

Briefing 2019/2020

Number 7 – 6 July 2020

Arrangements for schools from September – frequently asked questions (FAQs)

The following updated FAQs have been developed in light of the Government's re-opening in full of all state schools from 1 September 2020. These FAQs are not exhaustive and are intended to be a helpful reference point for leaders, employees, families and trades unions. All of the information hereafter is consistent with guidance published by the Department for Education, and should be read in conjunction with the latest published advice.

1. What changes for our schools on 1 September 2020?

The Government view continues to be that schools are safe places for children and staff, and therefore all state schools have been asked to re-open in full from 1 September. The term "re-open" is slightly misleading, as many schools across the country have been open throughout the lockdown period, as the Government instructed that an offer must be kept in place for the children of key workers; vulnerable children; and children with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) where families want to take up the offer of a place.

In the "phased reopening" of schools from 1 June 2020, mainstream primary settings were advised to have no more than 15 pupils in a class, in the designated year groups welcomed back, and these have commonly been referred to as "bubbles". From 1 September 2020, schools are being asked to widen "bubbles" to be whole classes or whole year groups.

"Bubbles" or pupil groups will continue to be important, as these will help reduce the number of children and staff required to self-isolate if/when there are instances of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools (covered later in this document). Given the availability of testing and the increase in attendees on sites – in conjunction with the lifting of wider societal restrictions – it is likely that schools will have to respond to an increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases in pupils and/or staff from September 2020.

Headteachers will have updated risk assessments in place to ensure schools are as safe as possible. We will continue to not hold mass gatherings such as whole staff meetings; assemblies; and/or other events unless absolutely essential.

2. Do children have to return to school from 1 September 2020?

Yes – the Government has reinstated statutory attendance measures for all children from 1 September 2020. The relaxation of shielding measures from 1 August 2020 also enables more pupils to return to school. However, Headteachers will continue to work with families, social care and NHS services where families have legitimate concern about their child's wellbeing, and decision making on attendance will be underpinned by a clear risk assessment.

3. Will all staff need to be in school from 1 September 2020?

Yes – the relaxation of shielding measures from 1 August means the Government advice is that shielding is paused. In practice this means that from 1 August 2020 those within these groups can go to work as long as the workplace is COVID-safe. Schools are ready to welcome these staff back with social distancing measures. However, staff should discuss any concerns they have on a case-by-case basis with their Headteacher or line manager should they be unduly worried about the impact of a return to work on their health or the health of a close family member.

4. Will arrangements change after 1 September 2020?

The Government has made it clear that their approach will continue to bend and flex around the prevalence of the COVID-19 virus in local areas. It may therefore mean that schools have to explore partial or full closure for a period, depending on the Government advice. This will be communicated, wherever possible, well in advance for families and staff.

The Government has also stated that they intend to see a return to “normal” working arrangements for all schools by the summer of 2021.

5. Will infection control measures be applied at all times?

All our academies will continue to have enhanced clearing regimes in place to reduce the risk of cross-contamination, and pupils and staff will be grouped together in “bubbles” to minimise unnecessary contact.

It is not possible to ensure social distancing measures are strictly adhered to in our academies at all times, as many of our pupils do not understand this. However, the use of class, year group or key stage “bubbles” will limit the risk of cross-contamination through a whole school.

Supply staff and other temporary workers can move between “bubbles”, and Headteachers will consider how to minimise the number of visitors to the setting where possible. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for pupils should provide interventions as usual.

6. What if an employee has child care responsibilities?

Staff are required to ensure they source their own child care arrangements as they normally would. The Trust has a parental leave policy which staff should refer to.

7. Do staff need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE)?

The DfE advice continues to be that the majority of staff don't require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work, such as if they conduct intimate care. It isn't recommended to wear face coverings or face masks/goggles in schools. We will therefore continue to use gloves and aprons for routine intimate care of pupils.

PPE is not required where restrictive physical intervention (e.g. Team Teach) is undertaken, and staff should continue to follow enhanced infection control measures (i.e. thorough hand washing after the intervention has ended).

Where children spit: unless they have the symptoms of COVID-19, the advice is masks and goggles are not necessary.

For children with specific medical needs and vulnerabilities – such as children with a tracheostomy – there is specific advice and each child with specific needs will have an updated care plan, where more stringent PPE measures may be required. This will be detailed for staff before they are asked to work with a child, with any additional equipment provided.

The exception to the above is if a child becomes unwell with COVID-19 symptoms at school and needs direct personal care until they can go home. In these instances, the supervising staff member(s) should wear a face mask if they can't keep 2 metres away from the pupil, and if the staff member(s) can't avoid contact with the child, they should wear:

- Disposable gloves
- A disposable apron
- A fluid-resistant surgical face mask
- Eye protection (if there's a risk of coughing, spitting or vomiting)

All schools will have an enhanced first aid kit to support staff in these circumstances.

8. Can a staff member or pupil choose to wear a face mask or goggles in school?

Face masks are not required in schools according to Government advice.

Regardless of the scientific evidence, some employees and pupils may find face masks reassuring.

As a general rule, staff and pupils are **not** permitted to wear face masks unless in specific circumstances as defined by a risk assessment.

