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Department
for Education

Guidance

Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020

Updated 12 May 2020

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As part of national social distancing measures to limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), we have had to limit the numbers of children and young people attending educational and childcare settings, to ensure that pupils and staff attending could do so safely. That is why, since 23 March 2020, education and childcare settings have only been open to priority groups (vulnerable children and children of critical workers)[1].

As well as offering face-to-face provision for those able to attend, settings have also done a huge amount to support the remote education of those who have been staying at home. Innovative and fast-paced work has taken place, by committed staff, to develop resources to make this education the best it can be.

Throughout this period, the work and dedication of critical workers has been crucial to our country. This of course includes all our critical workers working with children and young people – leaders, teachers, support staff, childcare workers, social workers and others, who have worked tirelessly to support the education and welfare of young people.

As a result of the huge efforts everyone has made to adhere to strict social distancing measures, the transmission rate of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased. We therefore anticipate, with further progress, that we may be able, from the week commencing 1 June 2020 to welcome back more children to early years, school and further education settings. We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the Roadmap are operating effectively. As a result we are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

We have worked closely with the sector, and will continue to do so over the coming weeks to support the wider opening of schools, colleges and childcare settings. In this document we are setting out the overarching aims and principles of this next phase, including information about protective measures which will be in place. We will work with the profession to produce more detailed guidance ahead of 1 June 2020.

Next steps

Education and childcare settings are already open to priority groups. Now that we have made progress in reducing the transmission of coronavirus we are encouraging all eligible children to attend – it is no longer necessary for parents of eligible children to keep them at home if they can. In particular, as per the existing guidance on vulnerable children and young people, vulnerable children of all year groups continue to be expected and encouraged to attend educational provision where it is appropriate for them to do so.

From the week commencing 1 June 2020 at the earliest, we will be asking primary schools to welcome back children in Nursery, Reception, year 1 and year 6, alongside priority groups. We will ask secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 and year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year, alongside the full time provision they are offering to priority groups.

We are also asking nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, to begin welcoming back all children. Alternative provision settings should mirror the approach being taken for mainstream schools and also offer some face-to-face support for years 10 and 11 students (as they have no year 12). Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools will work towards a phased return of more children and young people without a focus on specific year groups.

We want to get all children and young people back into education as soon as the scientific advice allows because it is the best place for them to learn, and because we know how important it is for their mental wellbeing to have social interactions with their peers, carers and teachers. Children returning to educational and childcare settings in greater numbers will also allow more families to return to work.

We are therefore gradually increasing the numbers of children and young people attending schools and colleges. This decision is based on the latest scientific advice. By returning pupils gradually settings can initially reduce the number of children and young people in classrooms compared to usual and put protective measures in place to reduce risks. Children will need to stay within their new class/group wherever possible and we will ask settings to implement a range of protective measures including increased cleaning, reducing ‘pinch points’ (such as parents dropping children off at the start and end of day), and utilising outdoor space. Staff and pupils in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their households. A negative test will enable children to get back to childcare or education, and their parents to get back to work. A positive test will ensure rapid action to protect their classmates and staff in their setting. Those who are clinically vulnerable, or are living with someone who is, should follow our protective measures guidance.

In childcare settings, providers will be asked to welcome back all children below statutory school age from the week commencing 1 June 2020. Demand for childcare is likely to be lower than usual at first, and existing space requirements and staff to child ratios for these age groups should allow for small group working. Where the physical layout of a setting does not allow small groups of children to be kept at a safe distance apart, we expect practitioners to exercise judgement in ensuring the highest standards of safety are maintained. In some cases, it may be necessary for providers to introduce a temporary cap on numbers to ensure that safety is prioritised. From 1 June 2020, childminders can look after children of all ages, in line with usual limits on the number of children they can care for.

Our ambition is to bring all primary year groups back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if feasible, though this will be kept under review. We will only welcome back additional year groups if the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates it is appropriate to have larger numbers of children within schools. The safety of children and staff is our utmost priority.

