

Arrangements for the phased reopening of schools in March 2021

Revised supplementary guidance (updated 8 March 2021)

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Summary of changes
V1.0	21/12/2020	First version of document
V2.0	21/01/2021	Update to supplementary guidance following the decision to delay the reopening of schools, originally planned for 18 January. Updates effective from 21 January 2021.
V3.0	16/02/2021	Significant updates to reflect new arrangements for a phased return to school as announced on 2 February and confirmed on 16 February.
4.0	08/03/2021	Reduced in length to provide a clearer focus on what is new: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of phase 2 plans for reopening (paras 1-4) • Updated background section (paras 5-7) • Plans for more children and young people to return to school from 15 March (paras 8-16) • Changes re school age childcare (para 17) • Changes re senior phase learners in college (para 18) • Vulnerable children and young people (paras 19-24) • Update on necessary mitigations (para 26-30) • Physical distancing, including 2m distancing requirement for secondary learners (para 31) • Revised school transport arrangements (paras 32-38) • Face coverings (paras 39-43) • Ventilation (paras 44-46) • Updated text on testing (paras 47-50) • Updated text on people who are shielding (paras 51-53) • Plans for phase 2 vaccine roll out (paras 54-59) • Updated text on remote learning (paras 60-63) • Update on plans for national qualification (paras 64-66) • Annex – for residential providers

Purpose of this guidance

1. This guidance reflects the First Minister's statement to Parliament on 2 March that phase 2 of the return to school will take place on 15 March, unless new evidence or new circumstances require this to be reconsidered.
2. The expectation is that from 15 March all children in primary 4 to 7 will go back to school on a full-time basis. All primary school children will also be able to return to regulated childcare, including after school and breakfast clubs.
3. There is also expected to be a phased return to secondary school from 15 March. It is the intention that all secondary school pupils will return to spend some time in school from 15 March until the Easter break. All pupils are expected to return to full-time schooling after Easter, subject to continued suppression of the virus and the requirement for 2m physical distancing between young people being removed.
4. This guidance sits alongside [Education Scotland guidance](#) for local authorities on in-school and remote learning for secondary learners. It supplements the [existing Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools guidance](#) specifically to support schools and local authorities in the run up to Easter. With a small number of exceptions (for example, the need for 2m distancing between young people in secondary school) all aspects of the existing guidance and accompanying mitigations continue to apply while schools are open. Where there are points of divergence, the material in this guidance should be treated as taking precedence.

Background

5. There is understandable anxiety among staff about a return to school. Every possible step should therefore be taken by local authorities and schools to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff in schools. The mitigations set out in *Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools* guidance and the additional measures in this guidance should be strictly adhered to.
6. The extended period of remote learning and the phased return to school present challenges for staff, learner and parental wellbeing. Local authorities and schools have significant support in place to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Education Scotland have provided complementary information on [Mental health & wellbeing: supports for practitioners, parents, carers & young people](#) to provide further sources of support. This is in addition to the earlier resources provided to [support children and young people's health and wellbeing](#).
7. The Education Recovery Group continues to monitor carefully the incidence and prevalence of COVID-19 in Scotland and in school communities to inform future phases of return and updated guidance around safety and wellbeing in schools. Guidance will be kept under review and updated when necessary.

Arrangements for school opening from 15 March

Primary schools

8. It is expected that all children in primary schools will return to school full time.

Secondary schools

9. In secondary schools there will be a combination of in-school learning and remote learning for all S1-S6 pupils. The 8% cap on numbers in secondary schools has been removed. Secondary schools should look to minimise the movement of young people and staff when in school.
10. Senior phase learners who are taking national qualifications, must have priority for face to face learning and teaching in school to help ensure they achieve the qualifications they deserve. In particular, learning and teaching of critical practical work in relation to qualifications in 2021 must continue. Notwithstanding this, we expect that all young people in secondary schools will receive some in-school education each week from 15 March wherever possible. Schools and local authorities will decide how to provide this based on local circumstances and needs. This will allow pupils to engage with their teachers and start seeing friends again. At this time, this is as important for wellbeing as well as for learning.
11. In the run up to Easter, a high-quality remote learning offer should remain in place, although it is recognised that the nature of it may change given that schools are prioritising face-to-face learning. Education Scotland will ensure that enhanced online resources continue to be available over the coming month.
12. Provision will continue for the children of key workers and S1-S6 vulnerable children and young people. Children and young people who are learning in special schools and enhanced support provision should return to school in the same way as those outlined above.
13. Attendance in secondary schools will include teaching and non-teaching staff who, in the judgement of the local authority and schools, are required to attend in person to give effect to these revised school reopening arrangements, this could include student teachers undertaking placement practice; and possibly HEI tutors observing their practice.
14. In seeking to deliver the above, it will be necessary to manage teacher and school leadership workloads.

