

CORONAVIRUS (COVID19)



NORTHERN IRELAND RE-OPENING SCHOOLS GUIDANCE

NEW SCHOOL DAY

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Overview

This guidance has been developed for education settings, to support a safe, phased reopening of schools in line with the Northern Ireland Executive's "[Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision-Making](#)" published on 12 May 2020.

The aims of this guidance are to:

- provide clarity of expectation with regard to practical approaches to a safe, phased reopening of schools; and
- in so doing, promote consistency of approach across Northern Ireland, whilst ensuring appropriate local flexibility for education settings and staff to adapt and adopt approaches that best suit their communities' needs and seek to maximise the safety of staff, children, young people and their families.

The guidance is written with a view to providing a planning framework for the Restart of schools in August / September and should be seen in that context. Public health advice at the time of school opening will always prevail over the aspirational planning assumptions made within this guidance.

The guidance, part of an overall Restart Programme, has been co designed by the Department of Education, school leaders and key partners and has been supported through consultation with Managing Authorities, trades unions and sectoral support bodies. It has been informed by judgements based on the scientific and public health advice available at the time of writing and should be read and applied in conjunction with the latest public health guidance available here. Given the changing scientific and public health environment we're all in, this guidance will change in line with the latest advice and as such should be treated as 'agile' guidance.

Where this guidance states that Managing Authorities and schools:

- "should" do something, there is a clear expectation, that it should be done; and
- "may" or "may wish" to do something, the relevant sections have been included as examples of relevant practice that can be considered if appropriate. Local variations are likely.

Nothing in this guidance affects the legal obligations of education settings with regard to health and safety and public health. Education settings must continue to adhere to all such duties when implementing this guidance. Under the Coronavirus Act 2020, they must have regard to the advice relating to coronavirus from the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland. In the event of any conflict between any applicable

legislation (including health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation must prevail.

Further Guidance

While the broad principles will be similar across all settings, it is recognised that Youth, Early Years and Special Education Needs sectors will require separate guidance and this is being developed. Likewise, further operational guidance on both catering and school transport provision is being developed and will be added at a later date.

Summary of Key Scientific and Public Health Advice

To promote transparency with regard to the scientific, public health and wider policy judgements that have informed the approach set out in this guidance, a summary of key scientific and public health advice has been published.

Introduction

The fight against COVID-19 has had, and will continue for some time to have, profound implications for society as a whole.

The Department of Education's (DE) Education Restart Programme identifies 5 inter-related key priorities as the means by which the safe return to school will be delivered. Workstream 5, "New School Day," focuses on the development of working arrangements and guidance essential to re-opening of schools for day one operations.

However, the "journey back to normality" for the education system will not be one where schools operate on a "business as usual" basis from day one and will require guidance for, and co-designed by, school practitioners and education stakeholders.

This paper sets out the key considerations for this journey, which will at all times proceed in parallel to Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance on management of the COVID-19 response and the Northern Ireland Executive's "[Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision-Making](#)" published on 12 May 2020.

It is neither practical, nor indeed would it be helpful, to be prescriptive about the arrangements that every school must follow – flexibility will be key to facilitate planning by schools that best meet local circumstances whilst recognising staff contractual arrangements with TNC 2020/1 and relevant JNC circulars. Nonetheless, practical, evidence-based guidance on matters relating to the new school day will provide the structure within which safe-planning may proceed.

Starting the Process of Return

Minister of Education, Peter Weir MLA, has stated that Primary 7 (for transition purposes) and Years 12 and 14 in post-primary (to facilitate preparation for key exams) should return to school on 24 August 2020, if safe to do so. It is appropriate for vulnerable children and young people to be considered as a priority cohort also. These priority groups should return on a full time basis until the full phased return to school for other children.

All other children should return to school by the normal school starting date.

Attendance Patterns

The Executive on 18 June 2020 agreed that the current social distancing guidance of 2m must be followed between all adults within the education sector but that a distance of 1m is appropriate between children and young people while using a 'protective bubble' strategy. In this context, younger children are viewed as all young people in Year 10 and below. Children in Year 11 and above will be expected to maintain social distancing (without a protective bubble) as will all adults in the education workforce.

The strategic objective is to achieve maximum face-to-face teaching time for all pupils at the earliest opportunity. Where social distancing cannot reasonably be applied a 'protective bubble' strategy can be adopted. The expectation is that the majority of settings will adopt such a strategy.

Whilst the aim, expressed and supported by many teachers, parents and young people, is to get as many pupils back to classroom teaching as quickly as possible in September with some schools able to accommodate all pupils, there will be circumstances where, due to small classrooms and other limitations, it may not be possible for all schools to move towards this at the same rate and therefore minimum levels should apply with the balance to be provided through blended learning which is described below.

Following consultation with educational practitioners, trades unions and sectoral bodies it is recommended that:-

- Primary school children return to full time education with social distancing, where practical, while implementing a 'protective bubble' strategy. In some schools classroom size may make this more challenging and we expect education settings to use all available space within the school to best facilitate a normal return to school;
- Those Primary school year groups which cannot meet social distancing requirements because of the limitations of available space will be split to maintain social distancing and will follow a blended pattern of education of a minimum of two days in school with the remaining time for remote learning. (This could see a range of models across primary schools but would ensure the minimum provision of 40% in school teaching contact time for all children with the balance by remote learning);
- Post-Primary schools may in the main be able to return to full time education with social distancing while implementing a 'protective bubble' strategy for younger year groups. Older pupils in year 11 and above will be expected to adhere to social distancing and will not operate in 'protective bubbles';
- Those Post-Primary schools which cannot ensure social distancing can be adhered to within all year groups may follow a blended pattern of learning. (This could see a range of models across Post-Primary schools but each model should ensure the minimum provision of 50% in school teaching contact time for all children with the balance by remote learning);
- Remote learning will be supported for those young people not attending including a small number of those shielding and advised not to attend; and,

- Further guidance on attendance for Special Schools, Education Other Than At Schools (EOTAS) and early years settings will be provided in due course.

In the event that social distancing rules are further relaxed over the summer period, before restart occurs, then it is possible that other attendance patterns will be considered, in consultation with practitioners and education stakeholders.

COVID-19 Risk

The risk of the disease being transmitted is higher the closer the contact, the greater the exposure to respiratory droplets (for example from coughing), or the longer the duration of the contact. A High Risk Contact is a person having had face to face contact with a COVID-19 Case within 2 metres for more than 15 minutes. Passing in corridors and short periods of contact does not therefore present a significant risk to staff or pupils.

The Basics of a “New School Day”

New School Day
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start of term is 24 August 2020 for Primary 7, Year 12 and Year 14 and all vulnerable children
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staggered arrival and pick up times to limit interactions.
<p>New Attendance Patterns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary Schools:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Protective bubble strategy- Maximise full use of school building- Where full classes cannot be accommodated – minimum 40% face to face teaching contact time (remainder by remote learning)• Post – Primary Schools:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Where possible protective bubble strategy (for younger years)- Where full classes cannot be accommodated – minimum 50% face to face teaching contact time (remainder by remote learning)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social distancing and increased hygiene measures will be introduced throughout the school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where pupils cannot be in school for all or part of the time, a ‘blended learning’ approach will be implemented.

Schools have expressed concerns about the sheer number and complexity of considerations relevant to the delivery of safe schooling. This section of this guidance paper is intended as a high-level summary of how a new school day might be structured and schools are invited to read this paper in its entirety, together with all prevailing guidance on the virus and its management. It is not intended to deliver all of the answers schools are seeking, nor is it offered as a “tick-box check-list.”

Journey to School and Arrival Considerations

The new school day starts with the journey to school. However they arrive at schools, arrangements should provide for avoidance of congestion and large gatherings of children and parents near the school gates or entrance areas to the building.

Welcoming the children and young people on arrival and quickly leading them to demarcated areas either externally or within the school and limiting the numbers of

children mixing together will all be important in the context of PHA social distancing guidance.

Use of staggered arrival times and marked drop-off areas and asking parents to remain on or outside the school grounds, where possible, can also help with limiting interactions. Schools should also consider discouraging or prohibiting children from bringing anything from home and, at the end of each school day, limiting/preventing shared resources from being taken home. The Education Authority (EA) will develop further operational guidance and provide this to schools, where necessary.

Protocols adopted by schools to manage arrival arrangements at schools are likely to prove equally applicable and effective at the end of the school day when children are collected/picked up by parents, guardians or carers.

At both arrival and collection times, parents should be actively discouraged from entering the school buildings as a means of preventing spread of the virus. Where parents must enter school buildings, appropriate hygiene measures should be in place.

