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Department for Education

Guidance

Contingency framework: education and childcare settings (excluding universities)

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Contents

- Who this guidance applies to
- Introduction
- Application of the contingency framework
- The contingency framework
- Infection prevention and control
- Face coverings
- Remote education
- Education workforce
- Safeguarding and designated safeguarding leads
- Exams and assessments
- School and FE meals

Print this page

Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and may only be initiated following a ministerial decision.

This framework is designed to set out how such restrictions would be implemented as a containment measure for the rare circumstances in which they are required to address transmission within education settings and the community.

Who this guidance applies to

This guidance is for local authorities, childcare and education settings (excluding universities).

Early years settings

This includes:

- all providers on the early years register
- providers registered with an early years childminder agency
- all early years provision in schools

Schools (including independent schools) and alternative provision (AP)

This includes:

- primary schools
- middle or upper schools
- secondary schools (including school sixth forms)
- residential and day special schools
- alternative provision (including pupil referral units, AP academies and AP free schools)
- 16 to 19 academies

Further education providers (FE)

This includes:

- sixth form colleges
- general FE colleges
- independent training providers
- designated institutions
- adult community learning providers
- special post-16 institutions

Out of school settings

This includes:

- breakfast clubs
- after-school or holiday clubs
- other out-of-school settings (including providers of wraparound childcare for children over the age of 5)

Introduction

The impacts of missing education are severe for children, young people and adults, both now and in the future. The evidence is very clear that being out of education causes significant harm to learning, life chances and mental and physical health. This is especially true for our most vulnerable children and young people. Lower academic achievement also translates into long-term economic costs which affects the standard of living that pupils and students will have over the course of their entire life.

Having reviewed the available evidence, the UK Chief Medical Officers issued a statement which makes clear that children and young people continue to be at low risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) and the risk from the virus of severe disease and death to children and young people is very low. This position was confirmed more recently by Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

The balance of risk is overwhelmingly in favour of children and young people remaining in education or childcare. For the vast majority of children and young people, the benefits of being back in education far outweigh the very low risk from coronavirus (COVID-19).

It is also important that parents and carers are able to return to work and having access to childcare will allow that to happen.

While it is not possible to ensure that any working environment is totally risk-free, there is reassuring evidence that staff working in childcare and education settings are not at higher risk than workers in other sectors. Considering risks to teachers and school staff, ONS analysis shows no evidence of differences in the positivity rate between primary and secondary school teachers, other key workers and other professions.

Application of the contingency framework

The government has made it a national priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normal as possible during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This remains the default position for all areas irrespective of local restriction tiers.

There is detailed guidance for education settings and providers operating during coronavirus (COVID-19), including:

- actions for early years and childcare providers
- actions for schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- protective measures for holiday and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- guidance for special schools and other specialist settings

> Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and may only be initiated following a ministerial decision. This framework is designed to set out how such restrictions would be implemented as a containment measure for the rare circumstances in which they are required to address transmission within education settings and the community.

Any decision to initiate local restrictions to any childcare or education settings will not be taken lightly and will be made by a ministerial decision on a case-by-case basis in the light of local and national circumstances.

The decision to apply the contingency framework outlined in a given area will be made by ministers within the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will work with other government departments, the Chief Medical Officer, the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), Public Health England (PHE) and relevant local authorities to ensure the decision is informed by the available evidence, via the existing mechanisms for decision-making about local restrictions (with which local authorities and directors of public health already engage).

Depending on the scientific and public health advice, DfE may advise implementation of this contingency framework across any geographical area (a cluster of settings, local area, local authority or region).

If there is significant concern that restrictions in an area have failed to mitigate community transmission, and that restrictions on education or childcare settings might also be needed, the JBC will facilitate a discussion with the Director of Public Health (DPH) and DfE's regional teams to consider the next steps.

> Any restrictions will be kept under review and will be lifted as soon as the public health and scientific advice says it is appropriate to do so. The guiding principle for any decision making will be that any restrictions to attendance on site are kept to a minimum.

As part of their contingency planning, nurseries, childminders, schools and FE providers should consider how they would operate in the event that these restrictions become necessary in their local area, including how they would ensure that every child, pupil or student receives the quantity and quality of education and care to which they are normally entitled, whether onsite or remotely.

This framework is not directly linked to policy on local restriction tiers. Unless advised otherwise, all settings should continue to operate as normal irrespective of local restriction tier, and all children and pupils should continue to attend unless they are required to self-isolate.

This contingency framework is designed as a means of reducing transmission within settings and the wider community. It should not be used to address operational challenges, including staff shortages.

