of pupils need to self-isolate. Schools should be mindful of the impacts on teacher workloads, and take into account the guidance on teacher time budgets in [TNC 2020/01](#).

- Where a child is medically advised not to attend school from the commencement of the 2020/21 term, parents should consult with their school Principal and, as required, the Education Authority regarding education provision for these pupils.

Executive Summary: The Basics of a “New School Day”

Schools have expressed concerns about the sheer number and complexity of considerations relevant to the delivery of safe schooling. This section of this guidance paper is intended as a high-level summary of how a new school day might be structured and schools are invited to read this paper in its entirety, together with all prevailing guidance on the virus and its management. It is not intended to deliver all of the answers schools are seeking, nor is it offered as a “tick-box check-list.”

New School Day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start of term is 24 August 2020 for Primary 7, Year 12 and Year 14 and all vulnerable children, with all other children and young people to return to school week commencing 31 August 2020.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils must not attend school if they display any symptoms of the virus.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staggered arrival and pick up times may be introduced to limit interactions and avoid gatherings at the school gates.
<p>Social Distancing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strict social distancing requirements for all pupils will be relaxed but remain in place between adults at 2m and, as far as is practicable between pupils and adults. - As far as is practicable, social distancing at 2m should be maintained for both children and adults who are not from the same household. - Protective bubbles will be used as a key mitigating action for those in Primary schools and years 8-10 in Post-primary schools. - For pupils in Years 11 -14 social distancing should be adhered to as far as is possible with limited interactions between different year groups. - Where non-teaching staff support SEN or vulnerable pupils, consistently remaining with an individual pupil or a class, these adults should be viewed as part of the protective bubble and social distancing may be relaxed. - For younger pupils, whilst not a requirement, social distancing should be encouraged and facilitated where practicable as part of other mitigating measures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Protective ‘Bubbles’ and increased hygiene measures will be introduced throughout the school as a means to mitigate the risk of virus transmission.

- Where pupils cannot be in school for all or part of the time, a ‘blended learning’ approach will be implemented. Whilst a blended approach is a useful and vital contingency arrangement, it is not optimal as it means reduced face to face teaching time.

Journey to School and Arrival Considerations

The new school day starts with the journey to school. The Executive has agreed that there is no longer a requirement for stringent social distancing on dedicated home to school transport vehicles. Executive guidance outlines that from 10 July it is mandatory that a face covering is worn by all persons aged 13 years and over if they are travelling on public transport unless they are exempt for medical reasons.

It is strongly recommended that all pupils wear a face covering on all dedicated school transport including buses and taxis where it is appropriate for them to do so. Parents should ensure their child has access to and understands the importance of wearing a face covering where it is appropriate for them to do so and disposing of it appropriately. Section 3 on school transport provides further details.

As pupils arrive at schools, arrangements should provide for avoidance of congestion and large gatherings of children and parents near the school gates or entrance areas to the building.

Welcoming the children and young people on arrival, quickly leading them to demarcated areas either externally or within the school and limiting the numbers of children mixing together will all be important in the context of PHA social distancing guidance.

Use of staggered arrival times and marked drop-off areas and asking parents to remain on or outside the school grounds, where possible, can also help with limiting interactions. Schools should also consider discouraging or prohibiting children from bringing anything from home and, at the end of each school day, limiting/preventing shared resources from being taken home. The Education Authority (EA) will develop further operational guidance and provide this to schools, where necessary.

Protocols adopted by schools to manage arrival arrangements at schools are likely to prove equally applicable and effective at the end of the school day when children are collected/picked up by parents, guardians or carers.

At both arrival and collection times, parents should be actively discouraged from entering the school buildings as a means of preventing spread of the virus. Where parents must enter school buildings, appropriate hygiene measures should be in place.

Hygiene

Regular and thorough attention to hygiene is essential to deter spread of the virus.

Children should wash their hands thoroughly on arrival at the education setting – this must be a repeatable discipline throughout the school day.

Hands should be washed thoroughly and regularly in the school at existing facilities using soap and water. Tepid / lukewarm water is suitable for this purpose. Hand sanitising material should also be made available at all entrance / exit points. It should be noted that hand sanitising is only a support mechanism for hand hygiene and does not negate the need to wash hands. Disposable paper towels are most appropriate for hand drying and use of shared / ordinary towels should be resisted. Younger children should be supervised/assisted when washing hands.

Practice of good respiratory hygiene should follow the “catch it, bin it, kill it” approach. The importance of good respiratory hygiene should be discussed with and explained to children. Staff and children should be supported with changes we all have to implement:

- Children should be discouraged from touching their eyes, face, nose and mouth, putting hands/fingers into their mouths – often unconscious actions that we all make regularly;
- They should be shown how to cough into their elbow if they don't have a tissue / paper towel;
- If they have a paper towel they should be shown how to cough into it and then dispose safely of it into the nearest bin.

Communications with parents may help to emphasise these issues to build up a level of understanding and routine application by children. Further details on hygiene can be found at Section 2.

Cleaning

A normal summer clean will have been implemented in advance of the new school term via the normal process, whether through the EA cleaning service or where cleaning staff are directly employed by the school.

Schools should remove unnecessary items from classrooms and other areas (where space exists for storage) – these should include items/toys/learning materials that are hard to clean. Consideration should be given for those subjects where equipment is required (e.g. keyboards / Bunsen burners / tools etc.).

Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly, with cleaning products appropriate for the purpose and surface. A system to confirm regular cleaning (frequency and standard) should be implemented.

Social Distancing – Protective Bubbles in school settings

While the Department of Health requirement for social distancing at 2m has not changed, the Executive has agreed that, due to the introduction of other mitigating measures, strict social distancing between all pupils will be relaxed but will remain in place between adults and, as far as is practicable between adults and pupils. Where this is not possible, the aim should be to maintain at least 1m social distancing for as much of the time as achievable. For pupils in Years 11 -14, social distancing should be adhered to as far as is possible with limited interactions between different year groups. For younger pupils whilst not a requirement, social distancing should be encouraged and facilitated where practicable as part of other mitigating measures

Relaxed social distancing means adhering as closely as possible to the social distancing rules in place across society at that point in time within the constraints of the accommodation / transport available and the numbers in the classroom / bus.

Protective bubbles will be used as a key mitigating action where possible. This involves organising children into small groups ('protective bubbles') with consistent membership i.e. same pupils in the bubble each day. Given the changing public health position it is now appropriate that such 'bubbles' are based on whole classes, facilitating the safe return of pupils to school on a full time basis.

Keeping children and young people in 'protective bubbles' is a means of decreasing interactions between groups until further easing of measures is possible based on the public health situation. Where 'protective bubble' measures are used, social distancing between the adult staff working with such groups should be maintained as much as possible.

The use of 'protective bubbles' should cover all aspects of the school day including, where practicable, use of designated areas and staggered times for meals and play in primary schools and for those years within post-primary schools (Years 8-10) in which it is practicable. For Years 11-14 there will be no requirement for protective bubbles, which are viewed as impractical in these year groups, given that pupils will be in mixed classes based on subject choice. However, schools will be expected to maintain social distancing as far as is possible and encouraged to keep movement and interactions within these year groups to a minimum. Arrangements applied in other countries have also extended to use of designated fixed places (desks) for individual children and young people. Further information on Social Distancing is available at Section 1.

Curriculum Delivery

Schools will be considering how they tailor delivery of the curriculum in order to reduce the risk of virus transmission within school and implement the range of mitigation measures set out in this guidance.

Section 5 provides a high level overview of a number of key issues and the likely approaches to curriculum delivery at different phases within education. More detailed guidance on Curriculum Planning more widely can be found in the Department's Circular [Curriculum Planning 2020/21 \(2020/06\)](#).

School Meals

When schools re-open for priority year groups on 24 August 2020 school meal services will not be provided. Parents should be advised to provide a packed lunch.

School meals will be available in schools from 1 September 2020. It is expected that where possible a hot meal, suitable as the main meal of the day, will be available for free school meals pupils and other pupils who wish to avail.

It is expected that, where possible, meals will be served and consumed in the dining hall. Schools may wish to consider staggered break and lunch times, etc. Further details on the School Meals Catering Services is available at Section 4.

Moving Around the School

Schools should consider flexible timetabling as a means of reducing movement of pupils and staff around the school environment.

It is accepted that not all schools are the same in design, size or layout and this may pose practical difficulties in application of social distancing guidance. It is for this reason that local application of additional risk mitigation measures (such as the 'protective bubble' model) should be applied.

Use of markings and visual cues (bearing in mind appropriate cues for children with impairments) for children and young people within corridors to direct the flow of class groups, application of a "one-way" system of travel and use of tape/markings/signage to demarcate social distancing zones are also encouraged as a means of further educating children on the importance of good practices. Likewise, schools are encouraged to lay out classrooms with all pupils facing forward as this has been shown to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

Test, Trace and Protect

Accurate recording of attendance using SIMS and records of group movements in classes and lunch groups may prove helpful to schools to manage staffing concerns in circumstances where a member of staff or a child should develop symptoms of the virus while in the school setting. The protective bubble strategy aids this. The Department of Health's [Test, Trace and Protect](#) strategy requires early identification and isolation of such cases, rapid testing, tracing of close contacts and early, effective and supported isolation to break transmission chains. Further information on the Track, Trace and Protect Strategy is available in Section 8.

Pupil Behaviour

The school's pupil behaviour policy may need to be reviewed to ensure that it covers COVID-19 related incidents, and as a means to prevent flagrant abuse of the COVID-19 risks, should make provision for the school to be able to sanction, up to and including exclusion, pupils who wilfully refuse to adhere to arrangements of social distancing and deliberately cough or spit at pupils or staff, putting them at risk.

How to Use this Guidance

This guidance provides an overarching framework for the re-opening of schools and education settings in Northern Ireland, with the aim of ensuring broad consistency and equity across local areas. It should be read in conjunction with the Department's [Guidance to Support Safe Working in Educational Settings](#) published on 23 June and wider COVID 19 related guidance issued by the Public Health Agency.

Settings should develop School Re-Opening Plans that incorporate the principles and expectations set out in this guidance and that meet the needs of local communities. Thereafter, risk assessments should be developed and implemented on a setting-by-setting basis.

In developing these plans, there should be close engagement and partnership working wherever appropriate between:-

- Managing Authorities, Boards of Governors (BoGs) (including in their role as an employer);
- school leadership teams, teaching and non-teaching staff, support staff and trades unions;
- parents and carers; and
- children and young people.

In accordance with relevant legislation and guidance, trades unions have been consulted on and involved in the development of risk assessment templates for use across schools. These have been provided by EA and are available [here](#).

Local plans should be clearly communicated to the school community. This is vitally important to ensure that parents and children understand what the new school day will mean for them.

This guidance will be kept under review to keep abreast of updates from advice provided by the PHA. **For further advice and support on any aspect of this guidance principals should contact their C-19 Link Officer, the EA dedicated Covid-19 help-line, or the FAQ section of the EA website. The C-19 Link Officer will act as the lead contact to ensure that queries are dealt with efficiently.**

Key Principles

The following key principles and requirements are generally relevant to the practical implementation issues covered by this supporting guidance and should be considered by Managing Authorities and schools.