Year groups in first phase of wider opening

The three year groups within mainstream primary have been prioritised because they are key transition years – children in Reception and year 1 are at the very beginning of their school career and are mastering the essential basics, including counting and the fundamentals of reading and writing, and learning to socialise with their peers. We know that attending early education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and supports children's social and emotional development. Year 6 children are finishing Key Stage 2 and are preparing for the transition to secondary school, and will benefit immensely from time with their friends and teachers to ensure they are ready.

We will prioritise younger children in the first phases of wider opening, for several reasons. Firstly, because there is moderately high scientific confidence in evidence suggesting younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus (COVID-19); and secondly because evidence shows the particularly detrimental impact which time spent out of education can have upon them. In addition, older children are more likely to have higher numbers of contacts outside of school so pose a greater transmission risk, and they are typically better able to learn at home.

The two year groups in mainstream secondary schools and colleges have been prioritised because they are preparing for key examinations next year, and are most at risk of falling behind due to time out of school or college. From 1 June 2020, we expect that secondary schools and colleges will be able to offer some face to face contact with year 10 and year 12 pupils. This will not be a return to full timetables or pupils back in school or college full time, rather some support to supplement pupils' remote education. In line with implementing protective measures and reducing contacts, schools and colleges should limit the attendance of the year 10 and 12 cohort in the setting at any one time and to keep students in small groups as set out in our guidance. Schools and colleges should also ensure that the use of public transport for travel to and from school/college is minimised, especially at peak times. We will be consulting with sector representatives over the coming week in order to develop some suggested models to demonstrate how this could operate, which will be published along with further guidance for secondary schools in the coming weeks.

Our approach is in line with other countries across Europe, who have begun to bring pre-school and school-age children back in a phased way and are focusing on primary schools and younger children. Approaches between countries will vary slightly based on different public health circumstances.

We expect all mainstream schools and colleges, including independent schools, to follow the same approach. We encourage middle schools to do the same and welcome back children in year 6, to ensure national parity for children in this year group.

Any educational or childcare settings which have closed should work towards reopening from the week commencing 1 June 2020 to cater for children in nurseries, Reception, year 1, year 6 and priority groups, and to provide some face to face support to pupils in years 10 and 12.

We will provide all educational and childcare settings with further guidance and support to help them to prepare for wider opening over the coming weeks and continue to work closely with the sector.

What the latest science tells us

The above approach is underpinned by our latest understanding of the science, which indicates that we need to take a phased approach to limit the risk of increasing the rate of transmission (often referred to as R) above 1. We have factored in:

- severity of disease in children – there is high scientific confidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they contract coronavirus (COVID-19)
- the age of children – there is moderately high scientific confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus (COVID-19)
- numbers of children going back – which needs to be limited initially then increased gradually as the science permits
- systems to reduce the size of the groups coming into contact with each other – such as smaller class sizes spread out across settings

Approach: First phase of wider opening of educational and childcare settings (from 1 June 2020 depending on the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus)

From the week commencing 1 June 2020 at the earliest, we are asking nurseries and other early years settings to open to all children; primary schools to welcome back pupils to Nursery, Reception, year 1 and year 6 (including in middle schools); secondary schools and colleges to offer some face to face support for children and young people in year 10 and year 12 to supplement their remote education; alternative provision to mirror the approach being taken for mainstream schools and also offer some face-to-face support for year 10 and year 11 students (as they have no year 12); and special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools to welcome back more pupils and students.

We will assess the impact of these changes closely, working with medical and scientific advisers as well as sector leaders. When the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates that it is appropriate to do so, we will ask more primary year groups to return to school, and issue revised guidance.