If individual settings are facing operational challenges in allowing all children, pupils or students to attend on site, they should work with the local authority (childcare and early years settings), RSC (schools) or ESFA territorial teams (FE providers) to discuss their individual circumstances and seek support. Sector guidance outlines a number of options for settings to consider if they are facing staff shortages or capacity issues, including:

- using staff, such as trainees more flexibly
- supply staff
- recruiting both permanent and short-term staff via the Teaching Vacancies Service

The contingency framework

This framework is designed to act as a containment measure where:

- there is extremely high prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- other measures have already been implemented

It is primarily a means of limiting the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in educational settings and the wider community. The contingency framework set out in this section describes how any restrictions to childcare and educational settings should be implemented. It is designed to be flexible and responsive to local circumstances. Restrictions may be advised for one, some or all of the types of setting.

! An educational setting should not move to implement restrictive measures of the kind set out in the contingency framework without the explicit agreement of DfE.

In all circumstances, and in all settings, priority should continue to be given to vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers to attend full time.

Early years settings

Where the contingency framework is implemented, all early years settings (including nurseries and childminders) should continue allowing all children to attend.

In the very unlikely event that evidence supports limiting attendance in early years settings, DfE may advise that only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend.

Primary schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, primary schools should continue allowing all children to attend.

In the very unlikely event that evidence supports limiting attendance in primary schools, DfE may advise that only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend.

Middle schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, middle schools (with some primary and secondary year groups) may be advised to adopt a combined approach such as all pupils in primary year groups attending but only vulnerable children and children of critical workers in older year groups. High-quality remote education should be provided for all other pupils.

Secondary schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, secondary schools should only allow vulnerable children, children of critical workers, pupils in years 11 and 13 and other pupils due to take external exams this academic year, to attend. High-quality remote education should be provided for all other pupils.

Boarding schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, boarding schools should follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools above for determining which children should be taught in the classroom. Children who are not to be taught in classrooms but who cannot return home should receive high-quality remote education in their boarding houses.

Special schools and special post-16 institutions

We want children and young people in special schools, including residential special schools, and special post-16 institutions to continue to receive high-quality teaching and specialist professional support. This is because we know that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and their families, can be disproportionately impacted by being out of education. Special schools should continue to allow pupils to attend full-time. Special post-16 settings should continue to allow students to attend as per their usual timetable.

Where the contingency framework is implemented, special school pupils who are of primary school age should continue to attend school while full-time attendance is mandatory in mainstream primary schools. However, in the very unlikely event that evidence supports limiting attendance in primary schools, attendance is encouraged but will not be mandatory for special school pupils of primary school age and parents will not be penalised if their child does not attend.

Where the contingency framework is implemented, pupils at special schools who are of secondary school age should continue to attend their education setting full-time. Whilst attendance is encouraged, it will not be mandatory and parents will not be penalised if their child does not attend.

Special post-16 institutions should continue to allow students to attend as per their usual timetable.

Alternative provision (AP)

Where the contingency framework is implemented, alternative provision (including pupil referral units, AP academies, AP free schools) should continue to allow all children or pupils to attend full-time.

Hospital education

Where the contingency framework is implemented, hospital schools should continue to provide full time education where it is safe and feasible to do so, and in line with hospital infection prevention and control measures.

Mainstream schools should continue to support their pupils in hospital, including through remote education support, to minimise the impact of their hospital stay on their education.

Further education (FE) providers

Where the contingency framework is implemented, FE providers should allow daily attendance only to vulnerable young people, the children of critical workers and priority learners, for example, those in exam or final assessment year groups or who are unable to complete their educational programme remotely. High-quality remote education should be provided for all other students, who should not attend.

Special post-16 institutions should continue to allow students to attend as per their usual timetable.

Residential providers should also prioritise those students who need to access specialist facilities and equipment to continue their education and training, and students with SEND needs.

Apprenticeships

Where the contingency framework is implemented, apprenticeship delivery and assessment (including the assessment of functional skills qualifications) is extremely flexible and should continue to take place in person where doing so online is not possible.

This includes training and assessment in the workplace (unless the workplace is required to close under local restriction tiers), in education and assessment settings and in community settings where a venue is being used for training or assessment.

Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare

Where the contingency framework is implemented, providers who run community activities, before or after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school or childcare provision (including wraparound childcare) for children over the age of 5 are able to continue to open for both indoor and outdoor provision. They should only allow those children to attend that are eligible to be in school full-time.

Infection prevention and control

Schools, nurseries, childminders, FE providers and Ofsted registered providers caring for children over the age of 5, should continue to follow the system of controls guidance (which includes infection prevention and control) outlined in the:

- actions for schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- actions for early years and childcare providers
- actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- guidance for special schools and other specialist settings
- protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children

The guidance sets out a system of controls which, when implemented, create an inherently safer system where the risk of transmission of the virus is substantially reduced. These controls still apply if restrictions are implemented.

All settings should update their risk assessment, in consultation with staff and unions, to reflect their contingency model and review implementation of control measures in light of this.