Scientific and Medical Advice

Any return to school in late August should take full account of scientific and medical advice as provided by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies ([SAGE](#)) in the UK and from other jurisdictions where available and directly from our Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor that it is safe to proceed.

Public Health Measures

There should be comprehensive implementation of complementary public health measures whilst, wherever possible, ensuring educational continuity. These include:-

- social distancing, where measures fall into two broad categories:-
 - increasing separation; and
 - decreasing interaction;

Key to implementation is that the actions of pupils and staff within the school and the appropriate use of available facilities can allow the required social distancing to be achieved by:-

- infection prevention and control (hygiene measures) such as enhanced cleaning, respiratory hygiene, handwashing;
- following stay-at-home guidance for people who have symptoms and/or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and their household members (household isolation);
- adherence to and participation in the Department of Health's [Test, Trace and Protect](#) strategy;
- use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in those limited circumstances where appropriate; and
- ensuring educational settings know what to do if someone becomes unwell onsite or one or more coronavirus cases occur.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments of individual settings should be undertaken to ensure that health and safety legislation and guidance is fully adhered to. These should be kept simple and accessible. To support this, the EA have developed good practice risk assessments which have been shared across education settings via existing

communication channels and attached to this guidance. Legal health and safety requirements must be adhered to as always.

Blended Learning

When schools return there may still be a need for a blend of face-to-face and independent/distance learning, directed by the pupils' teacher(s), for some particularly clinically vulnerable children. Whilst a blended approach is a useful and vital contingency arrangement, it is not optimal as it means a reduced face-to-face teaching time. There should be a particular focus on addressing digital exclusion as part of these arrangements.

Further guidance on supporting remote learning has been provided by the Department [here](#).

Clear Communication

Communication and dialogue with all trades unions, staff, Boards of Governors (BoGs), parents/carers and pupils on the reopening of schools should be carefully considered when implementing this guidance, to ensure confidence in the revised arrangements across all school users. The channels of communication (existing or otherwise) through which trades unions, staff, BoGs, pupils and parents/carers can raise concerns about the implementation of safety measures in individual settings should be made clear.

It will be vital to have clear public health messaging and to specifically highlight safety and hygiene requirements to parents and pupils returning to school. This is to ensure that the virus is kept out of schools and the risk of transmission minimised.

Section 1 - Social Distancing

Social Distancing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strict social distancing requirements between all pupils will be relaxed but will remain in place between adults (at 2m) and, as far as is practicable between adults and pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased Interaction – where social distancing cannot be applied, children should be kept in a small group ('Protective Bubble') to decrease interaction up to and including year 10.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For pupils in Years 11-14 social distancing should be adhered to as far as is possible whilst maintaining effective curriculum delivery. There should be limited interactions between different Year groups. For younger pupils whilst not a requirement, social distancing should be encouraged and facilitated where practicable as part of other mitigating measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While travel in corridors is viewed as low risk, schools should encourage a 'one way' system to maintain distancing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents and carers should be discouraged from congregating at school gates, perhaps with staggered start and end times.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When providing one-to-one care for SEN or vulnerable pupils, adult to adult social distancing should be maintained at all times. However, where staff consistently remain with a pupil or a class they should likewise be viewed as part of the protective bubble and social distancing between those adults and children can be relaxed.

(i) Methods of Social Distancing

Social distancing measures fall into two broad categories:-

- increasing separation; and
- decreasing interaction.

Social distancing applies to staff, older pupils, parents (and any others who may attend the school) and any external contractors or delivery people. It is essential that all these groups are taken into consideration. Special considerations apply to those who are clinically vulnerable.

Social distancing should be considered in all relevant areas of schools, including classrooms, indoor and outdoor spaces and those not used for learning and teaching, e.g. pupils' cloakrooms, entrance halls, staff rooms, resource areas, kitchens and caretaker areas. It is essential that social distancing is appropriately adhered to in areas where staff may congregate such as staff rooms, kitchens and bathrooms/toilets.

The implementation of social distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning. For instance, how social distancing is implemented for very young children, for children with complex needs or disabilities and for pupils in different Key Stages may vary.

For children and young people with the most complex additional support needs, schools should involve lead professionals and parents to decide how best to continue supporting them. For children and young people with the most complex additional support needs, schools should involve lead professionals and parents in their risk assessment process and agree how best to continue supporting them

Increasing Separation

The default position for schools is that adults should be supported to stay 2m apart. For children and young people the requirements for social distancing can be relaxed but a protective bubble strategy should be applied for Years 1-10. Nevertheless, as far as is practicable social distancing should be maintained between adults and children. For pupils in Years 11-14 social distancing arrangements between pupils should be adhered to as far as is possible and as permitted by delivery of the curriculum with limited interactions between different Year groups. For younger pupils whilst not a requirement, social distancing should be encouraged and facilitated where practicable as part of other mitigating measures (see section on Curriculum).

The requirement for social distancing reflects precautionary judgements based on public health advice at the time of writing. As the situation evolves, such requirements may be further amended. Education settings should implement measures with a view to being able to ease them as soon as it is safe to do so, to ensure the maximum benefit from in-setting learning is gained as early as possible.

While they should be avoided wherever possible, brief interactions within social distancing guidance, such as limited numbers of people passing each other in corridors or, where one way systems are not possible, walking through learning spaces to go to the toilet (for example), are considered low risk and are permissible. Use of floor markings in relevant spaces may help minimise the extent of such encroachments.

Self-Contained Cohorts (Protective Bubbles)

In circumstances in which the guidance on social distancing cannot reasonably be applied, an additional risk mitigation approach should be adopted. This involves organising children and young people into groups ('protective bubbles') with consistent membership, which are appropriate to the size of the setting. With the changing public health position this can be extended to treating a full class as a 'bubble'. We expect that this approach may be useful in all year groups up to and including Year 10.

When adopting this approach, every effort should be made to decrease interactions between groups and, if workable, ensure social distancing is considered within such groups and adhered to between such groups at all times. Once put in place, membership of groups should not change (until further easing of measures is possible based upon the public health situation). The cleaning, hygiene and health and safety measures set out in Section 2 of this guidance should, as in all cases, be followed carefully. Social distancing of 2m between the adult staff working with such groups and between staff and children should be maintained as much as possible.

Every effort should be made to support young people to continue to observe social distancing. Older children should be organised into small, consistent groups and assigned clearly defined zones or spaces within which they should endeavour to observe social distancing as far as practicable (e.g. a marked-off area of an outdoor space). This approach has the benefit of ensuring that social distancing continues to be followed by older pupils whenever practicable, but that when circumstances are such that accidental encroachments are likely to take place, such interactions are limited to a small number of consistent individuals.

Social Distancing When Delivering 1:1 Care

Provision of one to one care and support is integral to the delivery of quality education and support to some of our most vulnerable pupils. Whilst adult to adult social distancing should be maintained at all times, where staff consistently remain with a pupil or a class they should likewise be viewed as part of the protective bubble and social distancing between those adults and children may be relaxed. Any such staff who wish to avail of face coverings while they carry out this role are free to do so and for any contact that has been risk assessed as requiring PPE, this will be provided.

Social Distancing in Boarding Schools

Boarding schools and residential facilities will have their own particular challenges. Supplementary guidance available is to be considered in relation to these facilities. Section 10 provides supplementary guidance for Boarding Schools.

Social Distancing For Wraparound Care and Extended Schools

The “journey back to normality” for schools does not mean that they operate on a business as usual basis from day one; however, wraparound support such as school breakfast clubs and after school child care arrangements as well as other forms of pastoral care can be delivered and have the potential to greatly assist children and young people (particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds) with their return to school.

Wraparound Care and Extended Schools provision should operate using social distancing guidance as far as is possible and comply with any additional guidance provided by the Department of Health.

Extended Schools (ES) should consider how such supported provision might be designed or adapted to target those children and young people most in need or at risk of underachievement, including how best to address any direct impacts arising from COVID-19. In preparing ES Action Plans for the year ahead, schools should adopt a flexible approach as far as possible while ensuring they are adhering to the guidance. The EA will provide updates on the [Extended Schools website](#).

Social Distancing for Contractors³ and Deliveries

Where any work is being carried out within the school setting, contractors should adhere to the principles of social distancing. If this is not possible, then consideration should be given to possible mitigation measures to minimise the closeness and duration of time that is spent within 2m. A risk assessment should be undertaken.

Where contractors are required to undertake facilities management/repair tasks in an establishment, they must undertake these works in accordance with the latest regulations. If spaces are to be used in different ways from those originally designed/intended and with less/more overall footfall, consideration should be given to the ongoing management of these spaces.

Procedures should be put in place for deliveries to minimise person-to-person contact. Deliveries should be timed to avoid drop off/pick up times, with methods devised to reduce the frequency of deliveries, e.g. ordering larger quantities less often. Settings should consider providing appropriate hand hygiene facilities at drop off points, with clear signage on access rules. Given that these will involve face-to-face conversation, face coverings should be worn regardless of duration unless 2m can be maintained

³ Including but not exclusive to works contractors, school invigilators, access arrangements providers, visiting examiners / moderators.

(ii) Practical Approaches to Social Distancing – Use of Indoor Spaces

Education settings should consider the following practical approaches to ensuring the effective implementation of social distancing strategies.

It is important to note that these are intended as high-level descriptions of potential practical approaches. They are not intended as a checklist of approaches and should not be treated as such. The complexities of implementing these approaches in different schools and localities is not underestimated. The impacts of different approaches on staffing requirements, the challenges inherent in reducing interactions for certain age groups (e.g. very young children) and other key issues all require careful consideration to ensure successful implementation:-

- The Executive has agreed that strict social distancing requirements between all pupils will be relaxed but should remain in place between adults and, as far as is practicable, between adults and pupils;
- for younger children, consideration may be given to how to create zones within facilities to maintain small groups of pupils and reduce interactions between them. In these circumstances, consideration should be given to the allocation of resources to the same group or class, rather than sharing across groups or classes;
- careful consideration should be given to the removal of unnecessary items in the classroom to maximise capacity and decrease the number of items requiring cleaning as well as supporting social distancing. Utilisation of existing waste management arrangements should be considered to dispose of any surplus items, unwanted material or defunct equipment to promote space availability and hygiene. The storage of these items should be considered at a local/individual setting level, with support from Managing Authorities where necessary. Schools will need to be pragmatic around any equipment or material needing removed. In what is hoped to be a limited requirement, any material or equipment removed, existing storage spaces must be used and should NOT be put in areas containing electrical equipment, combustible materials, or impair any corridors, exits doors or fire escape routes. It is unlikely that any 'new' storage facilities will be made available due to lead-in time, physical space restrictions and statutory approvals required;
- to provide capacity to accommodate social distancing approaches for adults and older pupils, a flexible approach to the use of all existing spaces within the usual setting may be taken. Appropriate consideration should be given to staffing and supervision if this approach is adopted. For example, breakout space, dining space, libraries and indoor sports spaces may be utilised as learning and teaching areas to either accommodate part classes working remotely from teachers or to relocate whole class groups to larger spaces;

- very large spaces may be repurposed to accommodate multiple groups, for example, by repurposing a dining hall or assembly hall to provide general classroom accommodation. Where this is absolutely necessary, schools should consult with school caterers to ensure the safe provision of school meals in these circumstances. Temporary screens may be used to divide the space to provide appropriate separation between groups. If this approach is adopted, thought should be given to alternative approaches to the safe provision of lunches, physical education (PE) or other activities usually undertaken in such spaces. This may, for example, require increased use of outdoor amenities;
- the health and well-being of pupils and staff, and the provision of positive learning and teaching environments, is paramount when repurposing any space to provide additional capacity;
- appropriate⁴ floor markers should be considered to ensure pupils queue apart from each other. Staggered lunch breaks should also be considered;
- all staff rooms, bases and offices should be reconfigured to ensure the social distancing rule of 2m, or whatever government guidance prevails around social distancing, is maintained; and
- ensure that any social distancing measures still allow for hygiene measures to be implemented.

Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas are provided as illustrative documents⁵. These are for demonstration purposes only. School design is not the same across all school stock, with some schools having more individual classrooms and others more breakout/social space.

Ventilation

Where applicable, ventilation systems should be checked or adjusted to ensure they do not automatically reduce/increase ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels.

The opening of doors and windows should be encouraged to increase natural ventilation and also to reduce contact with door handles. However, propping open of doors into corridors, external doors, security access systems and any other fire safety doors is prohibited. It should be sufficient for windows to be open dependent on climates and for existing mechanical ventilation where desired to achieve thermal comfort.

⁴ Including for visually impaired

⁵ [Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas \(1\)](#)
[Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas \(2\)](#)

A ventilated space should be available for pupils (with appropriate supervision) / staff who become symptomatic to wait in until they can be collected or safely get home.

Education settings may wish to draw on the broad principles illustrated in these examples to help inform bespoke local solutions. There should be no restriction on how spaces are configured to best support the educational needs of learners whilst adhering to social distancing requirements. Education settings will be best placed to consider the right approach for their own individual circumstances.

(iii) Decreasing Physical Interaction

In addition to spatial solutions to maintain social distancing between individuals and/or small groups, the spread of the virus can be minimised through reducing the number and frequency of physical interactions between individuals (staff and pupils). This is particularly relevant in Post-Primary schools, as Primary pupils will tend to spend most of their time with one group of peers and one/two adults.

All education settings should consider appropriate approaches to minimising physical interactions between individuals/small groups in schools, including at social and dining times. Pupils should be encouraged to remain onsite for lunch wherever possible, to minimise unnecessary interactions with others off the school premises.

(iv) Circulation / Transitions

Some approaches to timetabling, circulation of school populations and transitions between different parts of the school day that Managing Authorities and schools can consider include:-

- **Limiting Teacher and Pupil Movement** – to minimise the need for large numbers of pupil transits, it may be beneficial to keep groups of pupils as much as possible in one location and have teachers move to them (it is recognised pupils will need access to specialist equipment for the effective delivery of practical subjects). This would require careful consideration, particularly with classes in the senior school, to align with subject choices and the stage of development for each individual. Reducing the amount of pupil circulation minimises contact with frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, which can help reduce virus spread. Consideration may need to be given to supervision arrangements as teachers move between classes. If teacher movements are not considered feasible, particularly with senior classes, careful consideration should be given to timetable arrangements (see below) to reduce the number of movements by pupils in a day;

- **One-way Systems** – many schools currently manage their pupil circulation by adopting one-way systems in corridors and on stairs. This may help avoid bottlenecks and ease travel around the school;
- **External Circulation** – as part of an amended circulation strategy, it may be beneficial to encourage the use of external areas to move between parts of the building. This would reduce the density of use of the internal areas and also provide some movement and fresh air. Appropriate solutions would be specific to each location. Increasing the use of outdoor spaces as learning environments could link with this strategy and the addition of sheltered areas could serve as expanded social zones during breaks. Safety in all weathers and security issues would require consideration in each location;
- **Soft Changeovers** – regardless of the number of transitions in a school day, the density of use of circulation space may be reduced by having soft changeovers. Consideration may be given to a “no bell” strategy, which allows a degree of flexibility on class start/finish times and avoids the intensity of flow which many schools experience. It also provides a calm and managed experience which better prepares staff and pupils for the next session;
- **Signage/Communication** – appropriate signage or verbal communication about the system adopted may need to be implemented if it differs from previous arrangements at the setting. Where available a public address system may support this;
- **Timetabling** – creative timetabling has the potential to reduce physical contact and thereby the transmission of infection. Some approaches that education settings may consider include the following:-
 - prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, some post-primary schools were adopting a “big block” timetable to reduce the number of transitions in the school day. This minimises disruption and also reduces the amount of set up/clean up time in practical subjects;
 - time-tabling may also be considered at a more holistic level to take account of time spent using indoor, outdoor and within digital environments. For example, each pupil could have allocated time learning in each of these environments, reducing the capacity requirements placed on indoor facilities. This would be particularly helpful in primary schools.
- **Drop Off/Pick Up** – the arrangements for parents to drop off and collect children/young people require careful consideration, to ensure that large gatherings of people can be avoided and social distancing maintained. Parents

should not enter school buildings unless required. Some approaches that Managing Authorities and schools may consider include the following:-

- staggered drop off/pick up times, so that not all children arrive onsite at one time;
 - if the school has additional access points, consideration may be given to whether it would be beneficial to open these to reduce congestion;
 - consideration may be given to where children go as they arrive at the setting. This could include going straight to their small group's designated learning space/classroom, which could be indoors or outdoors;
 - if parents or carers are dropping off younger children, they should be discouraged from gathering outside the school and should maintain distancing of 2m, as far as practicable, when dropping off their children. Appropriate markings may be introduced at the school gates/in car parks;
 - for those arriving by car, parents may be encouraged to park further away from the school and then walk with their children ('park and stride') to avoid congestion or alternatively use active travel routes where feasible. Car sharing with children of other households should be avoided;
 - where learning spaces can be accessed directly from outside, this should be encouraged to decrease interactions between individuals in circulation spaces; and
 - particular consideration should be given to the arrangements for parents of children with complex needs or disabilities, who may normally drop their children off within the school building.
- **Evacuation Procedures** – if the layout of the setting is changed, and/or circulation routes or entry/exit points are altered, consideration should be given to evacuation procedures (e.g. in the event of a fire or other incident). Evacuation points should also be considered to ensure appropriate social distancing arrangements are maintained between individuals/groups as far as practically possible. This should be included as part of the risk assessment for the setting. Evacuation arrangements for children with complex needs or disabilities should be reviewed in light of any changes;
 - **Induction/Orientation** – Managing Authorities and schools should consider how they will support staff and children to orientate themselves to the revised

layouts and circulation patterns described above. They may wish to consider the following approaches:-

- a map could be displayed in the educational setting detailing entry/exit points and new circulation patterns, for use by pupils, staff and parents drawing on learning from the retail sector. Clear signage and colour coding on walls and floors could be implemented prior to return to help with way finding, along with taping off of specific areas;
- appropriate visuals will be particularly important for younger children and for some children with additional support needs. These will need to be clear and child friendly to enable them to be understood by as many children as possible. These could include signs in braille (with appropriate arrangements made for hygiene) or signs that display meaningful symbols. Any signage that involves direct interaction from pupils will need to be cleaned regularly and further methods of communication should also be considered;
- some new schools utilise 3D digital models or 360 photography/videos to allow remote familiarisation prior to occupation. This approach may be considered for returning pupils to help them orientate new layouts. This would also be useful for those in transition, e.g. P7 to Year 8 in the event they have missed the opportunity for transition visits prior to schools closing; and
- for children with SEN, schools should work in partnership with parents, lead professionals, children and young people to establish what support and plans need to be put in place to meet their needs for both learning at school and at home. Enhanced transitions may be considered for children such as through visual representations and plans of social distancing in their schools.

(v) Social Time and Dining

- **Social Time and Dining** – education settings may wish to consider the following potential approaches to minimising interaction at social and dining times and dealing with associated logistical issues. Arrangements in each setting may depend on whether the dining hall is used as an additional learning space and/or whether food is being prepared on the premises. Further information is available in the School Meals Catering Services at Section 8
 - limiting the number of staff using staffrooms and bases at any one time. Numbers will naturally be less than usual if staggered lunch/break times are implemented;

- discouraging sharing of cutlery/crockery.

(vi) Space Utilisation

Education settings should seek to maximise the ability of their existing space to accommodate pupils by:

- Rearranging teaching spaces to minimise the risk of transmission and infection by:
 - Spacing seating as widely as possible within a teaching space;
 - Facing children to the front of the classroom as much as possible;
 - Assigning pupils to particular desks; and
 - Giving consideration to maximising space for individual pupils by removing non-essential furniture from teaching spaces.
- Considering flexible use of existing non-teaching space (where it is appropriate to do so).
 - examples may be repurposing resource areas, halls or sports halls.

Where schools wish to maximise the use of existing space or reduce the number of surfaces to be cleaned within the classroom, consideration may be given to removing surplus free-standing furniture. If there is not considered to be sufficient suitable storage space within the premises, consideration may also be given to gaining access to additional spaces on a short term basis. This could include use of conveniently located public, private or third sector estate. If additional facilities are required by schools for the conduct of examinations, these need to be approved by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) Centre Inspection Service. Consideration of the use of outdoor spaces may also be appropriate at certain times in the school year where weather permits. Schools should contact their managing authority for advice and guidance before entering into any such arrangements

It is acknowledged that in many settings it will not be possible to fully implement the social distancing protocols in place at a given time, however, schools should work to rearrange, repurpose or expand their existing space as best possible in order to accommodate pupils in as safe a manner as possible within the constraints of their buildings.

Use of any additional spaces should not be detrimental to the ability to clean or provide social distancing and should have adequate toilet facilities and handwashing/hygiene provision.

Use of Outdoor Spaces

In parallel with the indoor environment, education settings should consider appropriate use of the outdoor environment to enrich the learning experiences of children.

Evidence suggests that outdoor environments can limit transmission, as well as more easily allowing for appropriate social distancing between children and staff.

However, where some level of shelter is required the periodic use of the school building should be considered. With any repurposing of space, particularly in respect of any greater use of outdoor spaces for learning, schools must ensure that pupils with complex needs or disabilities are not disadvantaged.

Use of outdoor equipment with multiple touch points should be discouraged, and if outdoor equipment is being used, schools should follow hand hygiene guidance and ensure that multiple groups do not use it simultaneously, as well as considering appropriate cleaning by staff using it through disinfectant spray and paper towels, between groups of children using it (see hygiene measures). Advice on the managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms is available at [COVID-19: Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms.](#)

Section 2 - Hygiene and Physical Protection

Hygiene and Physical Protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will wash hands as soon as they arrive at school and regularly through the school day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will only be required in a very small number of cases e.g. dealing with intimate needs/ giving medication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPE should not be worn by children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All cleaning will be carried out in accordance with PHA Guidance. Routine general cleaning should take place at least daily.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular cleaning of door handles, desk tops etc. will take place throughout the day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools should remove unnecessary items from classroom e.g. soft toys, lego, learning materials that are hard to clean.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced cleaning may be required following an outbreak of COVID-19

(i) Personal Hygiene

Regular and thorough attention to hygiene is essential to deter the spread of the virus. Schools should encourage all staff, pupils, volunteers, contractors, service users and visitors to maintain personal hygiene throughout the day and that there are adequate handwashing facilities accessible to all children. The safe and practical use of toilets and hand-wash facilities should be considered by each school.

