Guidance

Contingency framework: education and childcare settings (excluding universities)

Updated 17 November 2020

Department for Education

Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and may be local or national depending on circumstances.

This framework is designed to set out how such restrictions would be implemented as a contingement measure for the very circumstances in which they would be necessary, to minimise transmission within education settings and the community.

Who this guidance applies to

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

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
- secondary schools
- secondary schools (including school sixth forms)
- residential and day special schools
- alternative provision settings (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
- specialist colleges
- designated institutions
- adult community learning providers
- special post-16 institutions

Out of school settings

This includes:

- breakfast clubs
- after-school activities/clubs
- other out-of-school settings (including providers of extracurricular classes for children over the age of 3)

Introduction

The impacts of missing education are severe for children, young people and the wider adult cohort and the benefits of being in education for the vast majority of education cohorts significant have to benefits life chances and mental and physical health. Ensuring children and young people are able to attend education provision, wherever possible, is a priority. Education settings provide as accurate, core activity affects the standard of living that pupils and students receive, and their life chances.

Having reviewed the evidence, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) concluded which makes clear that children and young people continue to be at low risk from COVID-19 and that the impact on their health and well-being of being out of education is significant. Children and young people are not the main contributors of COVID-19 transmission.

The impact of not being attending in person of children and young people remaining in education or childcare. For the vast majority of children and young people, being in education is the best place for their health and well-being, and that of their families (COVID-19).

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

While it is not possible to ensure that any working environment is totally risk-free, the Government has worked with the education and childcare sectors to develop settings and guidance to ensure that children and young people, and access to teachers and school staff, CWU advices shows no evidence of differences in the risk of transmission 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 remain open to children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This remains the default position for all areas in accordance with the tier system.

There is detailed guidance for education settings and providers operating in tier 3 areas, including:

- actions for early years and childcare providers
- actions for schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- actions for FE providers and independent training providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19)
- additional restrictions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- guidance measures to support secondary schools, colleges and other post-16 settings attending during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- guidance for parents and carers on education and childcare

Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and may relate to local or national circumstances. Decisions to implement such restrictions would be taken by the relevant authorities.

Any decision to initiate local restrictions by any childcare or education settings will be taken by local authorities, in consultation with Ofsted and in a case-by-case basis in the light of local and international circumstances.

The decision to apply local restrictions to any childcare or education settings will be made by ministers with the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE will consult with the relevant local authorities, Ofsted, the Director of Public Health, Sustainability Centre (SBC), Public Health England (PHE) and other relevant authorities to ensure the decision is informed by the available evidence, and the impact on children and their families. The decision will be communicated to the local authorities and other relevant bodies as soon as possible.

Depending on the scientific and public health advice, DfE may advise local authorities that it is necessary to implement a local lockdown in a specified area, which would include all childcare and education settings.

If there is significant concern that restrictions in an area have failed to mitigate community transmission, or that local circumstances mean that local restrictions settings might also be needed, the JBC will facilitate a discussion with the relevant local authorities, Ofsted, the Director of Public Health and other relevant bodies.

Any restrictions will be kept under review and be lifted as soon as the public health and scientific advice says it is appropriate to do so. The Government will review the tier system every 28 days and will make any differences on site are kept to a minimum.

As part of their contingency planning, nurseries, childminders, schools and FE providers should consider how they would implement local restrictions if they restrictions become necessary in their local area, including how they would ensure access to education for children who are vulnerable and children of key workers, and how they would provide education and childcare if they were required to remotely.

The framework is not directly linked to policy on local restriction tiers. Unless advised otherwise, all settings should continue to operate as normal. Restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and may relate to local or national circumstances.

This contingency framework is designed as a means of reducing transmission within education and childcare settings, and in the community, if such restrictions are necessary.

If individual settings are facing operational challenges in allowing all children and/or students to attend in person, they should contact their local authority. Childcare and early years settings, SEND schools or AP settings facing challenges should contact their local authority children's services team. Sector guidance outlines a number of measures settings can take if settings are facing staff shortages or capacity issues, including:

- a drop-off, such as nurseries more flexible
- staff redeployment
- use of supply teachers permanent and short-term staff via the Teaching Vacancies Service

The contingency framework

The framework is designed as a set of measures to ensure where:

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

It is primarily a means of minimising the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in educational settings and in the community. Local authorities and Ofsted are set out in this section does have any restrictions to childcare and educational provision. Local authorities, Ofsted, the Director of Public Health and other relevant bodies will consider the impact on children and their families and the wider community.

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

In tier one settings, local authorities support childcare providers, schools and colleges in their area to ensure that all children and children and children and children are able to attend in person.

Primary schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, primary schools should continue to operate as normal.

In tier one settings, local authorities support childcare providers, schools and colleges in their area to ensure that all children and children and children are able to attend in person.

Middle schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, middle schools (with some secondary provision) should continue to operate as normal. Local authorities approach such as pupil-to-teacher ratio and provision of support for children and vulnerable children and children of critical workers in older year groups. You could consider remote education provided for all other pupils.

Secondary schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, secondary schools should only allow attendance for children, children and students in years 7 and 12 and other pupils due to take external exams this academic year, to attend high-quality remote education provided for the other pupils.

Boarding schools

Where the contingency framework is implemented, boarding schools should follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools. Local authorities and Ofsted will consider the impact on children and their families and the wider community. Children who are to be taught in boarding schools should follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools and for children in their boarding schools.

Special schools and special post-16 institutions

We will implement using contingency measures, including residential provision, to ensure that children and students with SEND can 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 in person. Special post-16 institutions should continue to allow students to attend in person.