Learning in the outdoors

15. The requirement for strict 2 metre distancing in secondary schools may be relaxed when young people are outdoors for the purpose of outdoor activities and learning. The [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#) states that the outdoors can provide extra space for distancing between consistent groups of learners, help to decrease the risk of transmission and improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of young people. The [recent report from the International Council of Education Advisors](#) underlines this further. [Education Scotland advice](#), published alongside this guidance, advises that learning outdoors can help learners to continue to connect with one another and the school environment, support readiness for the fulltime return to in school learning, and provide experiences which enhance learning.
16. Outdoor learning should be interpreted broadly, to encompass a wide range of experiences and activities including those focused on learner wellbeing as well as specific activities pertaining to curriculum areas and subjects. Schools should consider what activities will positively draw in their learners. The [Outdoor Learning Directory](#) provides ideas of how outdoor learning can be utilised across the curriculum. Schools can also contact the

[Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education \(SAPOE\)](#) to access additional advice and support. Further advice on the practice and approach to outdoor learning and the range of options available to schools is available from the [Education Scotland Wakelet on outdoor learning and Learning for Sustainability](#).

Out of school childcare

17. On 2 March the First Minister announced that regulated school age childcare settings, including breakfast and after school clubs, can reopen for all primary school pupils from 15 March, subject to continued suppression of COVID-19. Until that date, settings have been asked to only remain open for children who may be considered vulnerable, and for the children of key workers. This could include teachers and other school staff.

Senior phase school learners attending college

18. Subject to continued submission of the virus, senior phase school learners studying SCQF level 6 Foundation Apprenticeships in Engineering and Scientific Technologies may commence a limited return to college campuses for essential practical coursework. From 15 March, colleges will be able to prioritise the return of other senior phase school pupils studying at college who require in-person provision to complete or progress. School pupils returning to college must be included within the current 5% limit on the numbers of students on campus for in-person teaching. Pupils should only be on campus for the duration of the practical work and should continue to learn remotely for those course elements where this is possible. [Temporary lockdown guidance for colleges](#) has also been published.

Support for vulnerable children and young people in secondary schools

19. Some children and young people rely upon the care and protection provided by schools and other agencies in relation to a range of specific circumstances. This should include those across any stages of learning within special schools and enhanced provision. Further guidance on [supporting children and young people with complex additional support needs](#) has been provided.
20. Local authorities (including through joint working between Chief Social Work Officers and Directors of Education) should ensure and prioritise continued care and support for these learners during the period until secondary schools reopen more fully. The definition in place of vulnerable children and young people since the start of January continues to apply (see Annex A). In doing so, they should consider how best to accommodate these children and young people safely, and in keeping with the mitigations set out below, alongside other learners now returning to school.

Vulnerable children and young people – definition

21. The definition in place since the start of January continues to apply. Children and young people may be vulnerable because of factors related to their personal development, features of their family life, or because of wider influences that impact on them within their community.
22. Those children and young people who were considered to be vulnerable prior to the pandemic should have been known to services, and are likely to have had a child's plan. The pandemic has brought others into this category, for example through loss of family income.

23. Where a child or young person requires co-ordinated support from more than one agency, this is likely to suggest greater vulnerability, and the plan would be co-ordinated by a lead professional. This would include a range of children and young people, such as those:

- at risk of significant harm, with a child protection plan;
- looked after at home, or away from home;
- 'on the edge of care', where families would benefit from additional support;
- with additional support needs, where there are one or more factors which require significant or co-ordinated support;
- affected by disability;
- where they and/or their parents are experiencing poor physical or mental health;
- experiencing adversities including domestic abuse and bereavement; and those
- requiring support when they are involved in making transitions at critical stages in their lives.