- Children should wash their hands thoroughly on arrival at the education setting and this must be a repeatable discipline throughout the day;
- frequent washing (in tepid / lukewarm water) for 20 seconds and drying thoroughly (hand dryer / not shared towel), particularly when entering/leaving the building and always before/after eating as set out by [PHA](#); note that

sanitiser is not a substitution for hand washing and young pupils will require supervising / assistance with hand washing;

- encouraging pupils/staff to avoid touching their faces including mouth, eyes and nose; and
- using a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze and use bins that are emptied regularly for tissue waste.

Regular reminders and signage should be applied to build awareness and maintain personal hygiene standards throughout the day.

Adequate facilities should be available for hand hygiene, including handwashing facilities that are adequately stocked and alcohol based hand rub at key areas (e.g. entry and exit points).

Where existing facilities do not have hand basins at entry/exit points, settings should provide hand sanitisers to facilitate initial entry to the building and then immediately direct users to the nearest hand basin facilities to enable washing of hands. Help should be given to those pupils who struggle to wash their hands independently.

Bins with bags should be provided in classrooms and in other key locations around the site for the disposal of tissues and any other waste. Consideration should be given to their disposal including double bagging and emptying.

A good supply of disposable tissues should be available to implement the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach in each classroom.

School Uniforms

While Coronavirus can land on fabrics and remain for some time, schools are not a high risk environment and while all children and where possible young people should be encouraged to wear clean uniform or fresh clothes each day, this is not essential and schools should be mindful of their school community and avoid creating additional pressure / expense on parents.

(ii) Cleaning

Schools continue to be safe places of work and study. Measures are in place throughout the year to ensure statutory and technical compliance across all schools in line with statutory requirements and health and safety guidance. Schools will generally have systems in place to ensure the safe operation of schools on re-opening and building supervisors are familiar with the processes every year in reopening for the new terms.

When classes return the school will have had an enhanced summer clean. Consideration should be given to the cleaning strategy to be adopted in the school. This may be an extension of the cleaning regime, with desk surfaces, chairs, doors, light switches, banisters, sinks and toilets being cleaned more regularly. There should be routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched objects and surfaces (e.g. telephones, keyboards, door handles, desks and tables). It should be noted that normal cleaning activity should be sufficient and that hand hygiene is the most effective method of combatting the spread of the virus.

Any cleaning measures will only support reducing the risk of transmission where hand hygiene and hand washing are adhered to. Materials such as disinfecting spray and paper towels are readily available and if so desired by those using equipment, these can be used to easily spray and wipe surfaces.

Normal cleaning products used throughout the year are sufficient in supporting hand hygiene and the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' measures. Whilst there are no cleaning products available that have been tested and proved to definitively eradicate COVID-19 viral strains, the standard range of cleaning materials used in schools such as 'Shield', 'Protect', 'Milton' and on occasion 'chlorine solution tablets' are readily available and support hygiene measures. Bleaching agents (such as sodium hypochlorite or a chlorine dioxide solution) are not recommended in the school setting, however, on occasion these can be deployed to address more specific cleaning requirements such as where bodily fluids on surfaces are present. All cleaning products must be stored and used in relation to the Material Safety Data Sheet in accordance with Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Further guidance on infection prevention and control: best practice advice for nurseries and childcare settings is available at the [Northern Ireland Regional Infection Prevention and Control Manual website](#).

Where possible, work-stations should be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces that are shared. Make sure that each workstation is wiped down and disinfected before the next person uses it.

Wherever possible, resources which are not easily washable or wipe-able should be removed.

Surfaces in dining halls should be wiped down and disinfected in between each sitting. Cleaning of the staff areas should be considered as part of the overall cleaning strategy. Staff should use their own cup/cutlery and ensure these are cleaned straight after use. Any crockery and cutlery in shared staff kitchen areas should be cleaned with warm general purpose detergent and dried thoroughly before being stored for re-use.

Building Supervisors may wish to consider continuous cleaning of toilets and wash facilities. Clear signage regarding the washing of hands after using the toilet should be displayed and appropriate hand drying equipment (hand dryer/paper towels) should be provided.

Clean work vehicles (such as mini-buses, etc.), between different passengers or shifts, as appropriate.

Enhanced and Terminal Cleaning are only recommended during an outbreak of COVID-19. For further detailed information read '[COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings. COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#) - GOV.UK'.

Should a COVID-19 confirmed case occur, the EA cleaning service should be notified. Following notification the normal process is undertaken of isolating the prevalent location within the school where any incidence of COVID-19 is likely to have happened. After three days of isolation an enhanced clean of the isolated location will be conducted. The normal cleaning regime then resumes thereafter.

As well as adapting the physical space and decreasing interactions in the education setting, Managing Authorities and schools should consider key practices in respect of hygiene and facilities management. All cleaning must be carried out in accordance with the PHA [guidance to support safe working in educational settings in Northern Ireland](#). It is essential that a system to confirm regular cleaning (frequency and standard) should be implemented.

(iii) Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) / Face Coverings

The PHA has published [guidance to support safe working in educational settings in Northern Ireland](#). This advises that routine use of PPE within education settings is not required other than for certain tasks deemed to be of higher risk of transmission.

PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases. These are:-

- working with children, young people and pupils whose care routinely already involves the use of PPE, due to their intimate care needs; and
- giving children medication.

PPE in the following situations means:-

- fluid-resistant surgical face masks;
- disposable gloves;
- disposable plastic aprons; and
- eye protection (for example a face visor or goggles).

Where PPE is recommended, this means that:-

- a facemask should be worn if a distance of 2m cannot be maintained from someone with symptoms of COVID-19 (**symptomatic children should not be in school**);
- if contact is necessary, gloves, an apron and a facemask should be worn; and
- if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of fluids entering the eye (e.g. from coughing, spitting or vomiting), eye protection should also be worn.

When PPE is used, it is essential that it is used properly. This includes scrupulous hand hygiene and following guidance on donning (putting on) and doffing (taking off) PPE safely to reduce the risk of contamination (a link to video guidance is available at the end of this document).

Face masks:-

- MUST cover both nose and mouth;
- MUST be changed when they become moist or damaged;
- MUST be worn once and then discarded – hands must be cleaned after disposal;
- MUST NOT be allowed to dangle around the neck; and
- MUST NOT be touched once put on, except when carefully removed before disposal.

Children Should Not Wear PPE

Educational settings should develop a clear procedure, in addition to following the strategic guidance outlined here, for what staff should do if a pupil starts to display symptoms of COVID-19 when at school, including guidance on the appropriate use of PPE adhering to the above PHA guidance.

PHA guidance makes clear that staff should continue to use PPE in line with current health and safety policies and risk assessments. Staff should only wear PPE when it is appropriate to the task they are undertaking. The exception is where, following an individual or organisational risk assessment it is found that a higher level of contamination, such as respiratory secretions, may be present or the risk assessment identifies that there is an identified need for PPE, then it should be readily available and provided in line with guidance. Staff within catering teams may need to use PPE

regularly as they will be serving meals to children and young people across a range of 'protective bubbles'.

The EA is leading on procurement of suitable quantities of PPE for educational settings and further advice will be provided directly by the EA.

Face Coverings

There is a clear distinction between PPE and face coverings. PPE is specialist medical grade equipment that has been and will continue to be used when working with some pupils whose hygiene or care needs involve the possible spread of liquids or aerosol dispersion such as vomiting or spitting. The guidance on the use of PPE is led by the underlying health need of the pupil and is unchanged.

[Public Health guidance](#) recommends that face coverings are used in particular circumstances - short periods in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible. Coronavirus (COVID-19) usually spreads by droplets from coughs, sneezes and speaking. These droplets can also be picked up from surfaces, if you touch a surface and then your face without washing your hands first. The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others while also providing some protection to the wearer. Because face coverings are mainly intended to protect others, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) they're not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing.

Within Education settings:-

- It is mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport. It is also strongly recommended that all pupils, regardless of age, should wear a face covering on all buses, trains or taxis for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.
- Face coverings must be worn in staff rooms and during adult to adult meetings lasting more than 15 minutes and by adults visiting the school site.
- Face coverings are strongly encouraged for activities that entail large numbers of staff or pupils within an enclosed space where social distancing is not possible.
- Given the risk mitigations in place in schools to limit and contain the spread of COVID-19, face coverings are not generally recommended for routine use in schools. Staff and pupils may wish to use them during the routine school day and this is acceptable. Schools should also be aware that some persons (including children) are exempt from wearing face coverings.

- Further information on face coverings can be found [here](#).

Section 3 - School Transport

The following guidance has been developed in line with advice from the Public Health Agency. It will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

The Education Authority is responsible for ensuring the provision of all home to school transport. This is provided on either **dedicated school transport** services or on **public transport services**. Dedicated school transport includes EA yellow buses, Translink buses that are only used by pupils and not used by the general public, privately operated bus services that are only used by pupils and taxis. Public transport services are scheduled bus and train services that are used by both pupils and the general public. This document draws a clear distinction between the guidance for those using dedicated school transport and those using public bus/train services.

Limited transport provision will be available for eligible pupils who require it in those year groups returning to school on 24 August 2020 with a full service resuming from 1 September.

Key Messages

Children showing any symptoms of COVID-19 **should not travel** to school.

The Education Authority is working collaboratively with transport providers such as Translink to maximise capacity across the home to school transport network. **Home to school transport, either on public bus services or on dedicated transport services, should only be used where there is no alternative available.**

All pupils should therefore seek to use alternative methods of travel in particular:

- **Active travel** such as walking and cycling, where it is safe to do so. Using active travel for pupils' journey to school carries the lowest risk of transmission of COVID-19 and will bring a range of health benefits as part of a healthier lifestyle. Department for Infrastructure travel guidance - [Safer travel guidance for public transport users, walkers, cyclists, drivers](#) - provides a range of advice and information on how to safely use active travel methods.
- **Use of "Park and Stride" facilities:** acknowledging that many parents may wish to bring their children to school, many towns now have Park and Stride facilities or other parking facilities whereby parents could park and walk with their children to school providing it is safe to do so, or alternatively drop their child at the park and ride facility and the child will either walk to school on their own or as part of a "walking bus" which schools are encouraged to facilitate.

For those children who have no alternative but to use the home to school transport service then the EA will make transport available as far as possible. Where children travel on dedicated school transport a series of mitigation measures will be put in place. These are outlined later in this section.

It is mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport. It is also strongly recommended that all pupils regardless of age should wear a face covering on all buses, trains or taxis for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.

Good hand hygiene practices must be adhered to at all times and these are detailed on the [PHA website](#).

