Part of
Education and childcare during coronavirus

Contingency framework: education and childcare settings (excluding universities)

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The restrictions described in this framework do not currently apply in Wales or Scotland.

Different education and childcare settings apply the national lockdown from 5 January 2021.

Any restrictions or education are always a last resort and may only be introduced following a national decision.

This framework sets out how such restrictions would be implemented in education and childcare settings, if necessary, and how we would minimise disruption to education and childcare and ensure that children and education settings and the community in those areas.

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 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
- pupil referral units (including pupil referral units, off academies and AP free schools)
- 16 to 19 academies

Further education providers (FE)

This includes:

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

Out-of-school settings

This includes:

- breakfast clubs
- after-school or holiday clubs
- either out-of-school settings (including providers of wraparound childcare) or childminders over the age of 12

Introduction

The impacts of missing education are severe for children, young people and adults, both now and in the future. There is clear evidence that short term gaps of education causes significant harm to learning, life chances and mental health and well-being. Disruption to education and childcare also disproportionately affects those from more deprived and vulnerable backgrounds, including long term economic costs which affects the standard of living that pupils and students can expect throughout their adulthood.

Having reviewed the available evidence, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) which makes clear that children and young people are at lower risk than adults from COVID-19 and that, in the UK, there is a low risk of severe disease and long term impacts of COVID-19 in children and young people in this age group. 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 being in education. The risk of COVID-19 is not zero and we must take all reasonable steps to minimise it, but the risk of harm to children and young people is far over that from coronavirus (COVID-19).

Education and childcare settings and leavers are able to return to work and training once their school and college has reopened.

While it is not possible to ensure that any working environment is totally risk free, there is reasonable confidence that staff working in education and childcare settings are not at higher risk than those in other workplaces. Evidence from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and from the wider evidence of differences in the positivity 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) pandemic. This is in recognition of the harm in every respect that lockdowns cause.

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 and other educational providers (COVID-19 guidance)
- actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- operating a secondary school during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance
- protective measures for holiday and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings (COVID-19) guidance for providers
- guidance for parents and carers on COVID-19 and education

Any restrictions or education would only be as a last resort and may only be enacted following a national decision. The DfE will be flexible in its approach to set out how such restrictions would be implemented as a contingency framework, if necessary, and how we would minimise disruption to education and ensure that children and young people are safe.

Any decisions to initiate such restrictions to any childcare or education settings will not be taken lightly and will be made by a ministerial decision on the basis of the evidence at the time, including advice from the chief medical officers.

The decision to apply the contingency framework outlined in a given area will be made by ministers in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer (CMO). The DfE will work with other government departments, the Chief Medical Officer, the devolved administrations, the Local Government Association and individual local authorities to ensure that decisions are informed by the latest evidence, so the working arrangements for decision-making about local restrictions are well-established and understood by all parties (including already engaged).

Depending on the scientific and public health advice, DfE may advise local authorities that it is necessary to take a local decision to close schools (or a cluster of settings), local to the area affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

If there is significant concern that restrictions in an area have failed to mitigate coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission, the decision to close education or childcare settings might also be needed. We DfE will facilitate a discussion with the local authority, the Local Government Association, and we will consider the next steps.

Any restrictions will be kept under review and will be lifted as soon as the evidence allows, in line with the advice from the chief medical officers. The guiding principle for any decision making will be that any restrictions to attendance are a last resort.

As part of their contingency planning, nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges should prepare for the possibility that they will need to implement these restrictions become necessary in their local area, including how they would ensure that they can continue to provide education for their children, while education and care is delivered to those who are unable to attend their setting remotely.

This framework is not directly linked to policy on local restriction tiers. Unless advised otherwise, all settings should continue to operate as normal regardless of which tier their local area is in, and should continue to implement the measures set out in their risk assessments.

This contingency framework is designed as a means of reducing transmission in a local area, if necessary, and it is not a tier one system specifically for education settings. It is designed to be flexible and to allow local authorities to consider how to implement the measures as soon as of the types of harm.

1 In 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 providing high quality remote education and children of critical workers for 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 (only applicable in areas with a three tier school system) should be considered operationally as if they were primary schools. The contingency framework would then be implemented in the primary schools in the area, and 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, including sixth form colleges, should continue to provide education for pupils in years 7 and 10 and other pupils for whom it is deemed the most suitable place to attend. High quality remote education should be provided for all other pupils.

Special schools and special post-16 institutions

We want children and young people to receive schools, including residential special schools, and special post-16 institutions to continue to receive high quality education and to be able to attend their setting. We know that for some pupils that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and their families, can be disproportionately impacted by the lack of a routine and by being unable to attend their setting. If implemented, special schools and special post-16 institutions should first time. Special post-16 settings should continue to allow students to attend as per their 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 their setting.