24. Children, young people and families may also experience adversity because of the impact of poverty and disadvantage (including entitlement to free school meals), and many will be facing this because of the necessary measures to respond to the pandemic. This will include families with loss of income, experiencing social isolation, or otherwise struggling because of the lockdown.

Support for children of keyworkers in secondary schools

25. The definitions of key workers agreed with local authorities previously during the pandemic will continue to apply. The need for local flexibility to suit local circumstances is acknowledged. It remains the case that not everyone who is eligible to apply will therefore be guaranteed a place.

Implementation of reducing risks guidance and enhanced mitigations (including approach to groupings)

26. [The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues met on 9 February](#) to consider its existing advice on the mitigations required to ensure a safe return to in-school learning for children, young people and staff. It recommended some key areas where its advice should be strengthened, for example the need for 2m distancing in secondary schools and on school transport. On 3 March, [the Advisory Sub-Group published additional advice](#) which would enable the use of 1m distancing on school transport to bring it into line with the mitigations in place on public transport, while emphasizing the need for effective ventilation and regular cleaning. In other areas its existing advice still stands although it has been strengthened further in one area to require face coverings to be worn throughout the day by all secondary aged pupils (not just senior phase).

27. Mitigations are in place to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in schools and ELC settings in Scotland, and these all continue to apply to the new variants. The [NERVTAG advice](#) on Mitigations to Reduce Transmission of the New Variant SARS-CoV-2 Virus concluded that a step change in the rigour of application of mitigations is required, given the increased transmission risk associated with the new variant.

28. Schools and ELC settings should therefore place a high priority on reinforcing the current mitigations designed to maximise safety and reduce risks for children, young people and

staff as set out in [the reducing risks guidance](#) and the [equivalent guidance](#) on ELC settings. All staff (including student teachers on placements) and learners attending schools on an exceptional basis for face-to-face learning should continue to implement and strictly observe these mitigations. This includes with regard to face coverings and existing requirements on distancing between secondary learners (and any additional mitigations that may be identified within updated risk assessments; for example, additional mitigations that are appropriate as a result of fewer people being in schools).

29. Other restrictions are not being eased in order to provide sufficient headroom to support the return of learners. For example, parents/carers should avoid contacts with other parents, children and young people at the school gates, on the way to school and after school in order to reduce community spread/outbreaks. Schools can assist with this by, for example, having staggered start/finish times.

30. More detailed advice is available in paragraph 104 of [the reducing risks guidance](#).

Physical distancing

31. [The reducing risks guidance](#) provides detailed advice on physical distancing in schools. Following the meeting of the Advisory Sub-Group on 9 February, it was decided that, as an additional protective measure, strict 2m distancing should be put in place at the current time between secondary-aged learners, in addition to continuing to be in place for staff in secondary schools. This applies to all learners in secondary schools including vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Physical distancing requirements in primary schools remain unchanged, eg 2m distancing between adults not from the same household should be maintained. There should also be 2m distancing between adults and children whenever possible. The requirement for strict 2 metre distancing between young people in secondary schools may be relaxed when they are outdoors for the purpose of outdoor activities and learning

School transport

32. On 3 March, [the Advisory Sub-Group published additional advice](#), including on the need for 2m distancing on school transport for secondary schools. The Advisory Sub-group noted that school transport has not been cited as a significant source of transmission and that local authorities and transport operators have taken considerable steps to put in place mitigations to reduce the risk of infection to passengers and drivers. For that reason, the sub-group has concluded that some relaxation can be supported alongside the effective use of ventilation on buses and regular cleaning.

33. Maintaining appropriate distancing is recommended and arrangements should be made wherever possible for each passenger to sit on their own. For example, consider using staggered “zig-zag” style seating, with pupils permitted to sit alternately in window/aisle seats in each row of the vehicle or, on services where there are banks of three seats, one seat is left empty between passengers. Children and young people from the same family should be permitted to sit next to each other.

34. In relation to secondary age pupils who are transported to school via taxi or private hire vehicle, pupils from two different households may travel in a taxi/private hire vehicle (alongside other mitigations e.g. hand and respiratory hygiene, face covering and windows open).