Schools are encouraged to work with the EA and Translink to determine how they might assist to **minimise pressure on the school and public transport network**. They should explore, for example, what steps could be taken to minimise the number of staff and pupils travelling on public transport services at peak times and maximise the use of existing buses by coordinating start and finish times in an area. This is particularly important for those who have no alternative to using public bus services, especially Metro services. Translink is planning to run additional dedicated school buses on routes where there is a large number of members of the public wishing to use Translink's peak time public bus services. Some pupils will continue to be provided with a pass for use on Translink's public bus services.

Schools may also wish to give consideration to their arrangements for/advice to pupils when disembarking from vehicles arriving on the school site and should make available access to waste disposal and handwashing facilities for EA transport colleagues where required.

Despite all the actions referenced in this guidance, there may be instances when parents/carers and children are delayed in getting to school due to transport issues and schools are encouraged to show understanding in such instances.

Dedicated Home to School Transport

This section applies to all **dedicated home to school transport**. By this, we mean bus and taxi services which exclusively carry children and young people travelling to school and other education institutions, including those with a transport escort. This includes services commissioned or provided by either the Education Authority or by schools or other educational establishments.

Pupils on all buses should always seek to maintain a social distance from others wherever possible, however the **guidance for public transport on social distancing will not apply on dedicated school transport in the new school year**. All other

mitigating measures below will apply. Further information on pupils minimising contact and mixing is shown in mitigating measure (e) later in this section. **Pupils using public bus/train services will continue to follow the social distancing guidelines that apply to all passengers.**

The Department considers that this is an appropriate balance because:

- The overall risk to children and young people from COVID19 is considered to be low.
- Pupils will usually face forward on a vehicle except in a small number of cases such as some pupils with special educational needs.
- Pupils on dedicated school transport do not mix with the general public on those journeys.
- Dedicated home to school transport often carries the same group of children and young people on a regular basis, and those children may also be together in school.
- The predictability, which public transport does not afford, will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in place.

Where capacity on a vehicle allows for additional space to be put between pupils, that should be done, however it is recognised that this will not always be possible. Where it is not possible, other measures to protect pupils, outlined below, will be implemented.

Home to School Transport on Public Transport Services

The Department for Infrastructure's [Safer travel guidance for public transport users, walkers, cyclists, drivers](#) documents state that when travelling, users should keep two metres social distance at all times - where that is not possible, they should try to keep at least one metre, taking suitable precautions such as wearing a face covering. **This advice applies for pupils aged 13 and over using public bus/train services where members of the public may also be on board. The wearing of face coverings for those under 13 on all buses, trains or taxis for the journey to school is strongly encouraged for those who are able to do so.**

Under the current social distancing guidelines, it is unlikely that there will be capacity to provide all eligible pupils with a seat on a public transport service. The Department of Education and the Education Authority are currently exploring all options for minimising the disruption that this may cause, including the provision of more dedicated school bus services. **Parents, children and young people are strongly encouraged to consider alternatives to using public transport, to plan their**

journey to and from school and to use active travel methods such as walking or cycling.

Measures to Protect Pupils on Dedicated and Public Transport Services

There are a range of measures that will be taken by the EA and by transport providers to minimise the risk to pupils. These measures can be applied to both dedicated and non-dedicated home to school transport services. The EA will also ensure that it takes account of the individual needs of pupils with special educational needs and work with the parents and schools in considering the implementation of these measures for these pupils.

a) Use of face coverings where possible

Executive guidance is that from 10 July 2020, it is mandatory for all persons aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport. Children using dedicated school transport, and those who have a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability that means that they cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering are exempt as are all children under the age of 13 on public transport. Further details are contained within the relevant [guidance document](#).

It is mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport. It is also strongly recommended that all pupils regardless of age, should wear a face covering on all buses, trains or taxis for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.

Face coverings should not be worn by those who may not be able to handle them as directed (for example, young children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities) as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission. They should also not be used by some children and young people with special educational needs who may become distressed.

Schools should also consider a process for removing face coverings for pupils and staff when they alight from home to school transport or arrive at school and communicate it to them clearly. This process should enable them to wash their hands immediately on arrival (as is the case for all children and young people), dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them, and then wash their hands again. A further face covering should be used when travelling home on public transport.

b) Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must follow the Public Health Agency guidance '[COVID-19: Information for the Public](#)'. This includes parents ensuring that their child(ren) do(es) not travel to or attend school if they or a member of their household has symptoms.

If a child or young person develops symptoms whilst at school, he/she should be collected by their parents and must not travel on home to school transport including public transport.

Parents should ensure their child knows that if they become aware of COVID-19 symptoms while on board a vehicle, they should either inform the transport driver or escort (if there is one on board their vehicle) and school staff immediately upon arrival at school.

Drivers and escorts will be provided with PPE as necessary to complete their duties. This will be dependent on the pupils being transported and any requirements for close contact. If a driver and/or transport escort have concerns that a child may be showing symptoms, they should make the child's school aware of these concerns as soon as possible. The school should then follow the procedures detailed earlier in this document in responding to a child who may be showing COVID-19 symptoms.

If requested by the PHA's Contact Tracing Service, the EA should seek to identify pupils who may have travelled on the same home to school transport vehicle for tracing purposes. It is recognised however that this may not be possible for pupils using Translink services.

Children, young people, drivers and transport escorts who have been in contact with someone that has developed symptoms whilst at school or on home to school transport do not need to go home to self-isolate unless they develop symptoms themselves (in which case, they should arrange to be tested) or the symptomatic person subsequently tests positive or if they have been requested to do so by PHA's Contact Tracing Service.

c) Good hygiene measures

It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that all children and young people travelling to school clean their hands before they leave their home. Where transport providers have made hand sanitiser available on board a vehicle, all pupils should use it upon entering a vehicle and when arriving at school and again when leaving school, boarding a vehicle and arriving home.

Parents should ensure that their children carry tissues on home to school transport and that their children are aware of the need to follow the PHA's "Catch it, bin it, kills it" messages.

In order to reduce the potential risks associated with pupils sharing food or drinks on board a school transport vehicle, no pupil should eat or drink on board unless it is for a medical reason.

When the EA is considering the safeguards to put in place in order to support children and young people with special needs and the staff working with them, it will take into account that some of these pupils may struggle to maintain as good hygiene practices as their peers.

It is important to maximise the ventilation of fresh air (from outside the vehicle) on dedicated school transport vehicles, particularly through opening windows and ceiling vents. Air recirculation will be avoided where possible

d) Vehicle cleaning

The EA will work with transport operators to agree the arrangements for cleaning vehicles. Operators should maintain high hygiene standards for buses delivering home to school transport. This should include rigorous cleaning standards including frequent cleaning of high frequency touch points should be undertaken or other mitigating options put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19.

e) Minimising contact and mixing

The EA will work with schools and transport operators to consider how mixing might be minimised on **dedicated school transport**. Children should, as far as possible, sit beside their siblings on a bus and/or be grouped together by year group or school. The same children always sitting together would help to minimise the number of contacts each child has. Schools and families/children should work with the EA and Translink to try to facilitate pupils sitting on a vehicle in the same groups wherever possible. However, it is recognised that vehicle capacity and the complexity of some home to school transport arrangements mean there will often be limits to the extent to which grouping can be arranged. It is therefore acknowledged that there may be mixing of wider groups on home to school transport.

On many **dedicated school transport** services, pupils from more than one school will be on board. Where it is not possible to have only pupils from one school on a dedicated school vehicle, or to socially distance or group these pupils, the mitigation measures put in place should minimise risks to pupils.

Schools should consider how they can put in place appropriate queuing or other arrangements needed for picking up and dropping off children at school.

Education Authority Operational Guidance

The Education Authority will provide more detailed operational guidance to staff, parents/carers, pupils, and operators that is consistent with the guidance from other government departments and bodies such as DfI and the Public Health Agency.

Guidance will address areas such as:

- What is expected from parents
- What is expected from pupils
- What they can expect from the EA

The Education Authority will ensure there is clear communication of guidance to schools, parent/carers and pupils; and will also work collaboratively with Translink and private operators to ensure information is consistently and effectively communicated.

The EA will also provide information to Drivers and Escorts about their return to work ahead of the new school year.

Section 4 – School Meals Catering Services

This guidance is intended to provide some overarching principles for the delivery of a school meals service on the reopening of schools for the academic year 2020/21. The following guidance has been developed in line with advice from the Public Health Agency. It will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

School meal services play a vital part in the health and wellbeing of children and young people and support their ability to make the most of the education opportunities provided to them. Due to the positive benefits that a school meals service has on children and young people's health and wellbeing it is expected that school meals services will be provided in schools from 1 September 2020.

However, when schools reopen for priority year groups only on 24 August school meals services will not be available. Parents should be advised to supply a packed lunch.

It is expected that where possible a hot meal, suitable as the main meal of the day, will be available for free school meals pupils and other pupils who wish to avail of them. This is particularly important for pupils entitled to free school meals for whom this might be their only meal that day. It is likely that initially there will be a reduced choice of menu available however the aim is to provide hot food menus offering a choice, served in school dining halls as before.

Nutritional Standards

All food provided in schools must be in keeping with the Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food and Drinks in School [Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food and Drinks in School Guidance](#).

Special Dietary Requirements

Schools and school caterers will need to ensure that pupils with special dietary requirements or allergies are catered for as per the Education Authority's [Guidance for the provision of special diets in schools](#).

Communication between schools, parents and the catering staff remains paramount, and it is recommended that meetings continue for all pupils requiring a medically prescribed diet but carried out remotely (for example, by telephone or conference call).

Particular care needs to be taken to check whether any pupils have allergies or special dietary requirements before food is provided. This procedure should be agreed in

advance with the Unit Catering Manager, included in the relevant risk assessment and suitable to the style of service being utilised.

Delivery of meals

It is not anticipated that all schools will be able to maintain class bubbles during break and lunch times. Some schools may wish to consider staggered break and lunch times, etc. if this can be accommodated. Schools and school caterers should work closely to agree local solutions to ensure the safe delivery of school meals. This is particularly important where schools are considering repurposing the dining hall. Where necessary, children, young people and parents/carers should be involved in these discussions. To protect the environment, reduce costs and improve the dining experience normal crockery and cutlery will be used where possible.

Where a risk assessment indicates that the provision of a hot meal in the dining hall is not possible, eating in the classroom and the provision of a cold packed lunch should be considered. In this scenario the use of disposable packaging and cutlery may be required.

COVID-19 Measures

School kitchens can continue to operate, but must comply with the guidance for food businesses on coronavirus: [Reopening and adapting your food business during COVID-19](#).

Catering staff should have access to appropriate PPE in addition to the normal disposable gloves and aprons usually available. Sanitiser should be available for Catering Staff, delivery persons and visitors to kitchens. Surfaces in dining halls should be wiped down and disinfected in between each sitting. Pupils should be encouraged to wash their hands before entering the dining hall or eating their meal.

Whilst it is not possible to eradicate cash handling arrangements at this time, it is suggested that anyone counting cash or banking cash can will do so wearing gloves.

Online payment systems and biometric systems of payment will continue to operate in the usual way and hand sanitising measures will be available for any touch points for biometric systems, where required.