Social Distancing – Protective Bubbles

Where the current social distancing guidance cannot reasonably be applied (for example with young children), schools should consider an additional risk mitigation approach organising children into small groups ('protective bubbles') with consistent membership appropriate to the size of the setting.

Keeping children and young people in 'protective bubbles' is a means of decreasing interactions between groups until further easing of measures is possible based on the public health situation. Where 'protective bubble' measures are used, social distancing between the adult staff working with such groups should also be maintained as much as possible. Implementing the Executive's decision on a move to 1m social distancing for children and young people means that schools must also implement protective bubbles to adequately manage the risk of transmission for those year groups.

The use of 'protective bubbles' should cover all aspects of the school day including, where practicable, use of designated areas and staggered times for meals and play in Primary schools and for those years within Post-Primary schools in which it is practicable. Arrangements applied in other countries have also extended to use of designated fixed places (desks) for individual children and young people.

In relation to school meals, seating and canteen space may not be available to pupils while social distancing puts pressure on space availability, and it is likely alternative arrangements are to be put in place, such as hatch collection and/or potentially meals delivered to classrooms with disposable containers and cutlery. It is important to stress

that hand hygiene (covered later in this document) is paramount and should be supervised for young children.

Use of designated, fixed places for children and young people, coupled with measures such as use of 'protective bubbles', while designed to minimise the potential for spread of the virus, are equally valuable.

Accurate records of group movements may prove helpful to schools to manage staffing concerns in circumstances where a member of staff or a child should develop symptoms of the virus while in the school setting. The protective bubble strategy aids this. The Department of Health's [Test, Trace and Protect](#) strategy requires early identification and isolation of such cases, rapid testing, tracing of close contacts and early, effective and supported isolation to break transmission chains.

Hygiene

Regular and thorough attention to hygiene is essential to deter spread of the virus. Children should wash their hands thoroughly on arrival at the education setting – this must be a repeatable discipline throughout the school day.

Hands should be washed thoroughly and regularly in the school at existing facilities using soap and water, and this can be with tepid / luke warm water. Hand sanitising material should also be made available at entrance points. It should be noted that hand sanitising is only a support mechanism for hand hygiene and does not negate the need to wash hands. Disposable paper towels / hand dryers are appropriate – not shared / ordinary towels. Younger children should be supervised/assisted when washing hands.

Practice of good respiratory hygiene should follow the "catch it, bin it, kill it" approach. The importance of good respiratory hygiene should be discussed with and explained to children. Staff and children should be supported with changes we all have to implement:

- They should be discouraged from touching their eyes, face, nose and mouth, putting hands/fingers into their mouths – often unconscious actions that we all make regularly;
- They should be shown how to cough into their elbow if they don't have a tissue / paper towel;
- If they have a paper towel they should be shown how to cough into it and then dispose safely of it into the nearest bin.

Communications with parents may help to emphasise these issues to build up a level of understanding and routine application by children.

Schools should remove unnecessary items from classrooms and other areas (where space exists for storage) – these should include items/toys/learning materials that are hard to clean.

Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly, with cleaning products appropriate for the purpose and surface. A system to confirm regular cleaning (frequency and standard) should be implemented.

Cleaning

A normal summer clean will have been implemented in advance of the new school term via the normal process whether on EA cleaning service or where cleaning staff are directly employed by the school.

Moving Around the School

Schools should consider flexible timetabling as a means of reducing movement of pupils and staff around the school environment.

It is accepted that not all schools are the same in design, size or layout and this may pose practical difficulties in application of the social distancing guidance. It is for this reason that local application of additional risk mitigation measures (such as the 'protective bubble' model) should be applied where social distancing is impossible.

Use of markings and visual cues for children and young people within corridors to direct the flow of class groups, application of a "one-way" system of travel and use of tape/markings/signage to demarcate social distancing zones are also encouraged as a means of further educating children on the importance of good practices.

If the person had been in contact with COVID-19 case, the PHA's Contact Tracing Service will contact the person by phone and give appropriate health advice.

How to Use this Guidance

This guidance provides an overarching framework for the re-opening of schools in Northern Ireland, with the aim of ensuring broad consistency and equity across local areas. It should be read in conjunction with the outline of the New School Day in educational settings and wider COVID 19 related guidance issued by the Public Health Agency.

Settings should develop School Re-Opening Plans that incorporate the principles and expectations set out in this guidance and that meet the needs of local communities. Thereafter, risk assessments should be developed and implemented on a setting-by-setting basis.

In developing these plans, there should be close engagement and partnership working wherever appropriate between:-

- Managing Authorities, Boards of Governors (BoGs) (including in their role as an employer);
- school leadership teams, teaching and non-teaching staff, support staff and trades unions;
- parents and carers; and
- children and young people.

In accordance with relevant legislation and guidance, trades unions should be consulted on and involved in the development of risk assessment templates for use across schools to be provided by the EA.

Local plans should be clearly communicated to the school community. This is vitally important given the expectation that educational provision may look different in settings across Northern Ireland (see section 14 communications).

This guidance will be kept under review to keep abreast of updates from advice provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and guidance and queries on it should be directed to your Link Officer in the EA in the first instance.

Key Principles

The following key principles and requirements are generally relevant to the practical implementation issues covered by this supporting guidance and should be considered by Managing Authorities and schools.

Scientific and Medical Advice

Implementation in late August and September should take full account of scientific and medical advice as provided by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies ([SAGE](#)) in the UK and from other jurisdictions where available and directly from our Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor that it is safe to proceed.

Public Health Measures

There should be comprehensive implementation of complementary public health measures whilst, wherever possible, ensuring educational continuity. These include:-

- social distancing, where measures fall into two broad categories:-
 - increasing separation; and
 - decreasing interaction;

Key to implementation is that the number of pupils and requisite staff within the school and the available facilities can allow the required social distancing to be achieved by:-

- shielding of clinically extremely vulnerable individuals;
- infection prevention and control (hygiene measures) such as enhanced cleaning, respiratory hygiene, handwashing;
- stay-at-home guidance for people who have symptoms and/or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and their household members (household isolation);
- adherence to and participation in the Department of Health's [Test, Trace and Protect](#) strategy;
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate; and
- ensuring educational settings know what to do if someone becomes unwell on-site or one or more coronavirus cases occur.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments of individual settings should be undertaken to ensure that health and safety legislation and guidance is fully adhered to. These should be kept simple and accessible. To support this, the EA will ensure that good practice risk assessments are shared across education settings via existing communication channels and attached to this guidance. Legal health and safety requirements must be adhered to as always.

Blended Learning

Where capacity constraints and/or safety and well-being considerations mean that children cannot learn in schools for some or all of the time, appropriate provision should be made for remote learning pursuant to local circumstances. When schools return there will be a blend of face to face and independent/distance learning directed by the pupils' teacher(s). There should be a particular focus on addressing digital exclusion as part of these arrangements.

Further guidance on supporting remote learning has been provided by the Department [here](#).

Clear Communication

Communication and dialogue with all trades unions, staff, BoGs, parents/carers and pupils on the reopening of schools should be carefully considered when implementing this guidance, to ensure confidence in the revised arrangements across all school users. The channels of communication (existing or otherwise) through which trades unions, staff, BoGs, pupils and parents/carers can raise concerns about the implementation of safety measures in individual settings should be made clear.

Social Distancing

Social Distancing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased Separation – the default position is that adults should stay 2m apart in line with PHA guidelines but children and young people should aim to maintain 1m where a protective bubble strategy is in place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased Interaction – where social distancing cannot be applied, children should be kept in a small group ('Protective Bubble') to decrease interaction up to and including year 10.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While travel in corridors is viewed as low risk, schools should encourage a 'one way' system to maintain distancing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents and carers should be discouraged from congregating at school gates perhaps with staggered start and end times.

Social distancing measures fall into two broad categories:-

- increasing separation; and
- decreasing interaction.

Social distancing applies to staff, children, parents (and any others who may attend the school) and any external contractors or delivery people. It is essential that all these groups are taken into consideration. Special considerations apply to those who are clinically vulnerable or those who are shielding (or clinically extremely vulnerable).

Social distancing should be considered in all relevant areas of schools, including classrooms, indoor and outdoor spaces and those not used for learning and teaching, e.g. pupils' cloakrooms, entrance halls, staff rooms, resource areas, kitchens and caretaker areas. It is essential that social distancing is appropriately adhered to in areas where staff may congregate such as staff rooms, kitchens and bathrooms/toilets.

The implementation of social distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning. For instance, how social distancing is implemented for very young children, for children with complex needs or disabilities and for pupils in different Key Stages will be different.

For children and young people with the most complex additional support needs, schools should involve lead professionals and parents to decide how best to continue supporting them. Separate more detailed guidance will be provided for these children.