The following principles will apply to this phase of wider opening by settings:

- children and young people in eligible year groups are strongly encouraged to attend (where there are no shielding concerns for the child or their household), so that they can gain the educational and wellbeing benefits of attending
- vulnerable children of all year groups continue to be expected and encouraged to attend educational provision where it is appropriate for them to do so (for children with education health and care (EHC) plans this will be informed by a risk

assessment approach)

- children, young people and staff who have been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable due to pre-existing medical conditions have been advised to shield. We do not expect people in this category to be attending school or college, and they should continue to be supported to learn or work at home as much as possible. Clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) people are those considered to be at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. Few if any children will fall into this category, but parents should follow medical advice if their child is in this category. Staff in this category should work from home where possible, and refer to the detail in our protective measures guidance
- a child/young person or a member of staff who lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, can attend their education or childcare setting
- if a child/young person or staff member lives in a household with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable, as set out in the guidance on shielding, it is advised they only attend an education or childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and, in the case of children, if they are able to understand and follow those instructions. This may not be possible for very young children and older children without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social distancing. If stringent social distancing cannot be adhered to, we do not expect those individuals to attend. They should be supported to learn or work at home
- staff and children or young people should not attend if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household
- protective measures will be put in place for staff and pupils, as far as is possible, to ensure that the risk of transmission is reduced

Implementation: Managing risk and rate of transmission

Scientific advice indicates that a phased return that limits the number of children in education settings and how much they mix with each other will help to control the rate of transmission. This is set out in our guidance.

There are a number of immediate issues which educational and childcare settings will need to consider. The following list of issues are the ones we have identified as the top priorities. We recognise that each setting and community is different, and that leaders will need to make their own judgements on the most important issues for them. Further guidance on these, and other important areas, will be developed with the sector in the coming days and weeks.

Key issues

Risk assessment

Every setting should carry out a risk assessment before opening. The assessment should directly address risks associated with coronavirus (COVID-19), so that sensible measures can be put in place to control those risks for children and staff. All employers have a duty to consult employees on health and safety, and they are best placed to understand the risks in individual settings.

Class sizes and staff availability

One of the protective measures we can take to reduce transmission is to have smaller group and class sizes. We know that, unlike older children and adults, early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain 2m apart from each other and staff. In deciding to bring more children back to early years and schools, we are taking this into account. Schools should therefore work through the hierarchy of measures set out in our guidance:

- avoiding contact with anyone with symptoms
- frequent hand cleaning and good hygiene practices
- regular cleaning of settings
- and minimising contact and mixing

It is still important to reduce contact between children and staff as far as possible, and settings can take steps to achieve that and reduce transmission risk by ensuring children, and staff where possible, mix in a small group and keep that small group away from other people and groups. For pre-school children in early years settings, the staff to child ratios within Early Years Foundation Stage continue to apply, and we recommend using these to group children. In mainstream schools and college settings the basic principle is that classes should be halved. Normally one teacher should be allocated to a group but if there are any teacher shortages then support staff may be used to lead groups, under the direction of a teacher. More detail is provided in our protective measures guidance.

Public Health England are clear that if early years, school and college settings do this, and crucially if they also apply comprehensive infection control measures, such as taking steps to ensure symptomatic individuals do not attend settings, regular hand cleaning, respiratory hygiene and cleaning measures and handling potential cases of the virus as per our advice, then the risk of transmission will be lowered.

Where settings can keep children and young people in those small groups 2m away from each other, they should do so. While in general groups should be kept apart, brief, transitory, contact such as passing in a corridor is low risk.

Each setting's circumstances will be slightly different. Any setting that cannot achieve these small groups at any point should discuss options with their local authority or trust. This might be because there are not enough classrooms / spaces available in the setting or because they do not have enough available teachers / staff to supervise the groups. Solutions might involve children attending a nearby school (on a consistent basis). If necessary, settings have the flexibility to focus first on continuing to provide places for priority groups and then, to support children's early learning, settings should prioritise groups of children as follows:

- early years settings– 3 and 4 year olds followed by younger age groups
- infant schools - nursery (where applicable) and reception
- primary schools – nursery (where applicable), reception and year 1

Our ambition is to bring all primary year groups back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if feasible, though this will be kept under review. We will review this advice on class sizes as and when the science indicates it is safe to invite more children back to childcare settings, schools and colleges.