Other considerations

If feasible, schools should consider resuming breakfast or break time. Schools should work closely with catering staff on how this can be delivered safely in line with PHA guidance.

Schools may wish to consider introducing a stay on-site policy during lunch time. Such considerations should be discussed with catering staff to ensure it is manageable.

Schools also need to be conscious that teachers are not contractually required to carry out mid-day supervision, unless employed under a separate contract.

If children and young people go offsite for lunch, they should follow the rules in place for wider society, for example wearing a face covering when entering a shop. Risk assessments should consider procedures for when children and young people leave and return to school premises, including hand hygiene.

Catering will be flexible on choice and while there may be a reduced menu, it is likely that the menu will include a choice of meals from hot meals to packed lunches.

Section 5 - Curriculum Delivery

Curriculum in Pre-Schools and Primary Schools

In pre-school and primary school, it is envisaged that in most cases a relatively straightforward approach can be adopted which will allow for full delivery of the Northern Ireland curriculum: a class will act as a single consistent group or bubble, with minimal prolonged indoor interaction with other classes within the school.

The requirement for strict social distancing between pupils has been relaxed. Young children particularly at pre-school and the Foundation Stage cannot reasonably be expected to remain apart from each other throughout the day. Further, efforts to ensure strict adherence to such measures could be confusing and upsetting for some children at this developmental stage, who are likely to have limited understanding of the rationale for social distancing or the wider public health situation. At this age, children should, insofar as is possible, be given opportunities to be actively involved in practical, play-based learning in a stimulating environment.

The Department's [Guidance on Planning for the Foundation Stage Curriculum](#) highlights a number of additional practical steps schools can take which will assist in mitigating against the spread of infection at this age.

At Key Stage 2, most older children will have a better understanding of the current public health context and schools can encourage distancing where possible and practical.

However, for older children too, engaging activities with opportunities for collaboration, play and creativity are critically important. Practical, “hands-on” learning and activities, experiments and investigations are an important part of the curriculum across all Areas of Learning. Schools will appreciate that children should, therefore, continue to have opportunities for practical, experiential learning within the classroom.

The delivery of Physical Education (PE), which is a compulsory element of the primary curriculum, is an area where schools may have particular concerns at this time. Schools will appreciate the positive impact that physical exercise can have on young people's health and wellbeing. A broad, well-balanced, quality PE programme will support the development of physical skills, thinking skills and personal capabilities as well as improving mental health and emotional wellbeing. Some children may not have undertaken physical exercise for many months and PE may be the only opportunity they are provided for regular exercise. Therefore, the Department would envisage that from September all children will continue to have regular access to PE within the curriculum. It is recommended that pupils are taught at least two hours of PE a week and where at all possible schools should endeavour to deliver this recommendation.

For most children and young people, the health benefits of participating in regular exercise far outweigh any potential risks. This is why the government has permitted the resumption of sporting activities outside schools. In the delivery of PE and wider sporting activities, schools will have due regard to wider public health requirements and the guidance provided by individual sporting governing bodies around safe delivery.

Schools may wish to consider allowing children to come to school in their PE uniform or for younger children to simply wear trainers on relevant days to minimise the need for changing.

Curricular Delivery in Post-Primary Schools

The Department would emphasise that it is extremely important that pupils at post-primary school continue to have access to subject specialists and enjoy the full breadth and balance of the curriculum. For some subjects, it may of course be possible for teachers rather than pupils to move between classrooms in order to minimise movement.

Post-primary schools should encourage pupils to keep their distance where and when possible within capacity and delivery restraints. However, strict social distancing requirements have been relaxed between pupils in schools and should not be a barrier to the delivery of practical subjects. The practical elements of a wide range of subjects ensure that pupils have access to specialist equipment and high quality teaching and continue to develop essential skills across all Areas of Learning.

Schools know the importance of practical work which provides opportunities for experiential learning, increasing independence and group work, as well as the skills which are core to many subjects and a key component of many qualification assessments. In practical subjects, good hygiene practices will be a key risk mitigation measure.

PE is a compulsory element of the curriculum at both Key Stages 3 and 4. As in primary schools, therefore, the Department would envisage that from September all children will continue to have regular access to PE within the curriculum. Schools will appreciate the positive impact that physical exercise can have on young people's health and wellbeing. This is why the government has permitted the resumption of sporting activities outside schools. In the delivery of PE and wider sporting activities, schools should have due regard to wide public health requirements and the guidance provided by individual sporting governing bodies around safe delivery.

Schools may wish to consider allowing children to come to school in their PE uniform on relevant days to minimise the need for changing.

Years 8-10

At post-primary school, the nature of curricular delivery clearly makes it more difficult to implement a single consistent class group or bubble. It may be possible, however, in some schools to achieve this for Years 8-10. Schools are, therefore, encouraged where possible to consider whether they can configure classes to maintain the same class grouping for all subjects in Years 8-10 as a risk mitigation measure.

However, it is accepted that some schools with larger classes will require limited mixing into different class groups to adhere to legal requirements for practical subjects. Similarly, a year group may come together for outdoor PE or games.

Post-14 Curriculum

As schools are aware, the Entitlement Framework is the child-centred, post-14 curriculum which aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced range of qualifications to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live. It provides a legal guarantee that all pupils have access to a minimum of twenty-one courses at Key Stage 4 and Post-16, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied.

For Years 11-14, in the context of this legal framework, the need to ensure appropriate progression pathways and the continuation of current examination courses, it is recognised that a single consistent class group will not be possible. Pupils will be in mixed classes based on their choice of courses. Schools should, however, try to avoid prolonged indoor interactions between different year groups (for example in canteens or assembly halls) as much as possible

Some young people access qualification courses in other schools or FE Colleges through Area Learning Communities. It is for local Area Learning Communities to ensure practical and manageable arrangements for delivery of these qualifications. The Department would expect a child centred approach to decision making whereby young people, particularly those who are part way through courses, should not if it all possible be disadvantaged.

Blended Learning

Schools should continue to contingency plan for the delivery of remote learning⁶ in the event of local or wider school closures, or that a class or group of pupils need to self-isolate. In the current public health context, schools will wish to have detailed plans in place. The Department's Circular (2020/05) [Guidance for Schools on Supporting Remote Learning](#) provides advice and guidance to schools on supporting remote

⁶ This is likely to involve engaging with pupils on an ongoing basis through the wide range of e-learning platforms available, as well as providing hard copy or emailed resources.

learning. It outlines a range of key principles for the development of a remote learning programme.

Blended learning is defined as:

An approach to education whereby schools will combine classroom based teaching and learning methods within school, with a range of remote learning in order to deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum.

Again, schools should continue to contingency plan for a blended approach to learning whereby pupils attend school on a part-time basis. This may be necessary in the event, for example, that the public health context requires schools to reintroduce strict social distancing. Detailed guidance on planning for a blended approach to curriculum delivery is provided in the Department's Circular (2020/06) *Curriculum Planning 2020/21*.

Schools must also ensure that any new working practices as a result of blended learning are consulted on with school trade union representatives and any work required is included on the individual teacher's time budget.

A small minority of children may be designated clinically vulnerable and parents should follow medical advice from their hospital consultant if their child is in this category. Where a child is medically advised not to attend school from the commencement of the new school term, parents should consult with their school Principal and, as required, the Education Authority regarding education provision for these pupils.

Childcare provision

All registered childcare providers have been provided with detailed guidance on the provision of safe childcare, which is available to read [here](#). Many parents rely on childcare provision, whether on school premises or elsewhere, to provide wrap-around care for their children while they are at work. Schools can play an important role in supporting pupils and parents by engaging positively and collaborating with local childcare providers to ensure that children can be dropped off and picked up in a safe and organised manner.

As with schools, childcare providers will be operating protective bubbles as a key mitigating action where possible, alongside other measures such as enhanced hand hygiene and cleaning practices and active engagement with Testing and Tracing.

The purpose of 'protective bubbles' is to limit the number of different interactions in any single day. This will reduce the risk of transmission and improve the ability to focus the tracking and tracing of the virus in circumstances where there is a positive test. In most cases, it is recognised that children attending childcare providers will be placed in a different (but consistent) bubble from the bubble established by their

school. Registered childcare providers will keep their own records for track and trace purposes, and it will be important that in the event of a pupil being exposed to, or testing positive for the virus, that parents are advised to alert their childcare provider.

Some childcare providers operate from school premises. Where a school or pre-school setting shares facilities such as their entrance, exit or general facilities including toilets and kitchen facilities with a childcare provider, they should consider the following:

- early discussion with the leader or manager to agree use of the premises
- consider potential implications of other services' operating model
- maintaining physical distance with other users
- arrangements for use of outdoor spaces

Section 6 - Workforce⁷

Detailed guidance has been developed for Principals and line managers to support staff returning to schools.

The guidance can be accessed via the following link: [Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to Schools](#). The guidance includes key considerations and responsibilities and sets expectations on how to support staff returning to the work place. It should be used to supplement any specific guidance and social distancing protocols linked to schools and it recognises that for the majority of school based staff it may not be feasible to work from home.

For further advice and support on any aspect of this guidance principals should contact their C-19 Link Officer, the EA dedicated Covid-19 help-line, or the FAQ section of the EA website.

Workforce Attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clinically vulnerable individuals have been advised to take extra care in observing social distancing and should work from home where possible. If they cannot work from home they should take extra care in observing 2m social distancing. Line Managers should undertake a risk assessment and staff should be offered safest available on-site roles.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">For staff who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable, current PHA advice does not require them to self-isolate. Staff can attend their education or childcare setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff living with someone who is considered clinically extremely vulnerable, and in receipt of a shielding pause letter, can continue to work with suitable controls in place. Such staff should have an individual risk assessment conducted.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Staff who were previously shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people). These restrictions eased and with effect from 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. The latest advice recommends that staff unable to work from home can now return to the workplace subject to risk assessment.

⁷ Please note that this may change depending on Executive decisions and for further support schools should contact their dedicated Link Officer

- The most up to date guidance and list of underlying health conditions that necessitate shielding should be checked on the PHA website.

(i) Workforce Attendance

Staff Who Are Clinically Vulnerable

Clinically vulnerable individuals who are at higher risk of severe illness (for example, people with some pre-existing conditions as set out in the NI Government website ([Click here for more information](#))) have been advised to take extra care in observing social distancing and should work from home where possible. This includes pregnant women. Principals/line managers should endeavour to support this, where possible, for example by asking staff to support remote education, carry out lesson planning or other roles which can be done from home.

If clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) individuals cannot work from home they should take extra care in the work place observing social distancing, staying 2 metres¹ away from others wherever possible, although the individual may choose to take on a role that does not allow for this distance if they prefer to do so. If they have to spend time within 2 metres¹ of other people, Principals/line managers should undertake a risk assessment with the individual to assess and control measures to reduce risk. They should, if necessary, be offered the safest available on-site roles.

Pregnancy And Risk

There is no evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get seriously ill from COVID-19 but pregnant women have been included in the list of people at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) as a precaution.

This is because pregnant women can sometimes be more at risk from viruses like flu. At present it is not clear if this happens with COVID-19 but because it is a new virus, it is safer to include pregnant women in the moderate-risk group.