35. Arrangements should be made between schools, local authority public transport teams and transport operators to ensure that transport capacity is taken into consideration when planning for pupil return and that appropriate school transport provision is in place. For example the preparation and sharing of relevant information about which pupils will be attending school and their transport requirements.
36. It is acknowledged that the extent to which in-school experience can be safely provided for secondary pupils will vary locally and that local authorities will have flexibility in how they implement the phased return to allow them to take account of local factors, such as local transport availability.
37. The advice remains that face coverings should be worn by children aged 5 years and over on dedicated school transport (unless exemptions apply).

School transport for children and young people with additional support needs

38. Where dedicated transport is provided for children and young people with additional support needs there is a requirement to consider the wellbeing needs of learners. Local authorities should take appropriate actions to reduce risk where adherence to strict physical distancing may not be possible. School and local authority transport teams may wish to work together to identify whether it is appropriate to transport pupils from the same class grouping 'bubble' in the same vehicle, subject to an assessment of the specific needs of the pupils involved and with the use of appropriate mitigations.

Face coverings

39. At its meeting on 9 February, the Advisory Sub-group specifically considered whether advice on face coverings should be strengthened in order to require medical grade face masks to be worn in secondary schools. However the Sub-group view was that such a requirement was not commensurate with the risk in school settings, and that cloth face coverings, when combined with the other, more important, mitigations of physical distancing and hand hygiene, were considered appropriate in schools.
40. Further, at its meeting on 1 March, the Advisory Sub-group considered whether the wearing of type IIR face coverings should be advised for secondary school staff. In light of the absence of evidence that school staff are more likely to become infected or become seriously ill, and recognition that schools are relatively low risk environments as long as mitigations are applied and community transmission suppressed, the sub-group advises that standard face coverings, rather than type IIR, remain appropriate for secondary staff.
41. This is in line with the current [World Health Organisation \(WHO\) checklist](#) to support schools re-opening which suggests that medical masks are only required under certain conditions (e.g. for immunocompromised children or those with other diseases, in consultation with the child's medical provider).
42. As an additional measure, face coverings should now be worn at all times by staff and young people in secondary schools; including S1-S3 learners (not just the senior phase) in classrooms, in communal areas and when moving about the school.
43. Any decision to use medical grade masks or PPE in schools (or any specific workplace settings) would need to be informed by an organisation risk assessment, undertaken with health and safety experts and public health advisers.

Ventilation

44. The existing heating and ventilation sections within [the reducing risks guidance](#) is still considered to be robust and appropriate.
45. In its [advice published on 3 March](#), the Advisory Sub-group did recommend however, that greater emphasis should be placed on ventilation, by keeping windows open as much as possible, and doors open when feasible and safe to do so. [The World Health Organisation \(WHO\) has published a roadmap](#) to improve and ensure good indoor ventilation in the context of COVID-19.
46. Additional funding has been provided by the Scottish Government to support the introduction of additional mitigations, including ventilation.

Testing

47. The current asymptomatic testing offer is for school staff and senior phase pupils. In line with advice from the Advisory Sub-Group, work is being undertaken with the UK Department of Health and Social Care to provide secondary schools with additional test kits to allow them to extend the offer of twice-weekly at-home lateral flow testing to all secondary pupils after the Easter break. Confirmatory PCR tests will continue to be made available for all those who test positive using lateral flow devices (LFDs). It will be important to encourage all those participating to undertake these PCR follow-up tests, to mitigate against any risk of false positives.
48. Step by step guidance about the asymptomatic testing programme has been shared with schools and ELC providers via Objective Connect , and will be updated to reflect the extension of the offer to all secondary pupils. This guidance was developed in collaboration with NHS Test and Protect and the UK Department for Health and Social Care to support school and ELC providers in the delivery of the Schools/ELC Asymptomatic Testing Programme.
49. Asymptomatic testing is an additional measure and should not replace other mitigations set out in this guidance. Additionally, asymptomatic staff, student teachers and learners who receive negative LFD results must not regard themselves or behave as if they are free from infection. Symptomatic staff, student teachers and learners should not use lateral flow tests and must not attend work or school. They must access a PCR test as per their usual symptomatic testing channel. If a symptomatic staff member, student teacher or learner has used a LFD test and has returned a negative result, they should still self-isolate and arrange a PCR test.
50. When close contacts of any confirmed COVID case are identified through Test and Protect, they are now asked to get tested as soon as possible. Close contacts will book a PCR test through the UK booking portal, but can get help booking their test via NHS24. Staff and senior phase pupils participating in weekly LFD testing who are identified as close contacts of someone who has coronavirus will need to get a PCR test as instructed, and self-isolate for 10 days (even if they have tested negative in their weekly LFD testing). If they receive a negative PCR result they may continue with their weekly at-home LFD testing if they have LFD at home test kits in their home to continue testing with. Otherwise, they will have to complete their 10 days' isolation before picking up further kits. If they receive a positive PCR result then they and their household will have to start isolating for 10 days from the date of their PCR test. They will not be able to participate in weekly LFD testing for 90 days.

