CORONAVIRUS (COVID19)

EDUCATION RESTART

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted that schools across Northern Ireland have now successfully opened and pupils have returned to education on the basis of The New School Day guidance published by my Department on 19 June 2020 and updated on 13 August and 29 September.

This fourth edition of the guidance makes a number of further amendments and additions to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for schools and Education settings issued on 29 September to reflect:

- the recent strengthening of restrictions agreed by the Executive on public gatherings;
- additional public health guidance on when to self-isolate and how to deal with those who refuse to test and /or self-isolate;
- up to date policy on educational visits; and,
- expanded advice on ventilation in schools.

My Department's this guidance continues to be informed by advice provided by the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).based on the scientific and public health advice available at the time of writing. It will continue to be monitored and amended to reflect any updates to public health guidance as the pandemic continues.
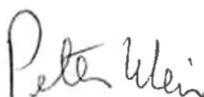
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Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings in Northern Ireland

Published on xx December 2020

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Key Changes

Key Changes since Northern Ireland Re-Opening Schools Guidance – New School Day published on 28 September 2020.

- Introduction – update of paragraphs 18&19 on page 10&11 regarding **school behaviour policy** to clarify consideration should be given to appropriate sanctions including suspension and expulsion for non-compliance with COVID-19 related school policies.

- Section 1 – Clarification that:
    - **tele-conference or video-conference must be used for all parent-teacher meetings**
    - **Open Nights/Days are not permitted**
    - **All in school meetings with more than six adults must be held by tele-conference or video-conference**. (Page 17 - see table and paragraph 9 & 10)
    - **Physical attendance by staff at external training events should be strongly discouraged.**

- Section 1 – Clarification that it is **recommended that schools prohibit attendance of spectators at school based sports and cultural events** (Page 18 - see table and paragraph 9)

- Section 1 – Clarification on **educational visits and school trips** (Page 19 paragraph 10)

- Section 1 - has been updated guidance **meetings within schools and overseas educational visits** (Page 17, paragraphs 19-10)

- Section 1 – Expanded advice on **ventilation** (Page 24 paragraph 25-31)

- Section 2 – has been updated guidance **on the use of face coverings on public transport and school transport** (Page 37, paragraph 34)

- Section 3 - has been updated to provide **clarification on the circumstances when a close contact may have occurred in transport settings**. (Page 43, paragraph 28)

- Section 3 - has been updated guidance **on the use of face coverings on public transport and school transport for primary and post-primary pupils** (Pages 40 - 43, paragraphs 7, 16 and 20)

- Section 3 - has been updated guidance **on public transport and school transport for persons developing symptoms** (Page 43 paragraphs 28)

- Section 8 – has been updated to clarify staff and pupils are expected to follow advice and **self isolate immediately they become aware of being in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case**. (Page 62, paragraphs 7 and 8)

- Section 8 – has been updated to **clarify action when a child refuses to, or is physically unable to take a COVID-19 test**. (Page 65, paragraphs 14 and15)

- Section 8 - has been updated guidance **on Test Trace and Protect** (Pages 63 - 66, paragraphs 7, 8 10, 11 and 14)

Introduction

1. This guidance has been developed for education settings, to support a safe re-opening 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 September 2020 and is based on the scientific evidence as at 27 November 2020. It will be kept continually under review as the science and public health guidance changes.

2. The aims of this guidance are to:

   - provide clarity with regard to practical approaches for a safe re-opening 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.

3. The guidance, developed as part of an overall Education 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.**

4. Where this guidance states that Managing Authorities and schools:

   - "should" do something, there is a clear expectation that it should be done;

   - "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.; and

   - "must" or "strongly recommended", it is expected that schools will implement these changes.

5. 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.

Note: Wider legislative changes made by the Northern Ireland Executive may impact on school settings and the Department of Education will monitor and provide advice as required.

Summary of Key Scientific and Public Health Advice

6. 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.

7. A 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, set out its assessment of some of the risks of re-opening schools in England in September.

8. 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.

9. The SAGE[1] paper highlighted 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).

10. The fight against COVID-19 has had, and will continue for some time to have, profound implications for society as a whole. Despite these challenges, the Northern Ireland Executive has and will continue to prioritise education for our children and young people. This guidance has been prepared to deliver on that

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[1] Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

intent and provide an environment that is safe for our children, education workforce and wider population recognising that to balance that greater restrictions have been placed on other elements of society.

COVID-19 Risk

11. 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 'Close Contact' as per Public Health guidance is defined as follows:

   A person who has been close to a confirmed case from 2 days before the person was symptomatic to 10 days after the onset of symptoms and:

   a. Lives in the same household

   b. has travelled in a car with the case OR

   c. has been within 2 metres of a case for more than 15 minutes OR

   d. has been within 1 metre of a case and had face-to-face contact including:

      i. being coughed on

      ii. having a face-to-face conversation

      iii. having skin-to-skin physical contact

12. Passing in corridors and short periods of contact does not therefore present a significant risk to staff or pupils, however, it is strongly recommended that face coverings are used in post-primary schools. Extra consideration should be given to interactions between adult staff which must be minimised in areas such as staff common rooms. Face coverings should be worn by adults where they cannot keep at 2m distance and are interacting with other adults or young people.