Principals/line managers should undertake a risk assessment with the individual to assess and control measures to reduce risk in addition to any existing risk assessments.

Further information is available through this [link](#).

Staff Who Live With Someone Who is Vulnerable

If a member of your household is considered clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable, current PHA advice does not require you to self-isolate. If a member of your household falls into this category, you are able to attend work.

With effect from 01 August 2020 “Shielding” has been paused and full details can be found by clicking on the [following link](#).

If a member of your household is considered clinically extremely vulnerable and in receipt of a shielding pause letter, employees should follow the guidance as [set out by the Government](#) and can continue to work with suitable controls in place. Such staff should have an individual risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate course of action is determined.

Staff Who Were previously Shielding

Prior to 01 August 2020 individuals who received letters classifying them as clinically extremely vulnerable were asked to take extra measures to social distance “shield” thus minimising interaction with others.

These restrictions eased over time and with effect from 01 August 2020 “Shielding” has been paused. Full details can be found by clicking on the [following link](#). The latest advice recommends that clinically extremely vulnerable individuals who are unable to work from home can now return to the work place subject to risk assessment.

Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME)

There is evidence that COVID-19 may disproportionately affect some groups, notably Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME). The EA and schools should ensure that the Occupational Health Service (OHS) provides practical support and advice to BAME staff.

All Minority Ethnic staff with underlying health conditions and disabilities, who are over 70 or who are pregnant should be individually risk assessed. The EA and schools will also need to be mindful of their wider equality obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

(ii) Staff who have symptoms of COVID-19

Test and Trace and Protect

PHA guidance under the Test and Trace and Protect programme will be applied for all staff or pupils in contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19. Test and Trace staff will contact anyone with a positive test and trace their contacts over a

period determined by the Test, Trace and Protect staff seeking information on where that individual has been in contact with someone for 15 minutes or more and less than 2m social distance. Isolation guidance will then be provided that is context specific and may result in friendship groups, regular contacts and potentially an entire class or 'bubble' being instructed to self-isolate at home.

Pupils can return to school when they have completed the necessary period of isolation as advised by the Test, Trace and Protect service. This will help contain any potential transmission to those staff/pupils and will also assist in protecting the wider community. [COVID-19: Information for the public](#).

Enhanced cleaning should be carried out within any classroom in which an individual who has developed COVID-19 has been to minimise risk of the spread of the virus. This should be clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils to provide assurance that the environment is safe.

Staff who exhibit any symptoms associated with COVID-19 should not attend school. The N.I. Executive has rolled out a Test and Trace and Protect strategy designed to control the spread of COVID-19 and symptomatic staff are expected to follow the advice and obtain a test for COVID-19.

Where an individual has had a negative result, it is important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household receive a negative result, the member of staff can return to work providing they are well enough and have not had a fever for 48 hours.

Anyone who tests positive will be contacted by the Contact Tracing Service in the Public Health Agency, and will need to share information about their recent interactions. This could include household members, people with whom you have been in direct contact, or been within 2 metres for more than 15 minutes. Passing in corridors and short periods of contact does not therefore present a significant risk to staff or pupils. All household members should follow PHA isolation guidance which currently requires everyone in the house to stay at home.

The guidance is as follows:-

- if you have symptoms of coronavirus or a positive test, you will need to stay at home for at least 10 days;
- if you live with someone who has symptoms or a positive test, you will need to stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms;
- however, if you develop symptoms during this 14-day period, you will need to self-check in accordance with Test and Trace guidance and stay at home for

10 days from the day your symptoms started (regardless of what day you are on in the original 14-day period);

- 10 days after your symptoms started, if you do not have a high temperature, you do not need to continue to self-isolate. If you still have a high temperature, keep self-isolating until your temperature returns to normal. You do not need to self-isolate if you just have a cough after 10 days, as a cough can last for several weeks after the infection has gone;
- if you have symptoms and live with someone who is 70 or over, has a long-term condition, is pregnant or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else they can stay for the 14-day isolation period;
- it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

Staff or pupils who have been part of the same 'bubble' as anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, must likewise follow PHA guidance and self-isolate and undertake a test under the Test and Trace and Protect system. They can return to school when they have a negative test result or have undertaken the necessary period of isolation after a positive test result. This will contain any potential transmission to those limited number of staff/pupils in the 'bubble' and protect the wider community.

Where staff or pupils have tested positive in a cohort that is not operating as a 'bubble' (for example, in some senior school classes or where smaller numbers permit social distancing within existing classrooms) all staff and pupils who have been in direct contact with the individual must follow the PHA guidance and self-isolate, seek a COVID-19 test and only return to school when they have received a negative test or completed the required period of isolation after a positive test.

It is essential that all staff follow this guidance, as by doing so staff will not only protect themselves but limit the spread of the virus to educational settings and the wider population.

For full details of the Test and Trace and Protect strategy click [here](#).

New StopCovid NI Proximity App

The StopCOVID NI Proximity App was released in July 2020 to assist in stopping the spread of COVID-19 in Northern Ireland, by anonymously contacting people who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. All staff are encouraged to download this free application to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

(iii) Workforce Planning⁸

There will be a specific workload pressure arising from the need to adapt existing resources to align with any blended model (in the event that this is necessary), providing in-school learning for an increased number of groups and support for offsite learning. The deployment of additional staffing is expected to be critical to ensuring this can be managed.

Education settings, working in close partnership with the EA, CCMS, trades unions and staff, are best placed to make judgements about how to make best use of available workforce capacity safely and effectively. This section sets out some high level expectations to ensure consistency.

Workforce Capacity

Education settings should undertake a review of the availability of teaching and support staff, including building supervisors, cleaning and office staff, to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the workforce to prepare settings and be able to provide any blended learning where necessary

Making Full Use of Available Workforce Capacity

Before considering alternative approaches, education settings should ensure that existing workforce capacity is fully utilised in responding to the local challenges likely to be faced.

The EA and Managing Authorities should take the following actions as part of any wider workforce planning activities for the opening of school premises:-

- consider at a local level how all staff who are working from home can support educational continuity, for example, by supporting remote learning;
- consider the availability of health and social care partners as part of planning for support for children and young people, particularly those with complex needs; and
- consider any other opportunities to ensure existing teaching and wider workforce capacity can be deployed to support school reopening.

Throughout this process potential workload issues should be carefully considered and education settings should be conscious of the well-being of all and the need to implement flexible working practices in a way that promotes good work-life balance for all staff.

⁸ Subject of PHA and Executive guidance at the time, this may change.

Assess Workforce Capacity Checklist

Staffing Checklist

1. How many staff do you have available to work in school?
2. How many teachers do you have available to work in school?
3. How many support staff including classroom assistants do you have available for work in school?
4. Do you have a Principal, Vice Principal or senior leader available for work in school?
5. Do you have at least one person with first-aid training available for work in school?
6. Do you have at least one person with up-to-date Designated Teacher for Child Protection training available to work in school?
7. Do you have your SEN co-ordinator available for work, or an alternative staff member who could take on this role?
8. Do you have a Building Supervisor and/or cleaning staff and, if necessary, at least one office staff member available during the school day?
9. Do you have sufficient catering staff to provide a school meals service in line with social distancing requirements

If the answer to questions 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 is no, then you should try to find a solution to this before going further.

You should speak to your employing authority who may be able to provide a suitable person temporarily to cover 5, 6, 7 or 8. In some cases, staff members may be prepared to undertake a different role to their normal role temporarily.

Keep your staffing arrangements as consistent as possible. Wherever possible, keep them with the same pupil group and in the same settings. In instances where you do need to use staff from other schools, ensure cover is agreed on a weekly basis, not daily, to limit contacts.

NI Substitute Teachers Register (NISTR)

In preparation for school restart, a range of NISTR service improvement activity has been completed during July and August. Many of these improvements are in direct response to feedback from Principals about the operation of the Register.

Activity has included a full cleanse of the pool of NISTR teachers available for booking, to remove any teachers whose account has been inactive for 2 years or more. This was communicated to those teachers in advance and they were advised what steps to take if they did not wish their account to be archived. The NISTR team is also currently completing registrations for a large number of newly qualified teachers.

EA has also been working with the providers of the NISTR system to develop new system functionality which will require teacher to continue to keep their account up to date at least every 90 days. It is hoped that these changes will make it easier and quicker to search for and identify a teacher who is available for work.

Section 7 - Pupil Attendance

Pupil Attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools should follow latest guidance on attendance for children and young people who have health conditions, who live with people with health conditions or who are pregnant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils who are clinically vulnerable are those with pre-existing conditions who have been advised to stringently follow the social distancing guidelines and should learn from home where possible. A small minority of pupils will fall into this category.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, can attend their education or childcare setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils who were previously shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people). These restrictions eased over time and as of 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Pupils should follow the guidance of their hospital consultant or General Practitioner (GP) if in doubt and should have an individual risk assessment conducted before return.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils living with someone who was previously shielding. These restrictions eased over time and as if 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Such pupils should have an individual risk assessment conducted before return.

Pupils Who Are Clinically Vulnerable

All schools should follow the latest guidance on attendance for children and young people who have health conditions or who live with individuals who have health conditions or are pregnant. Current guidance on these categories is published on NI Direct and by PHA [here](#). If in doubt, specific advice should be sought from a Hospital Consultant or GP.

In light of the Minister's statement 6th August, clarifying "that having taken account of the scientific and medical evidence, it is now appropriate for all pupils to return to school during the week commencing 31 August" we would consider attendance to be mandatory.

There will be a small number of children where medical guidance would be to refrain from school. The school should satisfy themselves, through evidence provided by the family that the pupil is shielding due to underlying medical conditions. If this is not possible then an unauthorised absence should be recorded.

Pupils Who Live with Someone Who is Clinically Vulnerable

If a child or young person lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable as above), including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting. If in doubt, advice should be sought from the Hospital Consultant or GP of the clinically vulnerable person.

Pupils Who Were Shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people)

Advice with regard to shielding eased over time and as of 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Pupil should follow the guidance of their hospital consultant or GP if in doubt about school attendance.

When planning for the return of pupils, education settings should consider the distance learning and support the needs of any pupils who are unable to return to school either all or some of the time.

The most up-to-date guidance and list of underlying health conditions that necessitate shielding should be checked on the NI Direct website under the [shielding section](#).

Pupils Who Are Living with Someone Who Was Shielding

Pupils who have household members who were considered clinically extremely vulnerable (at high risk of severe illness and requiring 'shielding'). These restrictions eased over time and from 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. Such children should have an individual risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate place of care is determined.

Pupil Who Develop Symptoms on Site

If a pupil develops symptoms of COVID-19 while at school follow the procedures set out in Section 8.

Enhanced cleaning should be carried out within any classroom in which an individual who has developed COVID-19 has been to minimise risk of the spread of the virus. This should be clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils to provide assurance that the environment is safe.

It is essential that all staff follow this guidance, as by doing so staff will not only protect themselves but limit the spread of the virus to educational settings and the wider population.

Recording Attendance

Specific guidance in respect of pupil attendance whether at school or at home will be issued separately see Circular DE2020/08 on the [DE website](#).