Increasing Separation

The default position for schools is that adults should be supported to stay 2m apart. For children and young people it is acknowledged that where social distancing cannot be maintained a protective bubble strategy should be applied. The requirement for social distancing reflects precautionary judgements based on public health advice at the time of writing. As the situation evolves, such requirements may be amended or eased. Education settings should implement measures with a view to being able to ease them as soon as it is safe to do so, to ensure the maximum benefit from in-setting learning is gained as early as possible.

In any defined learning space, there should be sufficient floor area to allow for 2m separation between adults and 1m between children and young people in a protective bubble. This approach should be applied to both the preparatory stage when staff may be in schools to get ready to return and thereafter.

While they should be avoided wherever possible, brief interactions within social distancing guidance, such as limited numbers of people passing each other in corridors or, where one way systems are not possible, walking through learning spaces to go to the toilet (for example), are considered low risk and are permissible. Use of floor markings in relevant spaces may help minimise the extent of such encroachments.

Self-Contained Cohorts (Protective Bubbles)

In circumstances in which the guidance on social distancing cannot reasonably be applied, an additional risk mitigation approach should be adopted. This involves organising children and young people into small groups ('protective bubbles') with consistent membership, which are appropriate to the size of the setting. We expect that this approach may be useful in all year groups up to Year 10. When adopting this approach, every effort should be made to decrease interactions between groups and, if workable, ensure social distancing is considered within such groups and adhered to between such groups at all times. Once put in place, membership of groups should not change (until further easing of measures is possible based upon the public health situation). The cleaning, hygiene and health and safety measures set out in this guidance should, as in all cases, be followed carefully. Social distancing of 2m between the adult staff working with such groups should be maintained as much as possible.

The circumstances in which this approach is appropriate are as follows:-

- where children and young people cannot reasonably be expected to remain 2m apart from each other and staff whilst maintaining learning; and
- where it may not be possible or appropriate for the 2m rule to be applied to some children and young people with additional support needs, e.g. where close contact with staff is necessary to their well-being. In such circumstances, bespoke approaches should be determined by individual or group risk assessments, with full regard to the best interests of children, young people and staff. Further guidance on hygiene/health and safety in special educational needs (SEN) schools, including personal care, will be developed and should be followed.

There may be circumstances in which, while not subject to the exceptions set out above, older children will inadvertently fail to maintain social distancing. This may be the case, for example, during social times or specialised group work (e.g. practical elements of science or technology).

Every effort should be made to support young people to continue to observe social distancing. Older children should be organised into small, consistent groups and assigned clearly defined zones or spaces within which they should endeavour to observe social distancing as far as practicable (e.g. a marked-off area of an outdoor space). This approach has the benefit of ensuring that social distancing continues to be followed by older pupils whenever practicable, but that when circumstances are such that accidental encroachments are likely to take place, such interactions are limited to a small number of consistent individuals.

The school's pupil behaviour policy should be reviewed to ensure that it covers COVID-19 related incidents and should make provision for the school to be able to sanction, up to and including exclusion, pupils who wilfully refuse to adhere to arrangements of social distancing and deliberately cough or spit at pupils or staff, putting them at risk.

Social Distancing in Boarding Schools

Boarding schools and residential facilities will have their own particular challenges. Supplementary guidance available is to be considered in relation to these facilities.

Practical Approaches to Social Distancing – Use of Indoor Spaces

Education settings should consider the following practical approaches to ensuring the effective implementation of social distancing strategies.

It is important to note that these are intended as high-level descriptions of potential practical approaches. They are not intended as a checklist of approaches and should not be treated as such. The complexities of implementing these approaches in different schools and localities is not underestimated. The impacts of different approaches on staffing requirements, the challenges inherent in reducing interactions for certain age groups (e.g. very young children) and other key issues all require careful consideration to ensure successful implementation:-

- where children and young people can reasonably be expected to maintain social distancing, the layout of classrooms should be rearranged to support this. Whilst not recommended, due to potential for changes to social distancing guidance, schools may consider physical markings between each seating position to provide clarity to children and staff;
- for younger children who are unable to maintain social distancing, consideration may be given to how to create zones within facilities to maintain small groups of pupils and reduce interactions between them. In these circumstances, consideration should be given to the allocation of resources to the same small group, rather than sharing across groups;
- careful consideration should be given to the removal of unnecessary items in the classroom to maximise capacity and decrease the number of items requiring cleaning as well as supporting social distancing. Utilisation of existing waste management arrangements should be considered to dispose of any surplus items, unwanted material or defunct equipment to promote space availability and hygiene. The storage of these items should be considered at a local/individual setting level, with support from Managing Authorities where necessary. Schools will need to be pragmatic around any equipment or material needing removed. In what is hoped to be a limited requirement, any material or equipment removed, existing storage spaces must be used and should NOT be put in areas containing electrical equipment, combustible materials, or impair any corridors, exits doors or fire escape routes. It is unlikely that any 'new' storage facilities will be made available due to lead-in time, physical space restrictions and statutory approvals required;
- to provide capacity to accommodate social distancing approaches, a flexible approach to the use of all existing spaces within the usual setting may be taken. Appropriate consideration should be given to staffing and supervision if this approach is adopted. For example, breakout space, dining space, libraries and indoor sports spaces may be utilised as learning and teaching areas to either accommodate part classes working remotely from teachers or to relocate whole class groups to larger spaces;
- very large spaces may be repurposed to accommodate multiple groups, for example, by repurposing a dining hall or assembly hall to provide general

classroom accommodation. Temporary screens may be used to divide the space to provide appropriate separation between groups. If this approach is adopted, thought should be given to alternative approaches to the safe provision of lunches, physical education (PE) or other activities usually undertaken in such spaces. This may, for example, require increased use of outdoor amenities;

- the health and well-being of pupils and staff, and the provision of positive learning and teaching environments, is paramount when repurposing any space to provide additional capacity;
- whilst not recommended due to potential changes in social distance guidance, floor markers should be considered to ensure pupils queue 1m apart from each other. Staggered lunch breaks should also be considered;
- all staff rooms, bases and offices should be reconfigured to ensure the social distancing rule of 2m or to whatever government guidance prevails around social distancing is maintained;
- ensure that any social distancing measures still allow for hygiene measures to be implemented;
- the safe and practical use of toilets and hand-wash facilities should be considered by each school;
- ensure there are adequate handwashing facilities accessible to all children. Note there will be an increased demand due to the increased frequency of hand washing; and
- cleaning schedules should be reviewed to meet the demands of the school. Cleaning practices should be assured to confirm that cleaning practices and frequency as per the agreed schedules and that the quality of cleaning practice is as expected. It should be noted that normal cleaning activity should be sufficient and that hand hygiene is the most effective method of combatting the spread of the virus.

Indicative examples of re-configured classrooms and internal school areas are provided as illustrative documents. These are for demonstration purposes only. School design is not the same across all school stock, with some schools having more individual classrooms and others more breakout/social space.

Education settings may wish to draw on the broad principles illustrated in these examples to help inform bespoke local solutions. There should be no restriction on how spaces are configured to best support the educational needs of learners whilst

adhering to social distancing requirements. Education settings will be best placed to consider the right approach for their own individual circumstances.

Decreasing Physical Interaction

In addition to spatial solutions to maintain social distancing between individuals and/or small groups, the spread of the virus can be minimised through reducing the number and frequency of physical interactions between individuals (staff and pupils). This is particularly relevant in Post-Primary schools, as Primary pupils will tend to spend most of their time with one group of peers and one/two adults.

All education settings should consider appropriate approaches to minimising physical interactions between individuals/small groups in schools, including at social and dining times. Pupils should be encouraged to remain onsite for lunch wherever possible, to minimise unnecessary interactions with others off the school premises. Some approaches they may wish to consider, depending on local circumstances, are set out below.