Face coverings

In areas in local restriction tier 2 or tier 3, education settings where pupils in year 7 and above are educated and in FE providers, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils or students when moving around outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Remote education

Guidance for getting help with technology for remote education has been published.

Where face-to-face education is disrupted, DfE is providing laptops and tablets to schools for some disadvantaged children in years 3 to 11 to access remote education. Schools should report disruption through the education settings status form.

Ownership of devices is transferred from DfE to the local authorities, academy trusts, schools and further education providers who receive them at the point of delivery.

Support is also available for disadvantaged children who need an internet connection to get internet access.

The government is funding expert technical support to help schools set up secure user accounts for Google and Microsoft's education platforms. Schools can apply for government-funded support through The Key for School Leaders to get set up on one of two free-to-use digital education platforms, G Suite for Education or Office 365 Education.

Education workforce

In any area where restrictions have been implemented, employers should consider advice from the relevant Director of Public Health and their local authority in relation to staff attending workplaces when updating their risk assessment. This includes initial teacher training (ITT) trainees. Employers should continue to explain to staff the measures they are putting in place to reduce risks, including how these protective measures have been reviewed as part of an updated workplace risk assessment.

Schools and FE providers should also consider if the coronavirus (COVID-19) education contingency framework offers more opportunities for staff to work at home, given reduced numbers of students on-site and the use of remote education for students scheduled to be at home. Employers should have regard to staff work-life balance and wellbeing. This includes considering how best to balance the demands of on-site teaching and support for remote education, which should be done within the terms and conditions of teachers' and staff employment.

Safeguarding and designated safeguarding leads

There should be no change to local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, which remain the responsibility of the 3 safeguarding partners (local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and chief officers of police).

If restrictions are implemented in any education or childcare setting, we would expect all local safeguarding partners to be vigilant and responsive to all safeguarding threats and ensure vulnerable children and young persons are safe, particularly as more children and young people will be learning remotely.

Keeping children safe in education is statutory safeguarding guidance that all schools, FE colleges, sixth form colleges and designated institutions must continue to follow. Other 16 to 19 providers are required to comply with relevant safeguarding duties and to follow the guidance in keeping children safe in education by virtue of their funding agreement.

Early years providers must continue to follow the safeguarding requirements in section three of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework.

Schools and FE providers (ideally led by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or a deputy) should review their child protection policy so that it reflects the local restrictions and remains effective. In some cases, a coronavirus (COVID-19) annex or addendum that summarises any key local restriction related changes might be more effective than re-writing and re-issuing the whole policy. It will be important that all staff working in the school or FE provider are aware of the revised policy.

It is expected that schools and FE providers will have a trained DSL (or deputy) available on site. However, it is recognised that for some schools and FE providers there may be operational challenges to this. In such cases, there are two options to consider:

- a trained DSL (or deputy) from the early years setting, school or FE provider can be available to be contacted via phone or online video, for example working from home
- sharing trained DSLs (or deputies) with other schools or FE providers (who should be available to be contacted via phone or online video)

Where a trained DSL (or deputy) is not on site, in addition to one of the above options, a senior leader should take responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site

Exams and assessments

Exam centres, schools and FE providers should remain open for exams and assessments. Additional mitigations may be needed to ensure that the delivery of exams and assessments is COVID-secure, in addition to the measures already set out in the actions for schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Assessment centres, FE providers or schools should work with their local health protection teams and REACT teams to facilitate this.

These additional mitigations may include:

- wearing face coverings in communal areas
- 2-metre spacing between all desks
- additional protections for candidates who are classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, such as taking exams and tests in a separate room to other candidates

> Senior leaders at the school or FE provider will determine whether it is appropriate, practical and reasonable to provide exams and tests in a separate room or, in exceptional circumstances, at the candidate's home.

Tests for entry to selective schools

Tests can continue to operate for in-year admissions to selective schools. We consider travel to such tests to be essential travel but, where possible, the use of public transport should be avoided.

In arranging tests, admission authorities should follow the protective health measures set out within the guidance on assessment processes for selective school admissions and the actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak.

School and FE meals

Schools should provide meal options for all pupils who are in school and meals should be available free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who meet the free school meals eligibility criteria.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meals or food parcels for eligible pupils who are not attending school where they:

- are self-isolating
- have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)
- are not attending as a result of implementation of local restrictions advised by government

Schools should work with suppliers to prepare meals or food parcels to be collected by, or delivered to, these eligible children during their time at home. Any parcels should be distributed in line with guidance on social distancing and local restriction tiers and should meet the school food standards.

The guidance on providing school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak outlines how and when children eligible for free school meals should be supported at home. It also contains information regarding best practice arrangements where food parcels are needed.

FE providers should continue to support students who are eligible for, and usually receive, free meals. This includes students in further education, who are newly eligible. FE providers should provide support even if students are studying remotely due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

There's further guidance on free meals in further education-funded institutions.

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