Key COVID-19 Symptoms

13. The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

   - a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature), or;

   - a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual), or;

- anosmia - the loss or a change in your normal sense of smell (it can also affect your sense of taste).

Social Distancing in Education Settings

14. The Executive, on 6 August 2020, agreed that the stringent application of social distancing requirements between pupils would be relaxed from 17 August. Public Health guidance with respect to social distancing of 2 metres (2m) remains 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.

15. 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 School (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.

16. 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 of the key 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 should 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. Face coverings are strongly recommended in post-primary settings for use in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets) where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain.

- 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 present a valid, up to date school absence letter from the child's consultant and, as required, contact the Education Authority regarding education provision for these pupils.

New StopCovid NI Proximity App

17. 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 strongly encouraged to download this free application to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and should comply with any notifications to self isolate delivered via the App.

18. Staff and pupils should be mindful that the app uses the lcation of each phone to identify contacts. This means that phones stored on handbags, lockers and school bags may inadverently identify the user as a close contact.. Phones should therefore be carried at all times and not left in lockers or bags stored away from the person. Staff and pupils should be encouraged to 'pause' the app when they are not carrying their phone with them to limit such unintended notifications

Test, Trace and Protect

19. 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. It is important this record includes all those attending schools which may include HSC staff who may be supporting children within the school environment. 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.

Pupil Behaviour

20. Schools should consider reviewing their pupil behaviour policy, in consultation with staff, pupils and their parents/carers, for the safety of all students and staff. For example, schools may wish to set out in detail their expectations on pupils in relation to hand-washing, hygiene, social distancing, bubbles, arrival, departure and moving around the school.

21. The policy should make provisions for the sanctions that will be applied including suspension and expulsion, if a pupil refuses to adhere to the school's safety measures or behaves in a way that puts themselves or others at risk, such as spitting or deliberately coughing at pupils or staff.

Parental Support

22. Parents have a key role in making schools safe and should
    - Promote compliance with school guidance / guidance /rules including on both public transport and dedicated school transport.
    - Ensure compliance with PHA guidance of child isolating while awaiting test results whether an identified close contact or staying at home if symptomatic.
    - Inform their child why they should comply with guidance.

How to Use this Guidance

1. This guidance provides an overarching framework for 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 2020 and wider COVID-19 related guidance issued by the Public Health Agency.

2. 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.

3. 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 Education Authority (EA) and are available **here.**

4. This guidance will be kept under review to keep abreast of updates from advice provided by the Public Health Agency.

5. For further advice and support on any aspect of this guidance principals should contact their C-19 Link Officer, the EA dedicated Covid-19 helpline, 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.

6. The EA's Youth Restart Page - https://www.youthonline.org.uk/restart/ contains further guidance relevant to Youth Services.

Key Principles

7. 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

8. Opening of educational settings during the pandemic should take full account of scientific and medical advice as provided by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) in the UK, 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

9. 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;

10. Other mitigating action which should be employed include:

- Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school.

- Where recommended, use of face coverings in schools.

- Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual.

- Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.

- Introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach.

- Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible.

- Where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

- Engage with the PHA Test and Trace process.

- Manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the school community.

- Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice.

WHEN SCHOOLS FOLLOW THE GUIDANCE SET OUT HERE THEY WILL EFFECTIVELY REDUCE RISKS IN THEIR SCHOOL AND CREATE AN INHERENTLY SAFER ENVIRONMENT.

Risk Assessments

11. 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. It is a legal requirement that employers must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, a representative chosen by staff. As an employer, you cannot decide who the representative will be. To support this, the Education Authority have developed good practice risk assessments which have been shared across education settings via existing communication channels.

Remote Learning

12. There may still be a need for schools to provide remote learning for some particularly clinically vulnerable children or whilst a class or large group of pupils are required to self-isolate.

13. Further guidance on supporting remote learning has been provided by the Department **here.**

Home Tuition

14. On 22 September, further restrictions were placed on households in Northern Ireland. Educational services to children at home such as the services of a home tutor are permitted under the exemption "…the services of any trade or profession at the private dwelling". Further guidance is available **here**.

Clear Communication

15. Ongoing communication and dialogue with all trades unions, staff, Boards of Governors (BoGs), parents/carers and pupils 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.