Protective measures in education and childcare setting

The DfE guidance on Implementing Protective Measures in Education and Childcare Settings contains detailed advice for settings on:

- cleaning, including supplies of cleaning and handwashing products
- testing and tracing
- PPE
- what settings should do in response to a case of COVID-19 being confirmed

Attendance

No one with symptoms should attend a setting for any reason. Eligible children – including priority groups - are strongly encouraged to attend their education setting, unless they are self-isolating or they are clinically vulnerable (in which case they should follow medical advice). If someone in their household is extremely clinically vulnerable, they should only attend if stringent social distancing can be adhered to, and the child is able to understand and follow those instructions. Families should notify their nursery/school/college as normal if their child is unable to attend so that staff can explore the reason with them and address barriers together. Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time, and schools and colleges will not be held to account for attendance levels. Schools and colleges should continue to inform social workers where children with a social worker do not attend.

Schools and colleges should resume taking their attendance register and continue to complete the online Educational Setting Status form which gives the Department for Education daily updates on how many children and staff are attending. The Department will continue to monitor attendance at early years settings, via local authorities. This is to ensure that we have up-to-date information on available early years and childcare provision during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, which children are accessing it and to monitor sufficiency in particular areas.

Vulnerable children and young people

There is a continuing expectation that vulnerable children and young people of all year groups will attend educational or childcare provision, where it is safe and appropriate for them do so. As per the current guidance, where these children and young people are currently not attending but attendance is appropriate, we expect providers and local authorities to consider how to encourage their attendance.

Vulnerable children and young people in this context include those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child. Attendance is expected, unless their social worker decides that they are at less risk at home or in their placement. The educational provider should notify the social worker in cases where these children or young people do not take up their place at school or college
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and it is determined, following a risk assessment, carried out with educational providers and parents, that their needs can be as safely or more safely met in the educational environment
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who are therefore in need of continued education provision - this might include children on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services, adopted children, those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training'), those who are young carers and others at the provider and local authority's discretion

Alternative Provision

Alternative Provision (AP) settings should follow the same principles and guidance as mainstream schools and welcome back, from 1 June 2020, all children in Reception, year 1 and year 6. AP settings do not have a year 12, so they should also offer some face to face support for students in year 10 and year 11 to supplement their remote education, as they are approaching key transition points. In line with the advice above for mainstream provision, settings should limit the numbers in attendance at any one time and aim to keep students in small groups as set out in our guidance. Settings should also consider ways to minimise use of public transport to get to and from school at peak times, in consultation with local authorities. Priority groups of all ages should continue to be offered a place and strongly encouraged to attend.

Special schools

Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools should work towards welcoming back as many children and young people as can be safely catered for in their setting. They may want to prioritise attendance based on key transitions and the impact on life chances and development, and to consider creating part-time attendance rotas so that as many children as possible can benefit from attending their setting. Special settings should work with local authorities and families to ensure that decisions about attendance are informed by existing risk assessments for their children and young people, which should be kept up to date.

Sixth form and further education (FE) colleges

Sixth form colleges should offer some face to face support to students in year 12 to supplement their remote education, alongside their offer to priority groups.

Further education (FE) colleges should also offer some face to face support to students who are in the equivalent of year 10 and year 12, who are studying for key examinations next academic year, along with those in priority groups. We will work with the sector to provide additional guidance for FE colleges on provision for these and other disproportionately affected learners.

Curriculum

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) sets the standards that schools and childcare settings must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. Early years settings should use reasonable endeavours to deliver the learning and development requirements as far as possible in the current circumstances, as set out here.

Schools and colleges continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate all their pupils during this period, based on the local context and staff capacity.

Where year groups are returning to school, we would expect school leaders and teachers to:

- consider their pupils' mental health and wellbeing and identify any pupil who may need additional support so they are ready to learn.
- assess where pupils are in their learning, and agree what adjustments may be needed to the school curriculum over the coming weeks.

