Part of
Education, childcare and skills during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance to Contingency framework: education and childcare settings

Updated 23 February 2021

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Contingency framework: education and childcare settings

The contingency framework is a set of guiding principles designed to help decision makers in education and childcare settings plan to apply tighter or more restrictive to education and childcare.

Nurseries, childminders, schools, 16 to 19 academies and further education (FE) providers will need to take into account the local circumstances and risks, and to plan appropriate for easing and tightening of restrictions become necessary in their local area. This includes how they would ensure every child, pupil or student receives the education they are entitled to, and ensure which those they are normally entitled, whether onsite or remotely.

Any restrictions on education are always a last resort and should only be initiated following a ministerial decision. This framework is separate to the processes in place for managing outbreaks and operational challenges.

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for:

- local authorities
- childcare and education settings

Early years settings

This includes:

- all providers on the Ofsted early years register
- providers registered with an early years childminder agency
- other early years providers (non-provision in maintained, non-maintained and independent schools)

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

This includes:

- primary schools (including reception classes)
- middle or upper schools
- secondary schools (including school sixth forms)
- residential and day special schools
- special post 16 providers
- AP providers (local authority alts, 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

Higher education providers (HE)

This includes:

- universities
- specialist and independent HE providers

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)

This guidance should be read alongside the detailed guidance for education and childcare settings and providers operating during coronavirus (COVID-19):

- 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
- incentive payments 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
- guidance for higher education providers
- guidance for children's social care services

Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination programme is now underway. Vulnerable people and adults, both the elderly and those younger, are being offered a first dose of a vaccination, which significantly lowers the risk of serious, life-threatening ill-health and physical health.

This is especially true for people who are vulnerable children and young people, lower academic achievement also translates into long-term economic costs which affect the standard of living that pupils and students will have over the course of their lifetime.

It is also important that parents and carers are able to return to work and having access to childcare and provide education for their children will allow them to happen.

Easing and tightening of restrictions in education and childcare

This document has made it without a normal priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normally as possible during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

If there is extremely high prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) and/or variants, and we have failed to reduce community transmission, restrictions affecting education and childcare may need to be tightened, in order to limit the overall number of social contacts in our communities and help protect the NHS.

Restrictions may also be necessary to help minimise the impact from new variants of the virus.

Any decision that attendance at education or childcare settings should be restricted will not be taken lightly. Those who ministerial decisions made are on an early area basis in the light of all available evidence, public health advice and local and national circumstances.

Any restrictions will be kept under review and would be lifted as soon as the public health and scientific advice says it is appropriate to do so.

The purpose of restrictions in education and childcare is to reduce the number of contacts that all us have with people in other households. Restrictions of this kind should be put under to address operational challenges, including staff shortages.

If individual settings are facing operational challenges in allowing all children, pupils or students to attend, they should first seek to take all reasonable steps to keep their settings open. DfE Contacts or DfE Operational teams DfE providers will be able to provide advice and support to help settings to do this. This may include the temporary redeployment of sectors for settings to consider if they are facing staff shortages or capacity issues.

Where setting closure will not generally be necessary. Such closures should only be considered on the advice of local health protection teams or the Regional Director of Public Health.

Decisions about easing or tightening of restrictions

The Department for Education (DfE) will work with the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), NHS Test and Trace and the Department of Health and Social Care, the Chief Medical Officer, Public Health England, other government departments, as well as relevant local authorities, to keep the public health situation in education and childcare settings under review and to advise Ministers and officials on informing the weekly evidence established Local Action Committee convened structure.

This brings together representatives from NHS Test and Trace and JBC, the Chief Medical Officer, PHE, and other government departments.

The Local Action Committee convened structure will review the epidemiological data on a regular rolling basis for any areas which situation restrictions are in place. to consider the impact on education.

The decision that attendance in education or childcare settings should be restricted or have restrictions eased will be made by DfE ministers.

Contingency framework principles

Depending on the scientific and public health advice, DfE may call for a tightening or easing of restrictions in education and childcare including or regionally.

The guiding principle for decision making should be that any restrictions to attendance should be kept to a minimum. Any decisions to tighten or ease restrictions in education should be allowed to attendance in education and childcare settings. It is also based on advice at the time.