16. 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
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.
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.
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.
Schools must not bring classes together for whole school or year group assemblies.
While travel in corridors is viewed as low risk, schools should encourage a 'one way' system to maintain distancing.
In post-primary settings, face coverings are strongly recommended for use in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets).
Parents and carers should be discouraged from congregating at school gates, perhaps with staggered start and end times.
When providing one-to-one care for SEN or vulnerable pupils, adult to adult social distancing should be maintained at all times. It is important in cases where staff are working closely with children e.g. in carrying out Aerosol Generating Procedures that the necessary PPE is used in line with guidance.

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.

As part of the child's care there may be HSC staff visiting schools who will be wearing PPE in line with HSC Trust policy and who will work within the schools COVID management arrangements.

- tele-conference or video-conference must be used for all parent-teacher meetings
- School open days / evenings are not permitted
- All in school meetings with more than six adults must be held by tele-conference or video-conference.
- Face to face meeting must not exceed 6 adults and must comply fully with current health advice on social distancing.
- Physical attendance by staff at external training events should be strongly discouraged. However, attendance at statutory training sessions which have been thoroughly risk assessed and cannot be facilitated online remains appropriate

Spectators (i.e. Parents, siblings and carers) should be advised they must not attend school sporting or cultural events

(i) Methods of Social Distancing

1. Social distancing measures fall into two broad categories:-
   - increasing separation; and
   - decreasing interaction.

2. 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.

3. 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. Face coverings are strongly recommended in post primary

settings for use in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets) where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain.

4. 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.

5. For children and young people in Special Schools with the most complex additional support needs, schools should involve lead professionals and parents to decide how best to continue supporting them.

Increasing Separation

6. 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 5 on Curriculum Delivery).

7. 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.

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

9. In light of the recent changes to Public Health guidance tightening controls on social interaction, tele-conference or video-conference must be used for parent-teacher meetings, school training events and all in school meetings. Face to face meetings must not exceed six adults and must comply fully with current public health advice on social distancing. Likewise, to ensure robust compliance with

social distancing guidance, settings should prohibit spectators (i.e. Parents, siblings and carers) from attending schools sports events and cultural events.

10. Domestic (UK) overnight and overseas educational visits have been paused and should not be arranged. This advice remains under review. Schools can resume non-overnight domestic educational visits. These trips should include any trips for pupils with SEN connected with their preparation for adulthood (for example, workplace visits or travel training). This should be done in line with protective measures, such as keeping children within their consistent group, and the COVID-secure measures in place at the destination. Schools should also make use of outdoor spaces in the local area to support the delivery of the curriculum. As normal, schools should undertake full and thorough risk assessments in relation to all educational visits to ensure they can be done safely. As part of this risk assessment, schools will need to consider what control measures need to be used and ensure they are aware of wider advice on visiting indoor and outdoor venues. Schools should consult existing health and safety guidance on educational visits when considering visits.

Self-Contained Cohorts (Protective Bubbles)

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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

14. 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. Supplementary guidance for Special Schools is available **here.**

Social Distancing in Boarding Schools

15. Boarding schools and residential facilities will have their own particular challenges. Supplementary guidance for Boarding Schools is available **here**.

Social Distancing For Wraparound Care and Extended Schools

16. 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.

17. Wraparound support 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.

18. 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 Contractors[2] and Deliveries

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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. If a visitor (e.g. equipment rep) is required to come into the school, in the best interests of the child, then this is appropriate and should be supported. It is however important that they adhere to public health guidance, work within the measures put in place by the school to manage the spread of COVID and where necessary use the relevant level of PPE.

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

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

23. 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.

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

- The Executive has agreed that strict social distancing requirements between all pupils will be relaxed but 2m 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.

- Appropriate[3] 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.

- Ensure that any social distancing measures still allow for hygiene measures to be implemented.

24. Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas are provided as illustrative documents[4]. 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

25. Emerging evidence points to the importance of good ventilation in reducing transmission through aerosols and airborne particles. The use of ventilation, whether natural or by mechanical means, should therefore be maximised as far as practicable.

26. Where applicable, ventilation systems should be checked or adjusted to ensure they do not automatically reduce/increase ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels. Recirculation of air between spaces, rooms or zones occupied by different people should be avoided. It is important that where users can intervene in the control of mechanical ventilation systems they are made aware of the benefit of these for reducing the circulation of infectious material.

27. 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, but users will need to achieve a balance between maximising ventilation and achieving a tolerable working temperature.

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[3] Including for visually impaired
[4] Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas (1)
  Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas (2)

28. To ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and pupils the ambient temperature in a workplace should not be below 16°C. In cooler weather windows should be opened just enough to provide constant background ventilation, and opened more fully during breaks to purge the air in the space.

29. To balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature, the following measures should also be considered where appropriate:

   - opening high level windows in preference to low level to reduce draughts
   - increasing the ventilation while spaces are unoccupied (e.g. between classes, during break and lunch, when a room is unused)
   - providing flexibility to allow wearing additional, suitable indoor clothing
   - rearranging furniture where possible to avoid direct drafts

   Heating should be used as necessary to ensure comfort levels are maintained, particularly in occupied spaces.