- identify and plan how best to support the education of high needs groups, including disadvantaged pupils, and SEND and vulnerable pupils.
- support pupils in Year 6, who will need both their primary and secondary schools to work together to support their upcoming transition to Year 7.

Schools should use best endeavours to support pupils attending school as well as those remaining at home, making use of the available remote education support.

No school will be penalised if they are unable to offer a broad and balanced curriculum to their pupils during this period.

Priority groups

Settings will need to consider how they integrate children and young people from priority groups who are attending but not in any of the transition year groups into their education offer. Settings have the flexibility to make the right decision for their circumstances on how these pupils are supervised, continue to learn and are supported in school.

Assessment and accountability

There are no changes to the previously announced expectations on assessment and accountability. No examinations or assessments will take place this term and Ofsted will continue to pause routine inspection.

Staff workload and wellbeing

Governing boards and senior leaders should be conscious of the wellbeing of all staff, including senior leaders themselves, and the need to implement flexible working practices in a way that promotes good work-life balance and supports teachers and leaders.

Workload should be carefully managed and schools and colleges should assess whether staff who are having to stay at home due to health conditions are able to support remote education, while others focus on face-to-face provision. Senior leaders and boards will want to factor this into their resource and curriculum planning, and consider where additional resource could be safely brought in if necessary.

Transport

Parents and children and young people should be encouraged to walk or cycle where possible, and avoid public transport at peak times.

Government will shortly publish guidance on how to travel safely, which schools, parents and young people can refer to when planning their travel, particularly if public transport is required.

Home to school transport provided or organised by schools, trusts or local authorities varies widely. Schools, trusts and local authorities should work together and with relevant transport providers to put in place arrangements which fit the local circumstances, including the measures being put in place to reduce contact. Further guidance is available in Guidance on implementing protective measures.

Food

Schools should provide meals for all children in school, and meals should be available free of charge where pupils meet the free school meal (FSM) eligibility criteria. To ensure food is available for pupils who attend, educational settings are expected to reopen their kitchens and ensure that meals are able to be prepared and served safely.

We are also continuing to ask schools to work with their food providers to offer meals or food parcels for benefits-related free school meal pupils not in school. Now that schools are opening more widely, school catering teams will be better placed to do this. The provision of food vouchers for those eligible under the benefits criteria will also continue to be available where needed. Information on supporting those in FE with free meals is in the FE operational guidance.

Costs associated with opening for more children and young people

As previously confirmed, schools will continue to receive their core funding allocations – as determined by the local authority for maintained schools and through the general annual grant (GAG) for academies. FE colleges continue to receive funding in line with the flexibilities that have been announced in recent weeks including payment on profile for 16-19 study programmes without reconciliation. In addition, we have announced a fund for schools to cover specific additional costs as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak – this remains open and should be used by schools as appropriate. Access to the wider business support schemes, including Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), can continue to be used for staff typically paid for through private income, on condition that the principles in Department of Education's sector specific guidance continue to be met.

For early years settings, the dedicated schools grant (DSG) should continue to be paid by local authorities for provision of free entitlements. Where parents are accessing hours beyond the free entitlements they are eligible for, early year providers should continue to charge parents in the normal way. The wider business support packages can continue to be used as appropriate, including the loan schemes and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), on condition that the principles in Department for Education's sector specific guidance continue to be met.

We are continuing to work with the childcare sector to understand how the early years sector can best be supported to ensure that sufficient safe, appropriate and affordable childcare is available for those returning to work now, and for all families who need it in the longer term.

Further guidance and support

We have published:

- supporting guidance on protective measures which should be implemented in education settings
- guidance for parents and carers

This complements the existing guidance for schools and educational settings that continues to be relevant (and which will be updated in due course where needed).

We will publish further guidance for senior leaders to enable them to work through the actions they need to take to get ready for 1 June 2020. This will be co-produced with experienced school and trust leaders and sector representatives.

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1. Throughout this document there is a distinction made between 'vulnerable children' which has a wide definition as described in this link and in the relevant section below; and those who are 'clinically vulnerable' to coronavirus. ↩

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