Circulation/Transitions

Some approaches to timetabling, circulation of school populations and transitions between different parts of the school day that education authorities and schools can consider include:-

- **Limiting Teacher and Pupil Movement** – to minimise the need for large numbers of pupil transits, it may be beneficial to keep groups of pupils in one location and have teachers move to them. This would require careful consideration, particularly with classes in the senior school, to align with subject choices and the stage of development for each individual. Reducing the amount of pupil circulation minimises contact with frequently touched surfaces such as door handles which can help reduce virus spread. Consideration may need to be given to supervision arrangements as teachers move between classes. If teacher movements are not considered feasible, particularly with senior classes, careful consideration should be given to timetable arrangements (see below) to reduce the number of movements by pupils in a day;
- **One-way Systems** – many schools currently manage their pupil circulation by adopting one-way systems within corridors and stairs. This may help avoid bottlenecks and ease travel around the school;
- **External Circulation** – as part of an amended circulation strategy, it may be beneficial to encourage the use of external areas to move between parts of the building. This would reduce the density of use of the internal areas and also

provide some movement and fresh air. Appropriate solutions would be specific to each location. Increasing the use of outdoor spaces as learning environments could link with this strategy and the addition of sheltered areas could serve as expanded social zones during breaks. Safety in all weathers and security issues would require to be considered in each location;

- **Soft Changeovers** – regardless of the number of transitions in a school day, the density of use of circulation space may be reduced by having soft changeovers. Consideration may be given to a “no bell” strategy which allows a degree of flexibility on class start/finish times and avoids the intensity of flow which many schools experience. It also provides a calm and managed experience which better prepares staff and pupils for the next session;
- **Signage/Communication** – appropriate signage or verbal communication about the system adopted may need to be implemented if it differs from previous arrangements at the setting. Where available a public address system may support this;
- **Timetabling** – creative timetabling has the potential to reduce physical contact and thereby the transmission of infection. Some approaches that education settings may consider include the following:-
 - use the flexibility within the NI Curriculum and, in particular, the use of cross-curricular themes to structure lessons innovatively and thereby reduce the need for learners and staff to move between different areas of an establishment;
 - prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, some post-primary schools were adopting a “big block” timetable to reduce the number of transitions in the school day. This allows for more in-depth learning and teaching without disruption and also reduces the amount of set up/clean up time in practical subjects;
 - particularly for years 13 and 14, where fewer subjects are taken and independent learning is more common, pupils may come into school for a longer session with the teacher or to perform practical elements, with self-directed learning or theory then being completed at home via online learning. A flipped learning approach may be particularly helpful for senior school classes; and
 - time-tabling may also be considered at a more holistic level to take account of time spent using indoor, outdoor and digital environments. For example, each pupil could have allocated time learning in each of these environments, reducing the capacity requirements placed on indoor facilities. This would be particularly helpful in primary schools.

- **Drop Off/Pick Up** – the arrangements for parents to drop off and collect children/young people require careful consideration, to ensure that large gatherings of people can be avoided and social distancing maintained. Parents should not enter school buildings unless required. Some approaches that Managing Authorities and schools may consider include the following:-
 - staggered drop off/pick up times, so that not all children arrive onsite at one time;
 - if the school has additional access points, consideration may be given to whether it would be beneficial to open these to reduce congestion;
 - consideration may be given to where children go as they arrive at the setting. This could include heading straight to their small group's designated learning space/classroom, which could be indoors or outdoors;
 - if parents or carers are dropping off younger children, they should be discouraged from gathering outside the school and should maintain distancing of 2m, as far as practicable, when dropping off their children. Appropriate markings may be introduced at the school gates/in car parks;
 - for those arriving by car, parents may be encouraged to park further away from the school and then walk with their children to avoid congestion or alternatively use active travel routes where feasible. Car-sharing with children of other households should be avoided;
 - where learning spaces can be accessed directly from outside, this should be encouraged to decrease interactions between individuals in circulation spaces; and
 - particular consideration should be given to the arrangements for parents of children with complex needs or disabilities, who may normally drop their children off within the school building.

- **Social Time and Dining** – education settings may wish to consider the following potential approaches to minimising interaction at social and dining times and dealing with associated logistical issues. Arrangements in each setting may depend on whether the dining hall is used as an additional learning space and/or whether food is being prepared on the premises:-
 - ensuring hand hygiene guidance is adhered to particularly where food is being prepared handled or consumed;

- staggering break times, for example, by different year groups. The appropriate approach may depend on the cohort of pupils in the school on any one day;
 - requiring pupils to maintain social distancing where possible or, for pupils up to Year 10, to stay in their small/designated groups/'protective bubbles' during social times, with appropriate supervision to facilitate this;
 - increasing the space for dining or implementing staggered dining arrangements, with children and young people eating in small groups and/or entering the dining hall in their designated groups;
 - consideration may be given to whether it would be beneficial for pupils to stay in classrooms to eat. This could involve children bringing their own packed lunch or options such as a hatch collection service from a designated point at the canteen with food in disposable dishes or meals delivered to classrooms in boxes containing the meals for distribution in the classroom. Potentially this may require pupils to eat at their desk, or alternative locations such as outside, using disposable containers, packaging and cutlery, which will be supplied as part of the meal service by the catering team;
 - maximising the use of the outdoor environment for social times/dining, although implementing distancing between pupils/groups/'protective bubbles' would need to be supervised and is weather/climate dependent; and
 - limiting the number of staff using staffrooms and bases at any one time. Numbers will naturally be less than usual if staggered lunch/break times are implemented.
- **Evacuation Procedures** – if the layout of the setting is changed, and/or circulation routes or entry/exit points are altered, consideration should be given to evacuation procedures (e.g. in the event of a fire or other incident). Evacuation points should also be considered to ensure appropriate social distancing arrangements are maintained between individuals/groups as far as practically possible. This should be included as part of the risk assessment for the setting. Evacuation arrangements for children with complex needs or disabilities should be reviewed in light of any changes;
 - **Induction/Orientation** – Managing Authorities and schools should consider how they will support staff and children to orientate themselves to the revised

layouts and circulation patterns described above. They may wish to consider the following approaches:-

- a map could be displayed in the educational setting detailing entry/exit points and new circulation patterns, for use by pupils, staff and parents drawing on learning from the retail sector. Clear signage and colour coding on walls and floors could be implemented prior to return to help with way finding, along with taping off of specific areas;
- appropriate visuals will be particularly important for younger children and for some children with additional support needs. These will need to be clear and child friendly to enable them to be understood by as many children as possible. These could include signs in braille (with appropriate arrangements made for hygiene) or signs that display meaningful symbols. Any signage that involves direct interaction from pupils will need to be cleaned regularly and further methods of communication should also be considered;
- some new schools utilise 3D digital models or 360 photography/videos to allow remote familiarisation prior to occupation. This approach may be considered for returning users to help them orientate new layouts. This would also be useful for those in transition, e.g. P7 to Year 8 in the event they have missed the opportunity for transition visits prior to schools closing; and
- for children with SEN, schools should work in partnership with parents, lead professionals, children and young people to establish what support and plans need to be put in place to meet their needs for both learning at school and at home. Enhanced transitions may be considered for children such as through visual representations and plans of social distancing in their schools.

Space Utilisation

Education settings should seek to maximise the ability of their existing space to accommodate pupils by:

- Rearranging teaching spaces to minimise the risk of transmission and infection by:
 - Spacing seating as widely as possible within a teaching space; and
 - Giving consideration to maximising space for individual pupils by removing non-essential furniture from teaching spaces.
- Considering flexible use of existing non-teaching space (where it is appropriate to do so).
 - examples may be repurposing resource areas, halls or sports halls.

In addition to maximising safe use of existing spaces, consideration may also be given to gaining access to additional spaces on a short term basis. This could include use of conveniently located public, private or third sector estate. For example, there could be opportunities to use council office space, libraries, leisure centres or cultural venues. It is recognised however that while gaining access to such alternative spaces may bring advantages in respect of expanding the opportunities to achieve social distancing standards, other issues around transport, safeguarding, and ensuring a generally safe and positive learning environment must also be considered as part of the school's decision making process in approving use of such facilities. Consideration of the use of outdoor spaces may also be appropriate at certain times in the school year where weather permits.

Given that existing accommodation across the education estate is very varied, this is likely to translate into large variations in the potential of the existing spaces (even with some expansion) to fully enable social distancing protocols.

It is acknowledged that in many settings it will not be possible to fully implement the social distancing protocols in place at a given time, however, schools should work to rearrange, repurpose or expand their existing space as best possible in order to accommodate pupils in as safe a manner as possible within the constraints of their buildings.

Practical Approaches to Social Distancing – Use of Outdoor Spaces

In parallel with the indoor environment, education settings should consider appropriate use of the outdoor environment to enrich the learning experiences of children and ensure as many children as possible can benefit from formal education at school. Evidence suggests that outdoor environments can limit transmission, as well as more easily allowing for appropriate social distancing between children and staff.

Effective outdoor learning can be delivered across many subject areas and the 3-18/19 learner journey, whilst enabling benefits in relation to learner engagement, health and wellbeing and educational attainment. Informal outdoor classrooms set within the natural environment can often be effective spaces for learning. However, where some level of shelter is required the periodic use of the school building should be considered. With any repurposing of space, particularly in respect of any greater use of outdoor spaces for learning, schools must ensure that pupils with complex needs or disabilities are not disadvantaged.