30. 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.

31. 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 and health and safety requirements. Education settings will be best placed to consider the right approach for their own individual circumstances. Guidance and discussion on good ventilation produced by SAGE and CIBSE is available here:

   - SAGE guidance on ventilation
   - CIBSE ventilation guidance

(iii) Decreasing Physical Interaction

32. 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. Face coverings are strongly recommended to be worn in post-primary settings when moving in corridors or confined communal areas where physical distancing is difficult to maintain.

33. 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

34. 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:

  o 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.

  o 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:

  o Staggered drop off/pick up times or longer drop off windows, so that not all children arrive onsite at one time.

  o If the school has additional access points, consideration may be given to whether it would be beneficial to open these to reduce congestion.

  o Consideration may be given to where children go as they arrive at the setting. This could include going straight to their small groups' designated learning space/classroom, which could be indoors or outdoors.

  o 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.

- o 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.

- o Where learning spaces can be accessed directly from outside, this should be encouraged to decrease interactions between individuals in circulation spaces.

- o 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:

- o 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 to help with way finding, along with taping off of specific areas.

- o 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.

o Some new schools utilise 3D digital models or 360 photography/videos to allow remote familiarisation prior to occupation. This approach may be considered for 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.

o 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

35. 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 4.

- 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; and

- discouraging sharing of cutlery/crockery.

(vi) Space Utilisation

36. 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.

37. 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

38. 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.

39. 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

40. 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.

41. 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.

42. 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. Advice on the managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms is available at **here.**

(vii) Childcare provision

43. 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.

44. 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.

45. 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.

46. 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; and,
- arrangements for use of outdoor spaces.

Section 2 - Hygiene and Physical Protection

Hygiene and Physical Protection
Children must wash hands as soon as they arrive at school and regularly through the school day.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will only be required in a very small number of cases e.g. dealing with intimate needs/ giving medication. HSC staff supporting children in the educational setting may be wearing PPE in line with HSC Trust guidance.
PPE should not be worn by children.
All cleaning will be carried out in accordance with PHA Guidance. Routine general cleaning should take place at least daily.
Regular cleaning of door handles, desk tops etc. will take place throughout the day.
Schools should remove unnecessary items from classroom e.g. soft toys, and other learning materials that are hard to clean.
Enhanced cleaning must be carried out following an outbreak of COVID-19.

(i) Personal Hygiene

1. 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 (preferably with a disposable paper towel / 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.

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

3. 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).

4. 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.

5. 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.

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

School Uniforms

7. 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

8. 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 and building supervisors are familiar with the processes every year in re-opening for the new terms.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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 occasions 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.

12. 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](#).

13. 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.

14. Resources which are not easily washable or wipe-able should not be shared between classes or bubbles and if necessary removed from classrooms. When

operating in consistent class bubbles, such as primary school foundation stages, such materials can be used when they are only used within an individual bubbles and are not shared in any way between bubbles. In settings with a morning and afternoon session resources will need to be cleaned between sessions.

15. All settings should be aware that where a confirmed COVID-19 case is identified within a bubble, any material that cannot be effectively cleaned will need to be quarantined for 72 hours or disposed of.

16. 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.

17. 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.

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

19. 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'.

20. Should a COVID-19 confirmed case occur, the EA cleaning service should be notified[5]. Following notification the normal process is undertaken of identifying the relevant location/s within the school where any incidence of COVID-19 is likely to have happened. An enhanced clean of the location will be conducted with staff using appropriate PPE and the location can then be used again safely. A normal cleaning regime then resumes thereafter.

21. 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.

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[5] Please note that this applies to all schools including GMI and VGS

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

Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

22. 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.

23. PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases. These are;

   - working with children, young people and pupils whose care routinely <u>already</u> 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).

24. 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.

25. 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.

   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.

26. Children should not wear PPE.

27. 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.

28. 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'.

29. 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

30. 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.

31. 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 are not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing.

32. Safe wearing of face coverings requires cleaning of hands before and after touching – including to remove or put them on – and the safe storage of them in individual, sealable plastic bags between use. Where a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn and should be replaced carefully.

33. This advice covers all education settings including EOTAS, Special Education provision and boarding schools.

34. In light of the latest scientific advice from the World Health Organisation, and from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Officer, the advice on the use of face coverings within education settings, unless a reasonable excuse applies under public health guidance is as follows:

- In Primary schools children are recommended not to use face coverings because of the range of mitigation measures schools have in place, the reduced rate of transmission to and from children of this age.

- Face coverings are strongly recommended to be worn where adults and young people in post-primary schools (including special schools and independent and grant aided schools) are moving about the school in corridors and confined communal areas (including toilets) where physical distancing is particularly difficult to maintain.