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 to allow only hospital-based education provision.

Mainstream schools should continue to support their pupils in hospital, including providing pastoral support. In recognition the impact of the 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 those 16 to 19 study programs with the highest practical assessment part groups or who are undertaking a traineeship or a supported internship programme remotely. This also applies to those who are studying higher education courses at FE providers. High quality remote education should be provided for all other students.

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 attend in order to be able to continue to continue their education and training, and students with SEND.

Apprenticeships

Where the contingency framework is implemented, apprenticeship delivery and assessment (including the assessment of functional skills qualifications) should continue as normal, with the majority of learning taken in person where doing so is safe and feasible.

This includes training and assessment in the workplace (unless the workplace is required to close for coronavirus reasons), 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 out-of-school settings (including providers of wraparound childcare) and school or college-based nurseries should continue to provide childcare for children over the age of 3 who are in continue to open for both indoor and outdoor provision. Providers should also 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 of out-of-school and holiday clubs should continue to follow the system of controls guidance published which includes infection prevention and control measures, including:

- 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 (COVID-19) guidance

The guidance sets out a system of controls which, when implemented, provides a hierarchy of measures to manage risk in education settings and is substantially reduced. These controls will be mandatory if they are implemented.

All settings should update their risk assessment, in consultation with staff and unions, to reflect their contingency model and revise 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 are above are expected to wear face coverings, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils in students when moving around outside of classrooms, for example, in communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

Remote education

Guidance for parents and carers on resources for remote education has been published.

When face-to-face education is disrupted, DfE is providing laptops and tablets to schools, for some disadvantaged children in years 3 to 11 across England, prioritising those who do not have access to a device through their settings digital filter.

Operation of resources is transferred from DfE to the local authorities, academy trusts, schools and the education providers who require them to be part of arrangements.

Laptops and tablets for disadvantaged children who need an internet connection are also being provided.

The government is funding expert technical support to help schools set up secure user accounts for laptops and tablets, including Microsoft Teams. Schools can apply for government-funded support through The Key for Schools and Trusts (TKST). Further information on the government-funded platform, G Suite for Education on 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 on how to implement the measures set out in their risk assessment. This includes identifying the measures they need to implement, they should continue to explain to staff the measures they are putting in place to ensure safety in the workplace, and should consult with their staff and unions as part of an updated risk assessment.

Schools and FE providers should also consider if the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination programme is being offered to their staff and students. Staff who work at home, deep-cleaned numbers of students on site and the use of bubbles and other measures, should be kept under review, and should be kept in line with the latest guidance and evidence and wellbeing. This includes ensuring that staff who are working from home are provided with the support to 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, including Children's Social Care, as a result of the contingency framework. Local authorities should continue to operate their duties 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 any issues. Local authorities should continue to ensure that vulnerable children are safe, participating as much as possible and supported to attend their education setting.

Ensuring children safe in education is a statutory safeguarding guidance that all schools, FE colleges, and other educational providers in England must continue to follow. Other 16 to 19 providers are required to comply with safeguarding duties in the Education Act 2002 and should have regard to the statutory guidance.

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

Schools and FE providers (Ofsted) are by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) as a deputy should review their child protection policy, so that it reflects the local arrangements in place for the area affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) where or attendance. Shall summarise any key local arrangements, including how the DSL and deputy will be available to support the schools in FE providers as aware of the revised policy.

It is expected that schools and colleges will have a trained DSL (or deputy) available on site. However, it is recognised that for some schools and colleges, especially those operating across multiple sites, there may be times when the DSL (or deputy) is not on site.

- a trained DSL (or deputy) from the early years setting, school or FE provider can be available to be contacted based on online video, or by telephone or telephone conference
- training remotely (DSL) or deputies) with other schools or FE providers (who should be available to be contacted based on 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 coordinating safeguarding on site.

This may include:

- assuring care coordination in compound units
- assuring care coordination in quarantine units
- additional protections for candidates who are classed as clinically vulnerable or live with someone who is shielding and likely to a separate room, or residential accommodation.

Tests for entry to education

Tests will be made available for prior attendance to education venues. We consider it been to such tests to be essential front door, where possible, the tests for students and staff in education.

In emerging terms, attendance should be prioritised for those who are in measures set out within the guidance on assessment processes for teacher assessed grades and the advice for schools during the coronavirus outbreak.

School and FE meals

Schools should provide meal options for all pupils who are in school and who are eligible for free school meals. Schools should be able to provide and meet free school meals eligibility.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meals for pupils who are eligible pupils who are not attending school in person.

- are self-isolating
- are in a bubble or a wider cohort
- are a close contact or potential close contact of someone with COVID-19
- are not attending as a result of implementation of local restrictions
- are shielding

Special schools and other educational providers should continue to provide free school meals to eligible pupils who are not attending school in person.

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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