Decisions regarding the recording of pupil attendance will be down to schools and the individual circumstances of each child. It may be possible for some children to continue to learn from home due to being clinically vulnerable if they are able to provide evidence of an underlying medical condition as well as learning at home. If evidence cannot be provided in terms of either the specific medical condition or that learning is not being completed then school should record attendance as an unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N) where appropriate.

We would suggest that registration of pupils working from home would happen once a day (rather than twice a day) for example provided that work was being completed as required. We appreciate that for some schools, this may be very challenging therefore schools may have to rely on a combination of their professional judgement and pupil's work on whether or not pupils have engaged with learning at home.

Section 8 - People Who Become Symptomatic Onsite

All members of the educational establishment including staff and pupils should be continually supported to understand the symptoms to look for and clear advice should be provided on how to respond if symptoms become apparent while on-site.

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature/fever or anosmia (a loss or a change in your normal sense of smell, which can also affect your sense of taste) in an educational setting, they and any members of their household within that school setting must be sent home and advised to follow the PHA guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection. Settings should keep a full record of such actions and request a parent / carer / guardian record their acknowledgement of this action.

A child awaiting collection should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door. Appropriate adult supervision must be provided. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to fully isolate the child, they should be moved to an area which is at least 2m away from other people. A risk assessment should be undertaken by the school to address this. Schools should fully document this process to ensure a record is held of who made the decision, who was contacted, who provided supervision and who picked up the child.

If the child needs to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected before being used by anyone else.

PPE should be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection if direct personal care is needed and a distance of 2m cannot be maintained (such as for a very young child or a child with complex needs).

If the child is seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk, call 999. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff (who was wearing the appropriate PPE and adhering to the social distancing guidelines) has helped someone with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or loss of taste/smell, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who has developed symptoms. Cleaning the affected area with available cleaning products, followed by disinfection after someone with symptoms has left will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

Test, Trace and Protect

Pupils and staff who exhibit any symptoms associated with COVID-19 should not attend school. The N.I. Executive has rolled out a Test and Trace and Protect strategy designed to control the spread of COVID-19 and symptomatic staff are expected to follow the advice and obtain a test for COVID-19.

Where an individual has had a negative result, it is important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household receive a negative result, the pupil or member of staff can return to work providing they are well enough and have not had a fever for 48 hours.

Anyone who tests positive will be contacted by the Contact Tracing Service in the Public Health Agency, and will need to share information about their recent interactions. This could include household members, people with whom you have been in direct contact, or been within 2 metres for more than 15 minutes. Passing in corridors and short periods of contact does not therefore present a significant risk to staff or pupils. All household members should follow PHA isolation guidance which currently requires everyone in the house to stay at home. Isolation guidance will then be provided that is context specific and may result in friendship groups, regular contacts and potentially an entire class or 'bubble' being instructed to self-isolate at home.

The guidance is as follows:

- if you have symptoms of coronavirus or a positive test, you will need to stay at home for at least 10 days;
- if you live with someone who has symptoms or a positive test, you will need to stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms;
- however, if you develop symptoms during this 14-day period, you will need to self-check in accordance with Test and Trace guidance and stay at home for 10 days from the day your symptoms started (regardless of what day you are on in the original 14-day period);
- 10 days after your symptoms started, if you do not have a high temperature, you do not need to continue to self-isolate. If you still have a high temperature, keep self-isolating until your temperature returns to normal. You do not need to self-isolate if you just have a cough after 10 days, as a cough can last for several weeks after the infection has gone;

- if you have symptoms and live with someone who is 70 or over, has a long-term condition, is pregnant or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else they can stay for the 14-day isolation period;
- it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

Enhanced cleaning should be carried out within any classroom in which an individual who has developed COVID-19 has been to minimise risk of the spread of the virus. This should be clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils to provide assurance that the environment is safe.

Pupils or members of staff can return to school when they have completed the necessary period of isolation as advised by the Test, Trace and Protect service. This will help contain any potential transmission to those staff/pupils and will also assist in protecting the wider community. [COVID-19: Information for the public.](#)

Section 9 - Communications

Education settings should ensure regular, timely and clear communication with their school communities about the approach they are adopting to a phased return to schooling in line with the Education Restart Programme and supporting guidance.

Parents and Carers

The main concerns for parents and carers are likely to be the safety and wellbeing of their children in schools as well as practical considerations on how the new arrangements will work, especially for working parents. As part of this, it is important to consider appropriate dialogue and engagement with the Parent Council / associations and any wider parent forums.

Two-way communication is vital. The gathering of questions, issues or concerns from parents and carers will be just as important as clear communication to parents and carers about how things will work.

Parents should not send their children to school if they display any COVID 19 symptoms.

Children and Young People

Schools and settings have arrangements for good quality dialogue and communication with pupils which they may wish to develop further to inform them and engage with them about the new arrangements. A variety of methods can help to gather pupil views, questions and issues and can help to clarify and address difficulties prior to return. Pupil Councils, pupil panels and other pupil voice arrangements remain very important at this time. General advice on good principles and methods for learner participation is available from the EA as well as a range of third sector organisations.

Supplementary Guidance for Residential Boarding/Hostel Accommodation in Educational Facilities

This guidance has been developed in consultation with boarding schools in Northern Ireland and is based on detailed guidance prepared by the Boarding Schools Association.

Application

This supplementary guidance is intended for school care accommodation services, provided for the purpose of pupils in attendance at a public, independent or grant-aided school and availing of the provision of residential accommodation. These include boarding school facilities.

The guidance is produced in support of the work of the Education Restart Programme. All activity aimed at the reopening of accommodation services will be in keeping with public health guidance as determined by the Chief Medical Officer and the PHA – including any specific PHA guidance relating to residential schools.

Schools are already preparing for the any alterations and other considerations they anticipate to enable re-opening. For boarding schools, the Boarding School Association has also prepared a checklist covering issues including facilities, curriculum, kitchens, boarding houses, medical, activities, staffing, well-being and new pupils and visitors. Each residential facility will undertake a discrete risk assessment based on their own school estate, buildings capacity and pupil roll, in conjunction with staff and Managing Authorities.

Preparing for Reopening of Facilities

The primary issues for all schools will be the health and well-being of pupils, staff and families. In order to allow for the highest level of preparation and testing of school facilities, schools will require clear, early and unequivocal national awareness as to the dates of possible reopening.

The return of pupils should assist returning international pupils to meet any isolation requirements first – dependent on travel advice. Likewise, residential facilities may be limited in the extent to which shared space can be repurposed, although outdoor and other facilities are likely to be employed. The probable lack of nearby similar schools means that sharing of facilities between schools is unlikely to be possible.

Every setting will undertake its own specific risk assessment, considering local circumstances, the domestic arrangements of pupils and staff, travel requirements, school capacity and public health and hygiene requirements.

The overall number of pupils, staffing levels, the capacity of each residential hall or house, the mix of shared dormitories and individual bedroom facilities and shared communal facilities must be considered. In turn, these preparations will assist in determining whether boarding houses can be considered discrete family units.

These will also include contingency provision for symptomatic pupils or staff, those with underlying health conditions and consideration of supply chains such as catering, external pastoral support and the use of school and public transport.

Schools should inform their HSC Trust of their intention to re-open and proposed reopening dates.

Capacity

Determining capacity for teaching and other non-residential spaces will be done in line with the principal guidance. Appropriate distancing will be observed where possible or other measures put in place to meet public health requirements, subject to local discretion.

Grouping/Households

Schools should organise boarding pupils into small groups who stay separate from other groups in the schools, in order to reduce risk of possible transmission while required measures are in place. Such groups may include relevant members of residential staff and each group should observe appropriate social distancing, particularly with any pupil or member of staff outside their household. Such groups may share common areas for certain activities. This would also reduce the need for wider isolation should symptoms be identified in any individual.

Incoming Pupils

Dependent on public health and travel advice, schools may seek to ask international boarders or those from outside the remit of Northern Ireland public health guidance, to return early for the autumn term in order to carry out any required quarantine period. This may include those service children in boarding schools whose parents are serving overseas. This will require specific confirmation from residential care and health and social trusts.

Schools that can provide assurance that a suitably equipped boarding house can count as “accommodation” for the purposes of public health guidance, may be in the position that pupils can re-enter the country knowing that they will be safely looked after at

school or, where appropriate, by guardians. As testing regimes develop (see below) quarantine requirements may diminish.

Likewise, schools with responsibility for guardians will also be required to assess specific guidance for those guardians they work with.

Testing

Procedures are in place for the local testing of anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Regular monitoring may be appropriate. Staff will monitor pupils, checking for symptoms and asking those presenting as unwell to go into an isolated area, while medical advice is sought. Individual institutions can consider isolation facilities suitable to their property and public health guidelines.

Depending on public health guidance, contact tracing registers may be set up and identify which boarders and adults are on-site. This would include recording visitors to the site, including parents.

Additional Public Health Considerations

Establishments should follow all of the requirements in the principle guidance for schools. In addition, they should consider the following requirements:-

- residential pupils showing symptoms will require to be isolated and tested;
- pupils must not travel to the school if showing symptoms – schools will need to be clear of country of origin policies concerning travel, quarantine and other guidance, as well as cultural expectations. It may be the expectation of some nationals that face coverings be worn, for instance;
- risk assessments will be required for pupils and staff at relevant establishments who are at risk of serious illness through underlying conditions. Consideration should be given to whether alternative care arrangements may be more appropriate for clinically vulnerable children. While reducing the risk of the transmission of COVID-19 remains the priority, schools should consider the emotional wellbeing of students, especially those who are already vulnerable to mental health issues. This includes those who may have had to complete repeated periods of isolation (during one holiday period) in their 'home' country and then in the UK;
- thorough risk assessments should be undertaken for any new groupings or households formed within the facility (see Groupings/Households) above. There is an increased risk that staff and children may not be able to adhere to social distancing in such households. Appropriate efforts should be made to maintain social distancing where possible, particularly with any pupil or member of staff outside their household;

- where distancing is not possible, appropriate alternative mitigation measures should be implemented, aligned with the principle guidance;
- where possible, individual rooms with en-suite washing and toilet facilities may be provided to reduce interactions;
- boarding facilities should provide appropriate hand hygiene facilities (e.g. hand sanitiser) in common spaces. Bathrooms should be fully supplied for handwashing and drying as per guidance in the main sections of this report;
- schools should consider whether boarders should be permitted to leave school premises in free time, having regard to the need to minimise unnecessary interactions with others off the school premises. This will also apply to health procedures in place for flexi-boarders and school residence pupils due to return home at weekends or during holidays. These factors should be considered as part of risk assessments;
- the use of relevant facilities by external groups or visitors attending school events, should remain subject to public health advice;
- resources shared between, rather than within, households (such as board games, magazines and books, snacks, etc.) should be restricted until public health advice changes; and
- the local health protection team should be contacted in the event of any cases to ensure a potential outbreak is dealt with promptly.

Establishments may also find the existing [Northern Ireland guidance](#) for residential children's houses, residential schools and secure care facilities on staffing, social distancing and self-isolation useful.