- In line with the current arrangements for public transport, it is mandatory for all pupils of post primary age to wear a face covering on public transport or school transport unless they have a reasonable excuse not to. Examples of reasonable excuses can be found **here** and include physical or mental impairment or disability, and causing severe distress. It is also strongly recommended that all primary aged pupils, regardless of age, should wear a face covering on all public transport and school transport services for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.

- Outside of classrooms, face coverings must be worn by adults where they cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face with other adults and/or children and young people; and, by all adults visiting the school site.

- Face coverings are strongly recommended for activities that entail large numbers of staff or pupils within an enclosed space where social distancing is not possible.

- 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 and this should be treated sensitively. No one should be excluded from school for failure to have or wear a face covering.

Using Face Coverings

35. It is vital that clear instructions are provided to staff and children and young people on how to put on, remove, store and dispose of face coverings in all of the circumstances above, to avoid inadvertently increasing the risks of transmission. The key points are as follows:

- Face coverings should not be shared with others.

- Before putting on or removing the face covering, hands should be cleaned by washing with soap and water or hand sanitiser.

- Make sure the face covering is the right size to cover the nose, mouth and chin. Children should be taught how to wear the face covering properly, including not touching the front and not pulling it under the chin or into their mouth.

- When temporarily storing a face covering (e.g. during classes), it should be placed in a washable, sealed bag or container. Avoid placing it on surfaces, due to the possibility of contamination.

- Re-usable face coverings should be washed after each day of use in school at 60 degrees centigrade or in boiling water.

- Disposable face coverings must be disposed of safely and hygienically. Children and young people should be encouraged not to litter and to place their face coverings in the general waste bin. They are not considered to be clinical waste in the same way that used PPE may be.

- Further information on face coverings can be found **here**.

Visors

36. Visors only protect the eyes and are only required where there is a risk of splashing. They are therefore only recommended for basic PPE when worn with a mask, plastic apron and gloves, as they do not offer the same protection as a mask or face covering which cover the nose and the mouth.

37. They offer little protection worn on their own and are not recommended for routine use in schools. Staff remain free to procure and wear them at their own expense.

Section 3 - School Transport

1. 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.

2. 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.

Key Messages

3. To ensure the overall safety of the school population, children showing any symptoms of COVID-19 **should not travel** to school.

4. 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.**

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. **It is mandatory for all post-primary aged pupils to wear a face covering on both public transport and school transport services. It is also strongly recommended that all primary aged pupils regardless of age should wear a face covering on both public transport and school transport services where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.**

8. Good hand hygiene practices must be adhered to at all times and these are detailed on the PHA website.

9. 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.

10. Schools may also wish to give consideration to their arrangements for 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.

11. 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

12. 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.

13. 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.** All other mitigating

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

14. The Department considers that this is an appropriate balance because:

- The overall risk to children and young people from COVID-19 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, of dedicated school transport, which public transport does not afford, will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in place.

15. 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

16. The Department for Infrastructure's Safer travel guidance 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. All pupils should seek to socially distance on all public transport and school transport services if it is possible to do so. The wearing of a face covering on both forms of transport is mandatory for those of post-primary age and strongly recommended for those of primary school age for those who are able to do so.

17. 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.

18. Further information in relation to school transport for special schools is available **here**.

Measures to Protect Pupils on Dedicated and Public Transport Services

19. There are a range of measures that have been 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.

Use of face coverings

20. Following a decision by the Executive guidance on 29 October 2020, it is now mandatory for all those of post primary age to wear a face covering when travelling on all public transport and school transport. 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 primary aged children. Further details can be found **here.** While it is not mandatory for primary school pupils to wear face coverings it is strongly recommended that all primary pupils should wear a face covering on all public transport and school transport for the journey to school where they are able to do so.

21. 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.

22. 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.

Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell

23. 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.

24. 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.

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

26. Drivers and escorts will be provided with PPE as recommended by Public health advice 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 at Section 8 in responding to a child who may be showing COVID-19 symptoms.

27. 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.

28. 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) a member of their household develops symptoms or they have been advised to self isolate by PHA.

    Should a pupil test positive they will be asked about their journey to school. Any close contacts identified on home to school transport will be notified.

Good hygiene measures

29. 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.

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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. Mechanical ventilation may be used if available, however air recirculation will be avoided where possible.

Vehicle cleaning

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

Minimising contact and mixing

35. 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.

36. 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.

37. 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

38. 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 the Department for Infrastructure and the Public Health Agency.

39. Guidance will address areas such as:
    - What is expected from parents;
    - What is expected from pupils;
    - What they can expect from the EA

40. The EA 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.

Section 4 – School Meals Catering Services

1. This guidance is intended to provide some overarching principles for the delivery of a school meals service 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.

2. 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.