Use of outdoor equipment with multiple touch points should be discouraged, however, if outdoor equipment is being used, schools should follow hand hygiene guidance and ensure that multiple groups do not use it simultaneously, as well as considering appropriate cleaning by staff using it through disinfectant spray and paper towels, between groups of children using it ([see hygiene measures](#)).

Use of any additional spaces should not be detrimental to the ability to clean or provide social distancing and should have adequate toilet facilities and handwashing/hygiene provision.

The availability of additional space across other public sector assets will vary across Northern Ireland. The use of these other spaces will raise complexities around staffing, cleaning, catering, insurance and transport if pupils are split across multiple sites. These should be worked through at a local level if this approach is adopted.

Wraparound Care and Extended Schools

The “journey back to normality” for schools does not mean that they operate on a business as usual basis from day one; however, wraparound support and other forms of pastoral care, where it can be delivered, has the potential to greatly assist children and young people (particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds) with their return to school.

Extended Schools (ES) should consider how such supported provision might be designed or adapted to target those children and young people most in need or at risk of underachievement, including how best to address any direct impacts arising from COVID-19. In preparing ES Action Plans for the year ahead, schools should adopt a flexible approach as far as possible. The EA will provide updates on the Extended Schools website: <http://www.niesis.org>

Where ‘protective bubbles’ are being operated within a school, wraparound care and ES provision must operate using the current social distancing guidance and comply with any additional guidance provided by the Department of Health.

Workforce¹

Workforce Attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff who are clinically vulnerable should be supported to work from home where possible, by asking them to support remote education. If they do not wish to work from home they should be offered safest available on-site roles in line with social distancing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) can attend their education or childcare setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff who are shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people) will have received written confirmation from their GP. These staff should not attend school in person.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff living with someone who is shielding should only attend the education setting if they are able to stringently adhere to social distancing. Such staff should have an individual work assessment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The most up to date guidance and list of underlying health conditions that necessitate shielding should be checked on the PHA website.

Staff Who Are Clinically Vulnerable

All schools should follow the latest guidance on attendance of staff who have health conditions or are pregnant, or who live with individuals who have health conditions or are pregnant. Current guidance on these categories is published on NI Direct and by PHA [here](#).

Clinically vulnerable people are a wider group of people who are distinct from those people who are extremely clinically vulnerable. People who are clinically vulnerable are those with pre-existing conditions who have been advised to follow social distancing guidance and should work from home where possible. People who are 'extremely clinically vulnerable' have been advised to follow shielding measures.

Staff who fall into the category of clinically vulnerable should be supported to work from home where possible, for example, by asking them to support remote education,

¹ Please note that this may change depending on Executive decisions.

carry out lesson planning or other roles which can be done from home. If they cannot work from home or do not wish to do so, they should be offered the safest available on-site roles, staying 2m away from others wherever possible, although the individual may choose to take on a role that does not allow for this distance if they prefer to do so.

If they have to spend time within 2m of other people, settings must carefully assess and discuss with them whether this involves an acceptable level of risk.

Staff Who Live With Someone Who is Clinically Vulnerable

If a child, young person or a member of staff lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting.

Staff Who Are Shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people)

This is a different group to those who are clinically vulnerable (as described above). Those who are shielding will have received written confirmation from their GP that they should 'shield'. This group will require a different set of measures to keep them safe.

People with such serious underlying health conditions are strongly advised to follow shielding measures to keep themselves safe and not to attend school in person. The most up-to-date guidance and list of underlying health conditions that necessitate shielding should be checked on the NI Direct website under the [shielding section](#).

Staff Who Are Living with Someone Who is Shielding

People who have household members who are clinically extremely vulnerable (requiring 'shielding') should only attend the education setting if they are able to stringently adhere to social distancing and all other advised hygiene measures. Such staff should have an individual risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate place of work is determined.

EA will provide schools with detailed operational guidance to support engagement with staff.

Test, Trace and Protect

Staff who exhibit any symptoms associated with COVID-19 should not attend educational settings. The Department of Health has implemented a contact tracing programme called [Test, Trace and Protect](#) designed to control the spread of COVID-19. All staff and pupils are expected to follow the requirements of this programme: to self-isolate if they are identified as close contacts of cases and to obtain a test for COVID-19 if they develop symptoms. All members of their household should follow

isolation guidance as provided by the Test, Track and Trace service in the Public Health Agency.

Where an individual has had a negative result, it is important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household receives a negative result, they can return to work providing they are well enough and have not had a temperature for 48 hours.

Where the result is positive, they should follow PHA isolation guidance which currently requires that everyone in your house must stay at home:-

- if you develop symptoms of coronavirus you should arrange to have a test as soon as possible, you will need to stay at home for at least 7 days from the onset of your symptoms;
- if you live with someone who has symptoms or has a positive test, you are a close contact and you will need to stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms, it is important that the full 14 days are completed;
- if you develop symptoms during this 14-day period, you will need to arrange to have a test and if your test is positive you must stay at home for 7 days from the onset of your symptoms (regardless of what day you are on in the original 14-day period);
- 7 days after your symptoms started, if your condition has improved and you have not had a temperature during the previous 48 hours you can complete your period of self-isolation. If you still have a high temperature, keep self-isolating until your temperature returns to normal. You do not need to self-isolate if you just have a cough after 7 days, as a cough can last for several weeks after the infection has gone;
- if you have symptoms and live with someone who is 70 or over, has a long-term condition, is pregnant or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else they can stay for the 14 day isolation period;
- it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days if you are a close contact or 7 days if you have the infection will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

It is essential that all staff and pupils follow this guidance. By doing so staff and pupils will not only protect themselves but they will also limit the spread of the virus to educational settings and the wider population.

Staff or pupils who have been part of the same 'protective bubble' as someone who has/develops symptoms and/or who tests positive for COVID-19, must follow PHA isolation guidance under the Test Trace and Protect programme. All other contacts in the same 'protective bubble' as a person with symptoms or who tests positive will have to self-isolate for the required 14 day isolation period. They can return to school when they have completed the necessary period of isolation as advised by the Test, Trace and Protect service. This will help contain any potential transmission to those staff/pupils in the bubble and will also assist in protecting the wider community. A 'protective bubble' is effectively an extension of a household. [COVID-19: Information for the public](#)

Where staff or pupils, in a cohort that is not operating as a 'protective bubble' (for example, in some senior school classes or where smaller numbers permit social distancing within existing classrooms), have developed symptoms or tested positive all staff and pupils within this cohort who have been in direct contact with the individual must self-isolate and follow PHA guidance. They can return to school when they have completed the necessary period of isolation as advised by the Test, Trace and Protect system.

Enhanced cleaning should be carried out within any classroom in which an individual who has developed COVID-19 has been to prevent the spread of the virus and this should be clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils to provide assurance that the environment is safe.

Pupil Attendance

Pupil Attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools should follow latest guidance on attendance for children and young people who have health conditions, who live with people with health conditions or who are pregnant.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils who are clinically vulnerable are those with pre-existing conditions who have been advised to stringently follow the social distancing guidelines and should learn from home where possible. A small minority of pupils will fall into this category.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, can attend their education or childcare setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils who are shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people) will have serious underlying health conditions. These pupils should follow shielding measures and should not attend school in person. Schools should consider the distance learning and support needs of pupils who are shielding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils living with someone who is shielding should only attend the education setting if they are able to stringently adhere to social distancing. Such pupils should have an individual risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate place of learning is determined.

Pupils Who Are Clinically Vulnerable

All schools should follow the latest guidance on attendance for children and young people who have health conditions or who live with individuals who have health conditions or are pregnant. Current guidance on these categories is published on NI Direct and by PHA [here](#).

Clinically vulnerable people are a wider group of people who are distinct from those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (who should rigorously follow shielding measures). People who are clinically vulnerable are those with pre-existing conditions who have been advised to stringently follow the social distancing guidance and remain at home where possible. A small minority of children will fall into this category and parents should follow medical advice if their child is in this category.

Pupils Who Live with Someone Who is Clinically Vulnerable

If a child or young person lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable as above), including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting.

Pupils Who Are Shielding (clinically extremely vulnerable people)

This is a different group to those who are clinically vulnerable (as described above). Those who are shielding are clinically extremely vulnerable and require a different set of measures to keep them safe.

Pupils with serious underlying health conditions are strongly advised to follow shielding measures to keep themselves safe and not to attend school in person.

When planning for a wider, phased return of pupils, education settings should consider the distance learning and support needs of pupils who are shielding.

The most up-to-date guidance and list of underlying health conditions that necessitate shielding should be checked on the NI Direct website under the [shielding section](#).