People on the shielding list (highest clinical risk)

51. Following consideration by clinicians of the increased risks of transmission of the new strain of coronavirus, [new guidance](#) for individuals on the shielding list has been issued for the duration of the lockdown period. This now makes clear that:

- **Staff at the highest clinical risk (people on the shielding list) should work from home, and if they cannot do so, they should not go into work as long as the area they live or work in is under lockdown.** The Chief Medical Officer issued a letter to everyone on the shielding list on 5 January to advise that your employer cannot arrange for you to work from home, then you should not attend work. If employers cannot make it possible for employees to work from home, they can use this letter (Shielding Notification), which serves a similar purpose to a fit note, as evidence that they should not go into work. A separate GP fit note is not required. The letter is valid up to 31 March to cover any times during which the person is living or working in an area under lockdown. We will update this guidance when new letters and guidance are issued.
- This advice remains regardless of whether people have had 1 or 2 doses of the vaccination. We will update this guidance if advice changes as evidence becomes available about the impact of the vaccination.
- **Children and young people at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) have also been advised by the Chief Medical Officer not to attend school, college or regulated childcare services such as nurseries in person in level 4 areas or during lockdown.** We will update this guidance if this advice changes. However, parents can consult with their child's secondary care (hospital) clinical team who may advise that an individualised risk assessment could be undertaken with the school, college or nursery and arrangements put in place which may allow your child to continue to attend when establishments re-open.
- Arrangements for learning from home will be put in place for children and young people who cannot attend school or college in person due to shielding requirements. The local education service will provide advice on the support available for children who are being asked not to attend school, college or childcare under additional protective measures

Clinically vulnerable children, young people and school staff

52. The arrangements for all other clinically vulnerable children, young people and school staff as set out in the reducing risks in schools guidance should be followed. This includes the [baseline advice](#) (which applies as standard throughout all levels) and the [enhanced protections at Levels 3 and 4](#). This guidance makes clear that individual risk assessments should be in place for clinically vulnerable staff. Local authorities should ensure that clinical advice is taken fully into account when updating these individual risk assessments and agreeing appropriate mitigations with employees. [Updated guidance](#) for pregnant employees is now available and should be followed (note that staff who are both pregnant and on the shielding list should follow the guidance for staff at the highest clinical risk above).

53. Information on shielding, including who would be considered within the highest risk group, is available at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): shielding advice and support - gov.scot](#)

www.gov.scot). Where concerns exist, [guidance for people with underlying health conditions](#) has been prepared and will continue to be updated. School staff who have underlying health conditions will wish to be aware of this advice in order to inform discussions with their employer, trade union and/or healthcare team in line with the current guidance on reducing risks in schools.

Vaccines for school staff

54. Vaccines are currently provided to people on a priority basis as set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). It is hoped that all those on the JCVI prioritisation list (groups 1-9) will be vaccinated by the end of April 2021, supplies permitting.
55. The JCVI issued its [advice on phase 2 of the vaccination roll out](#) on 26 February. The JCVI's advice is that an age-based approach remains the best way to address the risk of severe illness and mortality, and will ensure the quickest possible roll out of the programme to all. All four nations of the UK have agreed this approach.
56. The age cohorts which would follow the current phase 1 priority groups are:
 - All those aged 40-49 years
 - All those aged 30-39 years
 - All those aged 18-29 years
57. Some people within these age groups may already have received invitations to have their vaccine due to clinical vulnerability, or their role working with those who are clinically vulnerable including NHS and social care staff, and unpaid carers.
58. The JCVI did consider an occupational approach, and recommended that an age-based approach would remain the most efficient and effective approach which targets those at highest risk. Within occupational groups, age remains a clear factor in susceptibility to the virus. An operationally simple vaccination programme is therefore considered to ensure the quickest delivery of vaccines to all adults. We also understand that the JCVI considers the risk of infection in education staff to be in line with the general population, in keeping with the findings of recent studies.
59. It is important to note that vaccination does not change the need to continue all current COVID-19 mitigation measures (for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals) to protect staff and children and young people from transmission of the virus. A person's vaccine status does NOT change subsequent public health actions or interventions (including self-isolation) at this time. Vaccinated people should continue to comply with ALL testing regimes as per unvaccinated people, until guidance on this changes. Therefore those who work in close contact with children and young people, should continue to be assessed for the use of PPE and other protection measures.