3. Given the importance of nutritious school meals in enabling pupils to concentrate and learn when at school, there is a legislative requirement for the provision of school meals in accordance with the arrangements issued by the Department which can be found **here**. A school meal must be adequate in quantity and quality so as to be suitable as the main meal of the day. As we all generally expect our main meal to be a hot one it is therefore expected that a hot meal 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. Initially there may 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. Schools, which have not done so already, should move as soon as possible to the provision of a hot meals service available to all pupils.

Nutritional Standards

4. All food provided in schools must be in keeping with the Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food and Drinks in School Guidance. These standards require drinking water (tap water) to be provided free with lunch every day and that pupils should have easy access at all times to free, fresh, preferably chilled, drinking water in schools.

Special Dietary Requirements

5. 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.

6. 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).

7. 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

8. 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 possible, 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.

9. Where a risk assessment indicates that the provision of a hot meal in the dining hall is not possible, eating in the classroom and/or the provision of a cold packed lunch can be considered. However it should not be assumed that hot meals cannot be provided safely in classrooms. It is important that schools and school caterers work closely to agree pragmatic local solutions to ensure the safe delivery of hot school meals. In this scenario the use of disposable packaging and cutlery may be required.

COVID-19 Measures

10. School kitchens can continue to operate, but must comply with the guidance for food businesses on coronavirus: Re-opening and adapting your food business during COVID-19.

11. 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 in another designated room.

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

13. 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

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

15. 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.

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

17. 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.

Section 5 - Curriculum Delivery

Curriculum in Pre-Schools and Primary Schools

1. 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.

2. 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. Furthermore, 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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 <u>two</u> hours of PE a week and where at all possible schools should endeavour to deliver this recommendation.

7. 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.

8. 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

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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. Regulations on maximum class sizes in practical subjects remain in place.

12. 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.

13. 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

14. 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.

15. However, it is accepted that schools will require limited mixing into different class bubbles/groups to adhere to legal requirements for practical subjects. Additional bubbles should be consistent to maximise the benefits of segmentation. Similarly, a year group may come together for outdoor PE or games.

Post-14 Curriculum

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. Some young people access qualification courses in other schools or Further Education 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.

Remote Learning

19. If an individual child has to self-isolate for a designated period due to COVID-19, parents should talk directly to their school about provision of education material.

20. Schools should continue to contingency plan for the delivery of remote learning[6] in the event of local or wider school closures, or that a class or a large group of pupils within the class need to self-isolate. In the current public health context, schools will wish to have detailed plans in place.

21. The Department's Circular (2020/05) Guidance for Schools on Supporting Remote Learning provides advice and guidance to schools on supporting remote learning. It outlines a range of key principles for the development of a remote learning programme.

22. A small number of children will be advised by their clinical team not to attend school. Where a child has been medically advised by a consultant not to attend school during 2020/21, parents should consult with their school Principal and, as required, the Education Authority regarding education provision for these pupils.

Blended Learning

23. Blended learning is distinct from remote learning and involves a combination of in class and remote learning. It 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

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[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.

Section 6 - Workforce[7]

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

27. 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. 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.

28. **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
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.
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.
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.
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.

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

(i) Workforce Attendance

Staff Who Are Clinically Vulnerable

29. 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 Direct Government website 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.

30. 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 metres[1] 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 metres[1] of other people, Principals/line managers should undertake a risk assessment with the individual to assess and control measures to reduce risk. The employee can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague to discuss individual risk assessments. They should, if necessary, be offered the safest available on-site roles.

Pregnancy and Risk

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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. The employee can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague to discuss individual risk assessments.

34. Further information is available **here.**

Staff Who Live With Someone Who is Vulnerable

35. 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.

36. With effect from 01 August 2020 "Shielding" has been paused and full details can be found **here**.

37. 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. An employee can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague to discuss individual risk assessments.

Staff Who Were Previously Shielding

38. Prior to 1 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.

39. These restrictions eased over time and with effect from 01 August 2020 "Shielding" has been paused. Full details can be found **here.**

40. 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. The employee can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague to discuss individual risk assessments.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME)

41. There is evidence that COVID-19 may disproportionately affect some groups, notably Black, Asian 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.

42. All Minority Ethnic staff with underlying health conditions and disabilities, who are over 70 or who are pregnant should be individually risk assessed. An employee can be accompanied by a trade union representative or colleague to discuss individual risk assessments.

43. The EA and schools will also need to be mindful of their wider equality obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

(ii) Workforce Planning[8]

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

44. 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.

45. 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

46. 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

47. 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.

48. The EA and Managing Authorities should take the following actions as part of any wider workforce planning activities:

- 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 re-opening.

49. 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.

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 of 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)

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

51. Activity included a full cleanse of the pool of NISTR teachers available for booking, to remove any teachers whose account has been inactive for two 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.