The criteria described in this framework should be used to guide decisions about restricting attendance as well as prioritising groups to return to face-to-face education and childcare settings. Decisions will be based on the best public health advice and the need for restrictions in education and childcare.

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

Any restrictions will be kept under review and should be lifted as soon as the public health and scientific advice says it is appropriate to do so. Government will keep the restrictions as much notice as possible of such changes.

The framework set out in this section describes the range of measures that may be advised across different sectors. The exact nature of the restrictions that should be applied will depend on the local circumstances. Section 3 of this document specifications guidance will be published when restrictions are advised.

Early years settings

The default position for early years settings is to allow all children to attend.

If attendance needs to be limited in early years settings, DfE may advise that only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend. DfE will advise when children should be permitted to return.

Primary schools

The default position for primary schools (including reception classes) is to allow all pupils to attend.

If attendance needs to be limited in primary schools, DfE may advise:

- that primary schools only allow vulnerable children, children of critical workers, children in reception, year 1 and year 2 to attend; or
- that primary schools only allow vulnerable children and children of critical workers to attend.

In these circumstances, high-quality remote education should be provided for all other pupils.

Where it is appropriate to increase attendance, DfE may advise that those groups listed above should be prioritised for return.

Middle schools

Middle schools (with some primary and secondary year groups) may need to adopt a combination of the approaches set out for primary and secondary schools depending on the local area. High-quality remote education should be provided for all pupils who are not attending.

Secondary schools

Where restrictions are required, DfE may advise:

- that secondary schools allow only vulnerable children and young people, children of critical workers, pupils in years 10, 11, 12 and 13, and other pupils who are due to take exams to attend full-time; or
- that secondary schools only allow vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers to attend.

High-quality remote education should be provided for all other pupils.

Where it is appropriate to increase attendance, DfE may advise that those groups listed above should be prioritised for return.

These principles also apply to those who are studying higher education courses delivered by FE providers.

Specialist post-16 institutions should continue to welcome and encourage students to attend and follow their usual timetable.

Residential providers should also prioritise attendance for those priority groups as listed above.

In all circumstances, high-quality remote education should be provided for all students not attending.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship delivery and assessment (including the assessment of functional skills qualifications) is extremely flexible. Where restrictions are introduced, these activities should continue to take place in person if online delivery is not feasible.

This includes training and assessment in the workplace (unless the workplace is closed), training and assessment in other settings such as training providers and colleges and in community settings where a venue is being used for training or assessment.

Boarding schools

Where restrictions are introduced, boarding schools should follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools for determining which children should be taught in the school. Boarding schools should also follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools for determining which groups to prioritise for return to the classroom once restrictions are eased.

Boarding schools should also follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools for determining which groups to prioritise for return to the classroom once restrictions are eased.

Special schools and special post-16 institutions

Attendance expectations in special schools will remain in line with the equivalent age groups in mainstream schools, and expectations in special post-16 institutions will remain in line with the equivalent restrictions in mainstream FE.

However, we recognise that the definition of vulnerable means the cohorts in specialist settings will be different to those in other settings and that it may be more or less of an alternative as a restriction, and children and young people should be at an their usual timetable. Where attendance is not mandatory, special schools should continue to welcome and encourage students to attend and follow their usual timetable. Special schools should also be able to offer flexibility, special post-16 institutions should continue to welcome and encourage students to attend as per their usual timetable where the attendance is not mandatory.

In exceptional circumstances, special schools and special post-16 institutions may encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual timetabled and operational offer to students in the same way as they would in normal times. In such circumstances, they should seek to resume as close as possible to the specified provision for the child or young person as soon as possible. Where attendance is mandatory, full-time provision should be provided.

High-quality remote education should be provided for students who are not attending.

Alternative provision (AP)

Alternative provision (AP) should continue to allow all children or pupils to attend full-time.

On occasion AP will encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual timetabled and operational offer to students in the same way as they would in normal operational training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to full-time provision, as soon as possible.

High-quality remote education should be provided for all pupils and students who are not attending.

Hospital education

Hospital schools should continue to provide full-time education where it is safe and feasible to do so, and in line with hospital infection control and safety requirements.