Pupils Who Are Living with Someone Who is Shielding

Pupils who have household members who are clinically extremely vulnerable (at high risk of severe illness and requiring 'shielding') should only attend the education setting if they are able to stringently adhere to social distancing. Such children should have an individual risk assessment conducted before the most appropriate place of care is determined.

When planning for a wider, phased return of pupils and staff, the EA and schools should consider the distance learning and support needs of pupils who are shielding or living with people who are shielding.

Test, Trace and Protect

Children and young people who exhibit any symptoms associated with COVID-19 should not attend educational settings. The Department of Health has implemented a contact tracing programme called [Test, Trace and Protect](#) designed to control the spread of COVID-19. All pupils are expected to follow the requirements of this programme: to self-isolate if they are identified as close contacts of cases and to obtain a test for COVID-19 if they develop symptoms. All members of their household should follow the appropriate isolation guidance as provided by the Public Health Agency.

Where an individual has had a negative result, it is important to still apply caution. If everyone with symptoms who was tested in their household receives a negative result,

they can return to school providing they are well enough and have not had a temperature for 48 hours.

Where the result is positive, they should follow PHA isolation guidance which currently requires that everyone in your house must stay at home:

- if you develop symptoms of coronavirus you should arrange to have a test as soon as possible, you will need to stay at home for at least 7 days from the onset of your symptoms;
- if you live with someone who has symptoms or has a positive test, you are a close contact and you will need to stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms, it is important that the full 14 days are completed;
- if you develop symptoms during this 14-day period, you will need to arrange to have a test and if your test is positive you must stay at home for 7 days from the onset of your symptoms (regardless of what day you are on in the original 14-day period);
- 7 days after your symptoms started, if your condition has improved and you have not had a temperature during the previous 48 hours you can complete your period of self-isolation. If you still have a high temperature, keep self-isolating until your temperature returns to normal. You do not need to self-isolate if you just have a cough after 7 days, as a cough can last for several weeks after the infection has gone;
- If you have symptoms and live with someone who is 70 or over, has a long-term condition, is pregnant or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else they can stay for the 14 day isolation period
- it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days if you are a close contact or 7 days if you have the infection will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

It is essential that all staff and pupils follow this guidance. By doing so staff and pupils will not only protect themselves but they will also limit the spread of the virus to educational settings and the wider population.

Staff or pupils who have been part of the same 'protective bubble' as someone who has/develops symptoms and/or who tests positive for COVID-19, must follow PHA isolation guidance under the Test and Trace and Protect programme. All other contacts in the same 'protective bubble' as a person with symptoms or who tests positive will have to self-isolate for the required 14 day isolation period. They can

return to school when they have completed the necessary period of isolation as advised by the Test, Trace and Protect service. This will help contain any potential transmission to those staff/pupils in the bubble and will also assist in protecting the wider community. A 'protective bubble' is effectively an extension of a household. [COVID-19: Information for the public](#)

Where staff or pupils, in a cohort that is not operating as a 'protective bubble' (for example, in some senior school classes or where smaller numbers permit social distancing within existing classrooms), have developed symptoms or tested positive all staff and pupils within this cohort who have been in direct contact with the individual must self-isolate and follow PHA guidance. They can return to school when they have completed the necessary period of isolation as advised by the Test, Trace and Protect system.

Enhanced cleaning should be carried out within any classroom in which an individual who has developed COVID-19 has been to prevent the spread of the virus and this should be clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils to provide assurance that the environment is safe.

Specific guidance in respect of pupil attendance whether at school or at home will be issued separately.

Hygiene

Hygiene
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children will wash hands as soon as they arrive at school and regularly through the school day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will only be required in a very small number of cases e.g. dealing with intimate needs/ giving medication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PPE should not be worn by children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All cleaning will be carried out in accordance with PHA Guidance. Routine general cleaning should take place at least daily.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular cleaning of door handles, desk tops etc. will take place throughout the day.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools should remove unnecessary items from classroom e.g. soft toys, lego, learning materials that are hard to clean.

PPE

The PHA has published [guidance to support safe working in educational settings in Northern Ireland](#). This advises that routine use of PPE within education settings is not required other than for certain tasks deemed to be of higher risk of transmission.

PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases. These are:-

- working with children, young people and pupils whose care routinely already involves the use of PPE, due to their intimate care needs; and
- giving children medication.

PPE in the following situations means:-

- fluid-resistant surgical face masks;
- disposable gloves;
- disposable plastic aprons; and
- eye protection (for example a face visor or goggles).

Where PPE is recommended, this means that:-

- a facemask should be worn if a distance of 2m cannot be maintained from someone with symptoms of COVID-19 (**symptomatic children should not be in school**);
- if contact is necessary, gloves, an apron and a facemask should be worn; and
- if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of fluids entering the eye (e.g. from coughing, spitting or vomiting), eye protection should also be worn.

When PPE is used, it is essential that it is used properly. This includes scrupulous hand hygiene and following guidance on donning (putting on) and doffing (taking off) PPE safely to reduce the risk of contamination (a link to video guidance is available at the end of this document).

Face masks:-

- MUST cover both nose and mouth;
- MUST be changed when they become moist or damaged;
- MUST be worn once and then discarded – hands must be cleaned after disposal;
- MUST NOT be allowed to dangle around the neck; and
- MUST NOT be touched once put on, except when carefully removed before disposal.

Children Should Not Wear PPE

Educational settings should develop a clear procedure for what staff should do if a pupil starts to display symptoms of COVID-19 when at school, including guidance on the appropriate use of PPE adhering to the above PHA guidance.

PHA guidance makes clear that staff should continue to use PPE in line with current health and safety policies and risk assessments. Staff should only wear PPE when it is appropriate to the task they are undertaking. The exception is where, following an individual or organisational risk assessment it is found that a higher level of contamination, such as respiratory secretions, may be present or the risk assessment identifies that there is an identified need for PPE, then it should be readily available and provided in line with guidance. Staff within catering teams may need to use PPE regularly as they will be serving meals to children and young people across a range of 'protective bubbles'.

The EA is leading on procurement of suitable quantities of PPE for educational settings and further advice will be provided directly by the EA.

Cleaning

A normal summer enhanced clean should be arranged in advance of the new school term via the normal process whether on EA cleaning service or where cleaning staff are directly employed by the school. All cleaning activity will primarily focus on surface cleaning, such as desktops, handles. The normal cleaning regime should continue thereafter using the same cleaning materials used throughout a normal school year with specific attention to surfaces and door handles. Should a COVID-19 confirmed case occur, the EA cleaning service should be notified. Following notification the normal process is undertaken of isolating the prevalent location within the school where any incidence of COVID-19 is likely to have happened. Then after three days of isolation an enhanced clean of the isolated location will be conducted. The normal cleaning regime then resumes thereafter.

As well as adapting the physical space and decreasing interactions in the education setting, Managing Authorities and schools should consider key practices in respect of hygiene and facilities management. All cleaning must be carried out in accordance with the PHA [guidance to support safe working in educational settings in Northern Ireland](#). It is essential that a system to confirm regular cleaning (frequency and standard) should be implemented.

Normal cleaning products used throughout the year are sufficient in supporting hand hygiene and the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' measures. Whilst there are no cleaning products available that have been tested and proved to definitively eradicate COVID-19 viral strains, the standard range of cleaning materials used in schools such as 'Shield', 'Protect', 'Milton' and on occasion 'chlorine solution tablets' are readily available and support hygiene measures. Bleaching agents (such as sodium hypochlorite or a chlorine dioxide solution) are not recommended in the school setting, however, on occasion these can be deployed to address more specific cleaning requirements such as where bodily fluids on surfaces are present. All cleaning products must be stored and used in relation to the Material Safety Data Sheet in accordance with Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Further guidance on infection prevention and control: best practice advice for nurseries and childcare settings is available at the [Northern Ireland Regional Infection Prevention and Control Manual website](#).

Enhanced and Terminal Cleaning are only recommended during an outbreak of COVID-19. For further detailed information read '[COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings. COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#) - GOV.UK'.

Reopening Preparation

Schools continue to be safe places of work and study. Measures are in place throughout the year to ensure statutory and technical compliance across all schools in line with statutory requirements and health and safety guidance. Schools will generally have systems in place to ensure the safe operation of schools on re-opening and building supervisors are familiar with the processes every year in reopening for the new terms.

If the school site or building has been closed for many weeks or if parts of the building have been out of use for a long period, the school building supervisor should continue to undertake a basic health and safety check of the building concerned and enhanced cleaning prior to reopening. This is in line with normal procedures for cleaning at the end of the summer and beginning of the new school term. Early checks by Building Supervisors on any issues in the school will ensure a more timely response to rectify issues that have arisen.