52. 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
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.
For pupils previously shielding or with a family member who was previously shielding due to being identified as 'clinically extremely vulnerable': Children and adults identified as "clinically extremely vulnerable" were previously advised to shield. Shielding was paused for all adults and children in Northern Ireland from the 1st of August 2020. This means that children and young people can return to school or college even if they: • are clinically extremely vulnerable and were on the shielded patient list • have family members who are clinically extremely vulnerable who were previously shielding.
For pupils who are 'clinically vulnerable' or living with someone who is 'clinically vulnerable': Pupils who are clinically vulnerable or who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable can attend their education setting and should do so.
For pupils who have been advised not to attend school by their treating Consultant. A small number of children will be advised by their clinical team not to attend school. These include some children who are receiving cancer treatment and who recently had an organ transplant. These children will receive individual advice from their treating consultant. *The vast majority of these children would routinely be advised not to attend school even outside pandemic period due to the risk of infections other than COVID-19.*

Pupils previously shielding or with a family member who was previously shielding due to being identified as 'clinically extremely vulnerable'

1. People with certain medical conditions which make them extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 were originally advised to 'shield'. Advice with regard to shielding has eased over time and as of 1 August 2020 'shielding' has been paused. However, those who have previously been shielding remain more at risk than the general population.

2. It is important that schools take all necessary steps to ensure that appropriate social distancing, good handwashing and respiratory hygiene measures are in place and observed by pupils and staff alike irrespective of their previous shielding status.

3. If pupils who have been previously shielding or those with a family member who was previously shielding have particular concerns, advice may be sought from the pupil/their family member's GP or hospital consultant. This may be shared with the school so that the school can determine whether it is appropriate to take any additional actions over and above those already in place in order to reduce the risk further or if the existing actions that are in place within the school setting are sufficient.

Pupils who are 'clinically vulnerable' or living with someone who is 'clinically vulnerable'

4. Pupils who are clinically vulnerable but were not previously shielding or who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable but not previously shielding can attend their education setting and should do so. Details of those conditions deemed 'clinically vulnerable' but not 'extremely clinically vulnerable' are available **here.**

5. It is important that schools should take all necessary steps to ensure that social distancing, good handwashing and respiratory hygiene measures are in place and observed by pupils and staff alike irrespective of their previous shielding status.

Those who have been advised not to attend by their treating Consultant.

6. In light of the Minister's statement of 6 August 2020, 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", attendance is considered mandatory.

7. There will, however, be a small number of children where medical guidance would be to refrain from attending school. The vast majority of these children would routinely be advised not to attend school even outside pandemic period due to the risk of infections other than COVID-19.

8. It may be possible for some children therefore to have attendance recorded on the basis of evidence that the medical advice is that they should refrain from attending school as well as evidence of learning at home. If this is not possible then an unauthorised absence should be recorded.

Recording Attendance

9. Specific guidance in respect of pupil attendance whether at school or at home is set out in DE Circular 2020/08 - Attendance guidance and absence recording by schools.

10. Decisions regarding the recording of pupil attendance will be down to schools and the individual circumstances of each child. If evidence cannot be provided in terms of either the specific medical condition or that learning is being completed then school should record attendance as an unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N) where appropriate.

11. 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 and Operation of the Test and Trace system

1. 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. A series of flowcharts have been developed and are available **here**.

2. 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.

3. If, however, a child does not have symptoms of COVID-19 but has other flu or cold-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, they do not need to be tested and do not need to self-isolate. The child can go to school if fit to do so.

Protective Isolation

4. Isolation is a routine public health practice used to protect the general public and school population by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease. Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick and should not be mistaken for seclusion, a type of restraint which involves confining a person in a room from which the person cannot exit freely.

5. A child awaiting collection should be protectively isolated and moved, if possible, to a room where they can be quarantined behind a closed door (for example a school first aid room). In addition:

- Schools should be mindful of appropriate safeguards to ensure that students are isolated in a non-threatening manner, within the line of sight of adults, and for very short periods of time.

- Appropriate adult supervision must be provided at all times.

- The room should have adequate ventilation and, where windows facilitate being opened, they should be opened to increase air circulation.

- If it is not possible to fully isolate the child in a separate room, as a protective measure for them and others, they should be moved to an area which is at least 2m away from other people.

- Schools should actively plan for this eventuality and a risk assessment should be undertaken to address this.

- Any existing facilities routinely used for protective seclusion should not be used for isolation purposes.

- Schools must fully document this process to ensure a record is held of who made the decision, where isolation occurred, 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.