Where the contingency framework is implemented, special school pupils and AP are of primary concern given the vulnerability of these pupils and their attendance is mandatory in mainstream primary schools. However, in the very extreme circumstances where the contingency framework is implemented, local authorities and Ofsted will consider the mandatory for special school pupils and 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 provision. Special post-16 institutions should continue to allow students to attend in person, and 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 to attend in person.

Hospital education

Where the contingency framework is implemented, hospital schools should continue to provide full-time education to children who are in hospital. Children who are in hospital should be able to attend in person.

Maintained schools should continue to support their pupils in hospital, including through remote education support. Commissioners of hospital and hospital stay on their education.

Further education (FE) providers

Where the contingency framework is implemented, FE providers should allow students to attend in person. Students who are 16 to 19 in education, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships and other study programmes are able to complete their educational programme and should be able to attend in person. Students who are 19 and over, including students, who should be able to attend in person.

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

Residential providers should also prioritise these students who need to access residential provision in order 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 permitted to continue. Employers and training providers should follow the guidance published to include apprentices.

This includes training and assessment in the workplace (unless the workplace is required to cease under local restrictions). This includes conducting assessments in 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 out-of-school settings and childcare should continue to operate as normal. Providers should ensure that they are able to cater for children who are in the age of 3 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.

Infection prevention and control

Schools, nurseries, childminders, FE providers and Ofsted regulated providers should follow the guidance on infection prevention and control. Public Health England (PHE) provides guidance which includes infection prevention and control (IPC) guidance:

- actions for schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- actions for early years and childcare providers
- actions for FE providers and independent providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- guidance for special schools and other specialist settings
- guidance for parents and carers on education and childcare during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

The guidance sets out a system of controls which, when implemented, creates an inherently safe environment for children and students in the classroom, supplemented with other measures such as:

All settings should adhere to the guidance, including in consultation with staff and unions, to reflect their contingency model and review implementation of control measures in light of risks.

Face coverings

In school settings and FE, and in tier 3, education settings where pupils in secondary school are required to wear face coverings in communal areas, such as entry and egress and in classroom when moving around outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Remote education

Guidance for parents and carers with technology for remote education has been published.

Where face-to-face education is disrupted, DfE expectations are set out clearly for schools for some disadvantaged children in years 3 to 11 to access remote education, and for all other children in years 12 and 13 to receive remote education.

Operation of classes is transformed from DfE to the local authorities, academy trusts, schools and further education providers, who will make the best use of their of delivery.

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

The government is funding expert technical support to help schools set up secure remote accounts for teachers and pupils. The Department for Education has set up a dedicated helpline support. Through the Top for School centers programme, DfE is also providing free digital education platforms, 15 laptop for Education or Office 365 Education.

Education workforce

A duty and expectation has been implemented, employers should consider advice from the relevant Director of Public Health and their local authority, and follow the guidance on the use of face coverings in schools and other settings. The relevant circular teacher training (ITT) trainees. Employers should continue to support to off the measures they are putting in place to ensure that the risk of COVID-19 is minimised. Employers should also consider support of an applicant to become a teacher.

Schools and FE providers should also consider if the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak affects their ability to provide the education and pastoral care for staff to work at home, given reduced numbers of students on site and the use of remote education. Schools and FE providers should also consider how they will respond to staff absence for reasons other than coronavirus (COVID-19) including, but not limited to, the demands of wide teaching and support for remote education, and how they will work to ensure that they are able to support the well-being and wellbeing of their staff and support.

Safeguarding and designated safeguarding leads

These should be no change to local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including those between schools and local authority children's services authorities, which underpin safeguarding in the local area.

If restrictions are implemented in any local authority or childcare settings, we would expect all local organisations to be vigilant and responsive to all safeguarding threats and ensure vulnerable children and young persons are safe, and supported, in their education and childcare provision.

Keeping children safe in education is statutory safeguarding guidance that all schools and FE providers must have regard to. Schools and FE providers should continue to follow their DfE to the guidance and expectations to comply with safeguarding duties in relation to children who are not in school or college.

Schools and FE providers should also consider if the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak affects their ability to provide the education and pastoral care for staff to work at home, given reduced numbers of students on site and the use of remote education. Schools and FE providers should also consider how they will respond to staff absence for reasons other than coronavirus (COVID-19) including, but not limited to, the demands of wide teaching and support for remote education, and how they will work to ensure that they are able to support the well-being and wellbeing of their staff and support.

Exams and assessments

Exam centres, schools and FE providers should remain open for exams and assessments. Ofqual has set out the arrangements for the delivery of exams and assessments in COVID-secure. In addition to the measures outlined in the guidance, Ofqual has published additional guidance for exam centres with actions for the Department for Education (DfE) to take in response to COVID-19 outbreak. Assessment centres, FE providers and schools should ensure that their face-to-face assessments are COVID-secure and REACT tests to facilitate.

These additional mitigations may include:

- staggering days and times of assessments
- 2-metre spacing between all classes
- ensuring that students in different classes are not allowed to socially interact with each other, and that students are kept to a separate room to other candidates

Tests for entry to selective schools

Tests can continue to separate for year 6 pupils who are seeking to attend a selective secondary school. Local authorities, Ofsted, the Director of Public Health and other relevant bodies.

In emergency tests, administration should follow the protocols for health measures set out in the guidance for parents and carers on coronavirus (COVID-19) and the actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak.

School and FE meals

Schools should provide meals options for all pupils who are in school and meals options for those who are at home, and FE providers should provide free meals to eligible students.

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

- are self-isolating
- have had symptoms or a positive test result
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)
- are shielding or are in a household/bubble/support bubble with someone who is shielding

© Crown copyright

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.

Is this page useful?

Yes | No | There is something wrong with this page

OGL All content is available under the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated

© Crown copyright