Support for remote and blended learning

60. Practitioners across Scotland have been providing high quality remote learning for all learners. Secondary schools and local authorities should consider how best to organise staff to enable remote learning to continue for young people while they are not in school. Schools should continue to encourage and monitor learners' engagement in their remote learning provision. All schools and local authorities should have well-developed plans for

remote learning which should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are current and appropriate, and updated as required.

61. The Education Scotland website includes a [single landing page](#) for all guidance and practical support on remote learning.
62. Resources to support remote learning in non-school settings have been developed within local authorities, through Education Scotland and Regional Improvement Collaboratives, including national initiatives and partnerships. This offer includes access to **live, recorded and supported** learning resources as part of the [National e-Learning Offer](#).
63. In addition, the [National Improvement Hub](#) provides learning resources, webinars and links to [Glow Connect](#), providing information, help and support for Glow. Regional Improvement Collaborative Partnerships of local authorities have further information and support on Curriculum and blended learning for teachers which can be accessed through Glow.

Assessments for senior learners being affected by these decisions

64. In acknowledgement of COVID-19 related disruption to young people's education this academic year, examinations for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in 2021 have been cancelled. On 8 December the Deputy First Minister outlined to Parliament that National Qualifications in 2020-2021 will be awarded based on teacher judgement of evidence of demonstrated attainment, supported by local and national quality assurance processes.
65. The National Qualifications 2021 Group has issued updated guidance on 16 February 2021 setting out the details of the Alternative Certification Model, which included confirming a delay to the submission date for provisional results to 25 June.
66. The access to schools for some senior phase learners from 22 February was for the purposes of facilitating practical work which cannot be completed remotely. The priority for schools and colleges at this time should be to maximise learning and teaching time. This will impact on the timing of assessment, which can take place in the later stages of the 2020-21 session. The latest information from the National Qualifications 2021 Group can be found at: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/93778.html>

School meals

67. Under the provision of section 53A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities must promote the availability of school lunches at all schools, and any other educational establishments under their management, and they must encourage all learners **in attendance** to consume those school lunches. In the case of free school meals, education authorities are also required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that every pupil who is entitled to free school lunches receives them.

Free school meals provision

68. The arrangements for provision of free school meals to children and young people who are learning at home should continue. Local authorities and schools should continue to provide free school meals or alternatives, for children and young people who are eligible for free school meals.

69. All children in P1-P3 who are attending school should receive the universal free school meal provision. Local authorities should continue to enable anyone whose financial circumstances have changed and now meet the eligibility criteria to apply for free school meals. Information on [eligibility criteria](#) is available.

Provision for special diets

70. Local authorities and schools will continue to ensure that children and young people with special diets or allergies are catered for. No matter which option is chosen to provide meals to children and young people, care needs to be taken to check whether any have allergies or special diets before food is provided.

Supplementary guidance for residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities

Application

1. All schools, including residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities, should have regard to the measures set out in the main school guidance and apply them as appropriate in their specific settings. This supplementary guidance is intended for school care accommodation services, provided for the purpose of learners in attendance at a public, independent or grant-aided school, and consisting of the provision of residential accommodation. For clarity, this includes residential, special and secure accommodation. These include independent boarding school facilities and residence halls provided by local authority secondary schools.

Supplementary information

2. As set out in the latest supplementary guidance schools, from 15 March all children in primary 4 to 7 will go back to school on a full-time basis. There is also expected to be a phased return to secondary school from 15 March, and all pupils are expected to return to full-time schooling after Easter, subject to continued suppression of the virus. Children that meet the definitions of vulnerable children (including children and young people with significant additional support needs) and children of key workers may also be in school. All secondary learners should continue to be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning until schools reopen more fully, which will be at the earliest opportunity.