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

Out-of-school settings and early years childcare

Providers of out-of-school settings, holiday clubs, breakfast or after-school clubs, childcare and early years childcare providers should continue to provide childcare for children over the age of 5 should be able to continue to open for both indoor and outdoor provision.

Where restrictions are required, these providers should only offer face-to-face provision to children who are vulnerable children or children of critical or who are clinically extremely vulnerable and of equivalent age to those eligible groups.

Clinically extremely vulnerable pupils and students

Individuals who are defined as clinically extremely vulnerable are at the highest of severe illness from coronavirus. Pupils and students who are clinically extremely vulnerable should follow national guidance regarding formal shielding measures in place at the time.

Higher education (HE) providers

HE providers are autonomous and are responsible for putting in place the appropriate measures, in line with guidance, based on the individual circumstances of their provider.

Universities and other providers of HE will be able to welcome students back to their campuses, with their facilities and teaching delivery guidance restricted to the minimum. Limitations on attendance need to be made. DfE may advise that, in line with the higher education guidance, HE providers should ensure that students can access the most beneficial face-to-face, clinical and practical learning.

Where higher restrictions are required, we may advise that most of the provision should be online, with buildings open only for essential workers and students in the cohorts to be allowed because learning or teaching is essential. This should include the continuation of provision for those who are studying for qualifications that are essential for their career. DfE may advise that student cohorts should be prioritised for return in published guidance.

Infection prevention and control.

Schools, nurseries, childminders, FE providers and Ofsted-registered providers caring for children under the age of 5 should follow the latest infection prevention and control 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 and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

These controls still apply if restrictions are introduced.

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

Remote education

For digital or remote education expectations and the support available to schools, colleges and further education providers is available at Get Help with Remote Education.

DfE is providing laptops and tablets to schools, colleges and further education providers to support disadvantaged students who are not in a position to participate in remote learning. Schools and responsible bodies can find out if they have any remaining laptops and tablets available to order in their current allocation by signing into the Get Help with Technology portal.

Department of Health is transferred from DfE to the wider education sector, academy trusts, schools and further education providers who receive their of the point of delivery.

Support is also available for disadvantaged children and young people who need an internet connection for and internet access.

The government is funding expert technical support to help schools and colleges set up secure cyber accounts for Google and Microsoft education platforms.

Sign-up and get expert help for government-funded support to set up or one of Google and Microsoft digital education platforms, G Suite for Education or Office 365 Education.

Education workforce

Employers should continue to implement the system of controls set out in our guidance. This includes the measures in place to ensure that staff are able to maintain social distance in the workplace, allow more opportunities for staff to work in groups, reduced numbers of students onsite and the use of remote education for students who are required to be at home. Employers should have regard to staff wellbeing and workload.

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 Safeguarding partners:

- local authorities
- clinical commissioning groups
- chief officers of police

If restrictions are implemented in any education or childcare settings, we would expect all local safeguarding partners to be vigilant and responsive to any safeguarding concerns and ensure vulnerable children and young persons are safe, particularly in more disadvantaged areas and those with high deprivation.

Keeping children safe in education is intended to inform safeguarding practice for schools, FE colleges, sixth form colleges and designated institutions much have regard to. Other guidance, such as the Prevent duty, should also be considered when making decisions regard to the guidance is mandatory, but it is intended to be a useful tool for local multi-agency agreement.

Early years providers must continue to take all necessary steps to keep children safe and well and have regard to the statutory guidance on working together to safeguard children.

Providers must continue to follow the safeguarding requirements in section three of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and this should be read alongside the early years flexibilities under coronavirus disease (COVID-19) guidance.

Schools and FE providers (ideally by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or a deputy) should continue to follow the guidance in keeping children safe in education. Restrictions and remote effective. In exceptional circumstances, DfE may advise or addendum that summarises any key local restriction related changes might have to the DSL's role and working practices. Any such addendum will be kept to a minimum and the DfE provides an awareness of the relevant sections.

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.

Transport

Transport services to education settings should continue to be provided as normal where children are attending education settings. The transport to school and other places of education: 2020 to 2021 academic year guidance remains in place.

School and FE meals

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

Schools should also continue to provide free school meals support for pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals and who are not attending school because they:

- are self-isolating
- have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)

Schools should work with suppliers to prepare meals or lunch 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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