Consideration should be given to the cleaning strategy to be adopted in the school. This may be an extension of the cleaning regime, with desk surfaces, chairs, doors, light switches, banisters, sinks and toilets being cleaned more regularly. There should be routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched objects and surfaces (e.g. telephones, keyboards, door handles, desks and tables).

Any cleaning measures will only support the risk of transmission where hand hygiene and hand washing are adhered to. Materials such as disinfecting spray and paper towels are readily available and if so desired by those using equipment, can be easily sprayed and wiped. There is no need for additional cleaning over and above the normal school cleaning regime, except for any reactive cleans to specific incidents or enhanced cleans following a confirmed case of infection.

Where possible, work-stations should be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces that are shared. Make sure that each workstation is wiped down and disinfected before the next person uses it.

Wherever possible, resources which are not easily washable or wipe-able should be removed.

Surfaces in dining halls should be wiped down and disinfected in between each sitting. Cleaning of the staff areas should be considered as part of the overall cleaning strategy. Staff should use their own cup/cutlery and ensure these are cleaned straight after use.

Any crockery and cutlery in shared staff kitchen areas should be cleaned with warm general purpose detergent and dried thoroughly before being stored for re-use.

Building Supervisors may wish to consider continuous cleaning of toilets and wash facilities. Clear signage regarding the washing of hands after using the toilet should be displayed and appropriate hand drying equipment (hand dryer/paper towels) should be provided.

Clean work vehicles (such as mini-buses, etc.), between different passengers or shifts, as appropriate.

Personal Hygiene

Schools should encourage all staff, pupils, volunteers, contractors, service users and visitors to maintain personal hygiene throughout the day.

This includes:-

- frequent washing (in tepid / luke warm water) for 20 seconds and drying thoroughly (hand dryer / not shared towel), particularly when entering/leaving the building and always before/after eating as set out by [PHA](#);
 - note that sanitiser is not a substitution for hand washing
 - young pupils will require supervising / assistance with hand washing
- encouraging pupils/staff to avoid touching their faces including mouth, eyes and nose; and
- using a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze and use bins that are emptied regularly for tissue waste.

Regular reminders and signage should be applied to build awareness and maintain personal hygiene standards throughout the day.

Adequate facilities should be available for hand hygiene, including handwashing facilities that are adequately stocked and alcohol based hand rub at key areas (e.g. entry and exit points).

Where existing facilities do not have hand basins at entry/exit points, settings should provide hand sanitisers to facilitate initial entry to the building and then immediately direct users to the nearest hand basin facilities to enable washing of hands. Help should be given to those pupils who struggle to wash their hands independently.

Bins with bags should be provided in classrooms and in other key locations around the site for the disposal of tissues and any other waste. Consideration should be given to their disposal including double bagging and emptying.

A good supply of disposable tissues should be available to implement the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach in each classroom.

School Uniforms

While Coronavirus can land on fabrics and remain for some time, schools are not a high risk environment and while all children and young people should be encouraged to wear clean uniform or fresh clothes each day, this is not essential.

Ventilation

Where applicable, ventilation systems should be checked or adjusted to ensure they do not automatically reduce/increase ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels.

The opening of doors and windows should be encouraged to increase natural ventilation and also to reduce contact with door handles. However, propping open of doors into corridors, external doors, security access systems and any other fire safety doors is prohibited. It should be sufficient for windows to be open dependent on climates and for existing mechanical ventilation where desired to achieve thermal comfort.

A ventilated space should be available for pupils/staff who become symptomatic to wait in until they can be collected or safely get home.

People Who Become Symptomatic Onsite

All members of the educational establishment including staff and pupils should be continually supported to understand the symptoms to look for and clear advice should be provided on how to respond if symptoms become apparent while on-site.

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature/fever or anosmia (a loss or a change in your normal sense of smell, which can also affect your sense of taste) in an educational setting, they must be sent home and advised to follow the PHA guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection. Settings should keep a full record of such actions and request a parent / carer / guardian record their acknowledgement of this action.

A child awaiting collection should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door. Appropriate adult supervision should be provided as required. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate the child, move them to an area which is at least 2m away from other people. A risk assessment should be undertaken by the school to address this.

If the child needs to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected before being used by anyone else.

PPE should be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection if direct personal care is needed and a distance of 2m cannot be maintained (such as for a very young child or a child with complex needs).

If the child is seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk, call 999. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff (who was wearing the appropriate PPE and adhering to the social distancing guidelines) has helped someone who was unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or loss of taste/smell, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell. Cleaning the affected area with available cleaning products, followed by disinfection after someone with symptoms has left will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

School Management and Deliveries

Any work carried out within the school setting should adhere to the principles of social distancing. If it cannot adhere to the principles of social distancing, then consideration should be given to possible mitigation measures to minimise the closeness and duration of time that is spent within 2m. A risk assessment should be undertaken.

When staff return to reconfigure layouts to ensure social distancing for those attending facilities, care should be taken to ensure that 2m social distancing is adhered to when undertaking this work.

Where contractors are required to undertake facilities management/repair tasks in an establishment, they must undertake these works in accordance with the latest regulations. If spaces are to be used in different ways from those originally designed/intended and with less/more overall footfall, consideration should be given to the ongoing management of these spaces.

Procedures should be put in place for deliveries to minimise person-to-person contact. Deliveries should be timed to avoid drop off/pick up times, with methods devised to reduce the frequency of deliveries, e.g. ordering larger quantities less often. Settings should consider providing appropriate hand hygiene facilities at drop off points, with clear signage on access rules.

Workforce Planning²

As there is evidence that COVID-19 may disproportionately affect some groups, notably Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME), the EA and schools should ensure that the Occupational Health Service (OHS) provides practical support and advice to BAME staff, particularly where they are anxious about protecting themselves and their families. All Minority Ethnic staff with underlying health conditions and disabilities, who are over 70 or who are pregnant should be individually risk assessed and appropriate reasonable or workplace adjustments should be made following risk assessment. The EA and schools will also need to be mindful of their wider equality obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

The blended model of education that we expect to see on reopening and for some time after may lead to requirements for workforce flexibility and increased staffing. These may stem from, for example, more teachers or support staff being needed for a greater number of smaller classes (whether in the usual education setting or alternative venues), alongside a requirement to provide support for home learning and wider support for children and young people.

A proportion of staff may also be shielding or absent due to COVID-19 symptoms, which may affect their ability to attend physical settings. Staff may require access to childcare to allow them to attend school under the blended model of education.

There will be a specific workload pressure arising from the need to adapt existing resources to align with a blended model, providing in-school learning for an increased number of groups and support for offsite learning. The deployment of additional staffing is expected to be critical to ensuring this can be managed.

Education settings, working in close partnership with the EA, trades unions and staff, are best placed to make judgements about how to make best use of available workforce capacity safely and effectively. This section sets out some high level expectations to ensure consistency.

Workforce Capacity

Education settings should undertake a review of the availability of teaching and support staff, including caretaker, cleaning and office staff, to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the workforce to prepare settings and deliver education under a blended model of education.

² Subject of PHA and Executive guidance at the time, this may change.

Making Full Use of Available Workforce Capacity

Before considering alternative approaches, education settings should ensure that existing workforce capacity is fully utilised in responding to the local challenges likely to be faced.

The EA should take the following actions as part of any wider workforce planning activities for the opening of school premises:-

- ensure that supply lists are as up-to-date as possible and include the full pool of available staff. Supply staff are an important aspect of maintaining educational continuity and should be fully utilised in local planning around workforce capacity;
- consider at a local level how all staff who are having to stay at home due to shielding or self-isolation can support educational continuity, for example, by supporting remote learning;
- consider the availability of health and social care partners as part of planning for support for children and young people, particularly those with complex needs; and
- consider any other opportunities to ensure existing teaching and wider workforce capacity can be deployed to support school reopening.

Throughout this process potential workload issues should be carefully considered and education settings should be conscious of the well-being of all and the need to implement flexible working practices in a way that promotes good work-life balance for all staff.

Identifying Additional Workforce Capacity

Staffing Checklist

1. How many staff do you have available to work in school?
2. How many teachers do you have available to work in school?
3. How many support staff including teaching assistants do you have available for work in school?
4. Do you have a head or deputy available for work in school?
5. Do you have at least one person with paediatric first-aid training available for work in school?
6. Do you have at least one person with up-to-date Designated Teacher for Child Protection training available to work in school?
7. Do you have your SEN co-ordinator available for work, or an alternative staff member who could take on this role?

8. Do you have a caretaker and/or cleaning staff and, if necessary, at least one office staff member available during the school day?

If the answer to questions 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 is no, then you should try to find a solution to this before going further. You should speak to your Managing Authority who may be able to provide a suitable person temporarily to cover 5, 6, 7 or 8. In some cases, staff members may be prepared to undertake a different role to their normal role temporarily.