6. 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

PLEASE NOTE: PHA GUIDANCE ON MANAGEMENT OF A POSITIVE COVID-19 CASE CAN BE UPDATED AT SHORT NOTICE. SCHOOLS SHOULD CHECK C2K EXCHANGE FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION

7. The N.I. Executive has rolled out a Test and Trace and Protect strategy designed to control the spread of COVID-19 and staff and pupils are expected to follow the

advice and self-isolate immediately they become aware of being in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case (staff and pupils should not wait until they are contacted if they know that they have been a close contact). Pupils and staff who exhibit any symptoms associated with COVID-19 should not attend school and anyone who develops symptoms at school will be sent home.

8. If a child or member of staff has symptoms and is off school or has developed symptoms at school (and has been isolated in school and then gone home/been taken home by parent or guardian) the following should happen:

   - The symptomatic child/adult should have a test; pending the result of this the child/adult self-isolates, as does their household.

   - If the test is negative the child or a member of staff can return to school, as long as they have been fever free for 48 hours. The household can return to normal activities as soon as the negative result is known. In this instance there are no further implications for the school.

   - When a pupil or member of staff tests positive they should inform the school principal at the earliest opportunity.

   - If the test is positive the child or staff member should continue to self-isolate until 10 days after the onset of their symptoms and the household continues to self-isolate for 14 days from the onset of symptoms in the first household member.

   - If anyone else in the household develops symptoms during their 14 day self-isolation period, they should seek a test and if positive, that indiviual's 'clock' is reset for 10 days isolation from the first day of symptons. Anyone else in the household who remains symptom free can return to normal activities after their initial 14 day self-isolation period finishes.

   - When a child/adult tests positive the PHA's Test & Trace service will contact the case/parent as appropriate to identify household and community close contacts. They will ask the parent or case to inform the school principal of the result if they attend or work in a school. Close contacts in the school setting are identified by the school principal with the Public Health Agency's education team. The most up to date information on the steps to take is available **here.**

9. The definition of a close contact is as follows:

   A person who has been close to a confirmed case from 2 days before the person was symptomatic to 10 days after the onset of symptoms and:

   a. Lives in the same household;

b. has travelled in a car with the case; OR,

c. has been within 2 metres of a case for more than 15 minutes; OR,

d. has been within 1 metre of a case and had face-to-face contact including:

    i. being coughed on;

    ii. having a face-to-face conversation;

    iii. having skin-to-skin physical contact.

10. Only if a close contact develops COVID-19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, a fever/high temperature or loss of smell/taste) should they seek a test. Their household contacts must also now self-isolate pending the result of that test. If the test is negative: the close contact should still complete their 14 days self-isolation period; and the household contacts can resume normal activities. If the test is positive: the close contact becomes a case and the 'clock' resets for a new period of self-isolation for 10 days from the date of onset of symptoms; and their household contacts should remain in self-isolation until 14 days have passed since the onset of symptoms in their household member. For up to date advice on close contacts please contat the PHA.

PLEASE NOTE THAT CONTACTS OF (SHOWING NO OBVIOUS COVID-19 SYMPTOMS) CLOSE CONTACTS ARE NOT CONTACTS OF THE PERSON WITH CONFIRMED COVID. THEY ARE CONTACTS OF A CONTACT. THEY HAVE NO RESTRICTIONS ON THEIR ACTIVITIES INCLUDING ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL.

In practice this means that siblings of a child who has been identified as a close contact who are not themselves contacts of the case can continue to attend school.

Testing

11. The guidance on testing is as follows:

- Testing is only recommended if a person has any of the symptoms of COVID-19:
    - a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature), or;
    - a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual), or;
    - anosmia - the loss or a change in your normal sense of smell (it can also affect your sense of taste):

- if you have symptoms of coronavirus or, have no symptoms and 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.

12. Enhanced cleaning must be carried out by a properly trained person, within any classroom in which an individual who has developed a confirmed case of 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.

13. Further details can be found at COVID-19: Information for the public.

Non Compliance with Test Trace and Protect

14. Regrettably there are likely to be some staff members and/or pupils who for personal reasons do not wish to comply with the public health guidance in relation to COVID-19 including choosing not to follow the advice to get tested or self-isolate. Equally some SEN pupils may be physically unable to take a COVID-19 test.

15. Where it is clear to a Principal that such an individual has been:

- in a location that requires 14 days quarantine on return; or,

- a close contact of a confirmed case; or,

- displaying clear COVID-19 symptoms;

In line with their general duty of care for all pupils and staff, the Principal should inform them that they cannot attend the school until the required period of self-isolation has been completed and remind pupils and parents of the Pupil Behaviour and the Parental Support required in line with the introduction section of this guidance. Where such an individual attends school they should be isolated in line with the above guidance on protective isolation and be sent home from the school.

Where an individual is displaying symptoms of COVID but will not or cannot have a test, the Principal should discuss the situation with the PHA education team for further advice.

Section 9 - Communications

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

Parents and Carers

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. It must be made clear that parents should not send their children to school if they display any COVID-19 symptoms.

Children and Young People

5. 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.