3. Schools with boarding provision, whether independent, grant aided or local authority provision, should consider what arrangements to put in place from 15 March, and whether to make different provision for different pupils or groups of pupils. Schools will want to consider balancing the risks of travel against educational benefit and given the short period before the Easter break and the benefits of avoiding travel and reducing virus transmission, it may be appropriate for many pupils to continue to follow an appropriate timetable of remote learning from home. We would recommend that this is the case for pupils currently outside the Common Travel Area, unless it is necessary for them to attend school in person during March, for example, for the purpose of practical assessment for the alternative certification model for national qualifications.

4. If pupils require to travel to their boarding accommodation from outside the Common Travel Area and they are located in a non-acute country, they may travel to Scotland. They will be subject to the managed isolation requirements but if unaccompanied will be permitted to observe this managed isolation at their boarding school. The Scottish Government is currently reviewing regulations in order to create an exemption for this group of pupils, and we will communicate with schools as soon as this is in place (until then current regulations for managed isolation in a quarantine hotel will apply). Schools will be expected to take immediate responsibility for boarding pupils on arrival, transferring them straight into a regulated environment under full time supervision by staff, with carefully controlled mitigations for the duration of the isolation period, including:

- Single rooms and private bathroom facilities where possible; or
- The setting up of bubbles, but only where pupils have travelled from the same area. These bubbles should contain no more than 5 individuals to minimise the numbers

required to self-isolate should anyone test positive, and should look to be of the same age-range as far as possible;

- Appropriate private transfer and transport direct to accommodation, following wider advice for taxi travel, or with appropriate spacing on buses – one person per row with mask on, with no-one immediate in front or behind;
- All FACTS guidance should be strictly followed;
- Testing requirements ahead of travel and during isolation as per guidance for all travellers still apply. Pupils aged 11 and older travelling directly to Scotland, or aged 5 and older travelling via England first, must have a testing package booked before they travel. These testing packages can be ordered online and delivered to the school, to be taken on day 2 and day 8 of isolation. Younger pupils are not required to have booked testing in order to travel, but testing in the same way is recommended for pupils of all ages.
- Schools also should follow the procedures for staff testing, test and protect, and outbreak management as set out in the main school guidance.
- Any arrangements for physical activity would need to follow the same guidance as for the broader managed isolation guidance.

5. Subject to continued suppression of the virus and confirmation of return dates for all pupils, schools may wish to consider planning for pupils to arrive early, for example in advance of the start of the summer term, in order to complete these arrangements. If pupils are arriving during holiday periods this should be for the minimum length of time possible and solely for the purpose of pupils beginning the summer term on the relevant start date following managed isolation requirements.

6. If pupils are in, or have been in the last 10 days, an acute country, this travel presents a higher risk and should not be undertaken unless there is no other option. Any pupils travelling from acute countries will be required to comply with the managed isolation arrangements which are applicable at the time for travellers from those countries.

7. Regular reviews of these arrangements will continue to be undertaken including ahead of the summer term, taking into account the latest evidence about new variants and progress in reducing community transmission levels. Arrangements following reviews will be communicated at the earliest opportunity. It is acknowledged that boarding school pupils, parents, host families and schools need to be able to plan return safely, including for those travelling from other UK nations, or from outside the UK.

8. Where boarding pupils do not return to school, independent schools, like those in state provision, should provide remote learning. Where boarders are the children of key workers, they should look to access local childcare arrangements such as childminders or informal childcare, in line with current guidance.

9. Where pupils are considered to be vulnerable (in line with definitions set out earlier in this guidance), particularly those attending residential special schools, schools should assess how to effectively continue to meet their needs, including, where necessary, through provision of a residential place.

10. In planning for the wider return of boarding pupils, either in March or after the Easter break, schools should allocate pupils to residential “bubbles”, as practiced in autumn 2020. These bubbles should be as small as practically possible and would endure through all activities which are not governed by the main guidance. Schools should continue to risk assess these arrangements as per the wider reducing risks in schools guidance, considering for example the arrangements for distancing as set out elsewhere in this guidance, and maintain contact with their local health protection team.