Keep your staffing arrangements as consistent as possible. Wherever possible, keep them with the same pupil group and in the same settings. In instances where you do need to use staff from other schools, ensure cover is agreed on a weekly basis, not daily, to limit contacts.

Catering

Flexibility in relation to location of meal consumption and timings of meals will be required. Given that alternative catering arrangements will be required it may not be possible to accommodate pupils in canteens and a reduced service may be likely. Potentially this may require pupils to eat at their desk, or alternative locations such as outside, using disposable containers, packaging and cutlery.

Catering will be flexible on choice and while there may be a reduced menu, it is likely that the menu will include a choice of meals from hot meals to packed lunches.

Whilst it is not possible to eradicate cash handling arrangements at this time, it is suggested that cash is accepted in plastic bags or cling film, and that anyone counting cash or banking cash can will do so wearing gloves.

Online payment systems and biometric systems of payment will continue to operate in the usual way and hand sanitising measures will be available for any touch points for biometric systems, where required.

Communications

Education settings should ensure regular, timely and clear communication with their school communities about the approach they are adopting to a phased return to schooling in line with the Education Restart Programme and supporting guidance.

Parents and Carers

The main concerns for parents and carers are likely to be the safety and wellbeing of their children in schools as well as practical considerations on how the new arrangements will work, especially for working parents. As part of this, it is important to consider appropriate dialogue and engagement with the Parent Council / associations and any wider parent forums.

Two-way communication is vital. The gathering of questions, issues or concerns from parents and carers will be just as important as clear communication to parents and carers about how things will work.

Children and Young People

Schools and settings have arrangements for good quality dialogue and communication with pupils which they may wish to develop further to inform them and engage with them about the new arrangements. A variety of methods can help to gather pupil views, questions and issues and can help to clarify and address difficulties prior to return. Pupil Councils, pupil panels and other pupil voice arrangements remain very important at this time. General advice on good principles and methods for learner participation is available from the EA as well as a range of third sector organisations.

Supplementary Guidance for Residential Boarding/Hostel Accommodation in Educational Facilities

This guidance has been developed in consultation with boarding schools in Northern Ireland and is based on detailed guidance prepared by the Boarding Schools Association.

Application

This supplementary guidance is intended for school care accommodation services, provided for the purpose of pupils in attendance at a public, independent or grant-aided school and availing of the provision of residential accommodation. These include boarding school facilities.

The guidance is produced in support of the work of the Education Restart Programme. All activity aimed at the reopening of accommodation services will be in keeping with public health guidance as determined by the Chief Medical Officer and the PHA – including any specific PHA guidance relating to residential schools.

Schools are already preparing for the substantial alterations and other considerations they anticipate to enable re-opening. For boarding schools, the Boarding School Association has also prepared a checklist covering issues including facilities, curriculum, kitchens, boarding houses, medical, activities, staffing, well-being and new pupils and visitors. Each residential facility will undertake a discrete risk assessment based on their own school estate, buildings capacity and pupil roll, in conjunction with staff and Managing Authorities.

Preparing for Reopening of Facilities

The primary issues for all schools will be the health and well-being of pupils, staff and families. In order to allow for the highest level of preparation and testing of school facilities, schools will require clear, early and unequivocal national awareness as to the dates of possible reopening.

In a residential school environment, alternating pupil attendance would have to be considered in the context of the use of the wider school estate, while separate arrangements will have to be considered for day pupils as part of the wider issue of day/boarding mix. The staggered return of pupils could assist returning international pupils meet any isolation requirements first – dependent on travel advice. Likewise,

residential facilities may be limited in the extent to which shared space can be re-purposed, although outdoor and other facilities are likely to be employed. The probable lack of nearby similar schools means that sharing of facilities between schools is unlikely to be possible.

Every setting will undertake its own specific risk assessment, considering local circumstances, the domestic arrangements of pupils and staff, travel requirements, school capacity and public health and hygiene requirements.

The overall number of pupils, staffing levels, the capacity of each residential hall or house, the mix of shared dormitories and individual bedroom facilities and shared communal facilities. In turn, these preparations will assist in determining whether boarding houses can be considered discrete family units.

These will also include contingency provision for symptomatic pupils or staff, those with underlying health conditions and consideration of supply chains such as catering, external pastoral support and the use of school and public transport.

Schools should inform their HSC Trust of their intention to re-open and proposed re-opening dates.

Capacity

As referenced in the principal guidance, schools will have to consider if facilities are currently in use in another capacity relating to COVID-19, such as hub school provision for key worker or vulnerable children or the provision of facilities and support for front-line workers.

Determining capacity for teaching and other non-residential spaces will be done in line with the principal guidance. Boarding facilities are not in the position to alter days in school or stagger attendance. Appropriate distancing will be observed where possible or other measures put in place to meet public health requirements, subject to local discretion.

Grouping/Households

Schools should organise boarding pupils into small groups who stay separate from other groups in the schools, in order to reduce risk of possible transmission while required measures are in place. Such groups may include relevant members of residential staff and each group should observe appropriate social distancing, particularly with any pupil or member of staff outside their household. Such groups may share common areas for certain activities. This would also reduce the need for wider isolation should symptoms be identified in any individual.

Incoming Pupils

Dependent on public health and travel advice, schools may seek to ask international boarders or those from outside the remit of Northern Ireland public health guidance, to return early for the autumn term in order to carry out any required quarantine period. This may include those service children in boarding schools whose parents are serving overseas. This will require specific confirmation from residential care and health and social trusts.

Schools that can provide assurance that a suitably equipped boarding house can count as “accommodation” for the purposes of public health guidance, may be in the position that pupils can re-enter the country knowing that they will be safely looked after at school or, where appropriate, by guardians. As testing regimes develop (see below) quarantine requirements may diminish.

Likewise, schools with responsibility for guardians will also be required to assess specific guidance for those guardians they work with.

Testing

Procedures are in place for the local testing of key staff displaying symptoms of COVID-19 infection. However, schools will need to consider wider testing of pupils and staff – with the guidance and support of the PHA. Regular monitoring may be appropriate. Staff will monitor pupils, checking for symptoms and asking those presenting as unwell to go into an isolated area, while medical advice is sought. Individual institutions can consider isolation facilities suitable to their property and public health guidelines.

Depending on public health guidance, contact tracing registers may be set up and identify which boarders and adults are on-site. This would include recording visitors to the site, including parents.

Additional Public Health Considerations

Establishments should follow all of the requirements in the principle guidance for schools. In addition, they should consider the following requirements:-

- residential pupils showing symptoms will require to be isolated and tested;
- pupils should not travel to the school if showing symptoms – schools will need to be clear of country of origin policies concerning travel, quarantine and other guidance, as well as cultural expectations. It may be the expectation of some nationals that face coverings be worn, for instance;

- risk assessments will be required for pupils and staff at relevant establishments who are at risk of serious illness through underlying conditions. Consideration should be given to whether alternative care arrangements may be more appropriate for clinically vulnerable children. While avoiding the transmission of COVID-19 remains the priority, schools should consider the emotional well-being of students, especially those who are already vulnerable to mental health issues. This includes those who may have had to complete repeated periods of isolation (during one holiday period) in their 'home' country and then in the UK;
- thorough risk assessments should be undertaken for any new groupings or households formed within the facility (see Groupings/Households) above. There is an increased risk that staff and children may not be able to adhere to social distancing in such households. Appropriate efforts should be made to maintain social distancing where possible, particularly with any pupil or member of staff outside their household;
- where distancing is not possible, appropriate alternative mitigation measures should be implemented, aligned with the principle guidance;
- where possible, individual rooms with en-suite washing and toilet facilities may be provided to reduce interactions;
- boarding facilities should provide appropriate hand hygiene facilities (e.g. hand sanitiser) in common spaces. Bathrooms should be fully supplied for handwashing and drying as per guidance in the main sections of this report;
- schools should consider whether boarders should be permitted to leave school premises in free time, having regard to the need to minimise unnecessary interactions with others off the school premises. This will also apply to health procedures in place for flexi-boarders and school residence pupils due to return home at weekends or during holidays. These factors should be considered as part of risk assessments;
- the use of relevant facilities by external groups or visitors attending school events, should remain subject to public health advice;
- resources shared between, rather than within, households (such as board games, magazines and books, snacks, etc.) should be restricted until public health advice changes; and
- the local health protection team should be contacted in the event of any cases to ensure a potential outbreak is dealt with promptly.

Establishments may also find the existing [Northern Ireland guidance](#) for residential children's houses, residential schools and secure care facilities on staffing, social distancing and self-isolation useful.