However, if an employee or pupil's mental health and anxiety will be better managed with the use of a face mask in school – and this is the single means of them attending rather than being absent through sickness – then Headteachers can consider allowing this as a reasonable adjustment on a case by case basis.

This will need to be reviewed regularly, as it is a deviation to the Trust's dress code and may be highly unsettling for others, as well as inhibiting effective communication to support learning.

Where this is agreed as a reasonable adjustment to the dress code policy on a case by case basis, the individual takes full responsibility for the provision of face masks, unless this is being worn at the request of the Headteacher for specific activity. Arrangements will be reviewed at least monthly.

9. Should schools be taking staff and/or pupil temperatures on arrival?

The Government advice is that this isn't necessary, and therefore we will not be routinely taking staff or pupil temperatures in school, unless we have individual cause for concern.

10. Does a class or school need to go into isolation if an employee or pupil has symptoms?

No. The Government advice is that – provided enhanced infection control measures are in place - no one needs to go into isolation unless they themselves display symptoms.

If an employee or pupil has symptoms of COVID-19, however mild, they must stay at home for at least 7 days from when the symptoms started, though getting tested will allow for an earlier return if the result is negative.

If a test cannot be accessed, then after 7 days, if they do not have a high temperature, they do not need to continue to self-isolate. Symptoms are any of the following:

- a new continuous cough;
- a high temperature;
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia).

If an employee or a pupil still have a high temperature, they should keep self-isolating until their temperature returns to normal. They do not need to self-isolate if they only have a cough or anosmia after 7 days, as these symptoms can last for several weeks after the infection has gone.

If an employee or pupil live with others and they are the first in the household to have symptoms of COVID-19, then they must stay at home for at least 7 days. All other household members who remain well must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the household became unwell.

If a staff member or pupil develops symptoms at school, a member of the senior leadership team must be informed immediately and contact with others must be kept to a minimum, whilst an exit plan from school is agreed.

If anyone develops symptoms, they should follow 'Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection' and get tested.

11. Can I access a test?

Yes - testing is now widely available and can be accessed by individuals directly. Schools can support staff and pupils accessing a test if required.

If someone develops symptoms they should get a test, and:

- if the test delivers a negative result, they can return to school immediately (unless they are in a period of preventative 14-day self-isolation, as detailed in section 12 below); OR
- if the test result is positive, they should inform their setting immediately, and must isolate for at least 7 days from the onset of their symptoms (which could mean the self-isolation ends before or after the original 14-day isolation period) - their household should self-isolate for at least 14 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms, following 'Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection'.

12. What if a staff member or a pupil has a confirmed case?

Where a staff member or pupil tests positive for Coronavirus, their class "bubble" will be required to self-isolate for 14 days as a precautionary measure. Anyone else from outside that "bubble" does not need to self-isolate, unless they have been in contact with the individual who has tested positive and meet one of the following criteria:

- face to face contact with a case for any length of time, including being coughed on, a face to face conversation, or unprotected physical contact (skin to skin);
- extended close contact within 1-2 metres for more than 15 minutes; and
- travelling in a small vehicle, like a car, with an infected person

Household members of those who are sent home do not need to self-isolate themselves unless the child, young person or staff member who is self-isolating subsequently develops symptoms.

If an employee or pupil develops symptoms at any point during the 14-day period, they should access a test.

If the test delivers a negative result, they must remain in isolation for the remainder of the 14-day isolation period - this is because they could still develop COVID-19 within the remaining days.

If the test result is positive, they should inform school immediately, and must isolate for at least 7 days from the onset of their symptoms (which could mean the self-isolation ends before or after the original 14-day isolation period) - their household should self-isolate for at least 14 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms, following Government guidance.

13. Where a child is transported to school by a taxi or mini bus, what measures must transport providers follow?

Local Authorities are responsible for home-to-school transport, and are asking providers to ensure social distancing measures are adhered to on buses and that bus routes will be structured around school needs. Schools will not need to plan for what is easier/best for the transport providers.

14. Will staff be expected to visit children at home?

Yes - though this is not common practice for the majority of staff and will continue to be an expectation for only a small number of cases, as all pupils are expected to attend school.

If a member of staff is asked to visit a family home and is uncomfortable doing this, these concerns should be shared with a member of the senior leadership team, for further discussion.

Prior to undertaking a visit, our academies will ascertain whether any member of the household is suffering from symptoms of COVID-19. An initial risk assessment, where possible, should take place by telephone.

Where households report no COVID-19 symptoms, no PPE is required, but social distancing should be maintained where possible. Where this is not possible, senior leaders will undertake a risk assessment. Good basic hygiene should be followed, such as handwashing or use of sanitiser before and after the visit, and not touching your face during the visit.

15. Given the reported over-representation of people from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic category in the Government's mortality data for COVID-19, is there specific advice or guidance in place for pupils or staff from a BAME group?

Whilst the Government have reported emerging trends from reported deaths linked to COVID-19, this is not fully understood and therefore has not yet led to any specific advice or guidance for schools. Any staff or families who feel additional vulnerability – for whatever reason – are encouraged to talk openly to a member of their school's senior leadership team in the first instance.

At this time, there is no evidence-based risk to children or staff from a BAME group in any of our academies.

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