



Department for Education guidance for full opening of schools (England)

An initial UNISON briefing

Background

On 2 July the Department for Education (DfE) issued guidance for schools in England on re-opening in full in September.

UNISON was consulted on a draft by the DfE under strict confidentiality and we made many general and specific comments. These covered:

- Social distancing, noting the differing rules for most workplaces compared to schools
- The need to explain the science behind decisions
- The need for urgent improvements to the test, trace and isolate system
- Cleaning guidance and need for more staff - including sick pay and the real living wage for contracted out staff
- The future of 'bubbles' versus classes
- The role of TAs in cover
- Catering and the provision of meals and break times
- Future lockdowns and decision making
- The role of support staff in pastoral care/bubbles
- Black workers and other staff in higher risk group
- PPE and face coverings
- Ofsted inspections

Unfortunately, only some of the suggestions were taken on board. This means that the final guidance leaves many questions unanswered and will put huge pressure on schools and school leaders to make the decisions that the government have dodged.

This short briefing looks at the DfE guidance in section order with accompanying UNISON explanatory notes and comments. Headings and numbers used in this briefing correspond to those used in the DfE guidance, so you should be able to cross-reference.

This briefing summarises the areas that are likely to be most relevant to support staff, but please refer to the full document to look at any area in detail:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

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Introduction

The guidance states that it is the government's plan that all pupils will return in September. The guidance is relevant to all mainstream and alternative provision schools, including pupils with SEND and EHCP plans. There is separate guidance for FE, early years and special schools.

UNISON note: We plan to produce additional specific workplace checklists/risk assessments with other unions for schools, early years, special schools and FE.

Welcoming children back to school

This section makes the government's case for re-opening in fully in September. Key phrases in this section are "We are, therefore, asking schools to prepare to welcome all children back this autumn" and "While our aim is to have all pupils back at school in the autumn, every school will also need to plan for the possibility of a local lockdown and how they will ensure continuity of education". "Schools should use their existing resources to make arrangements to welcome all children back. There are no plans at present to reimburse additional costs incurred as part of that process." This section also states that the test and trace scheme is 'up and running'.

UNISON note: *This wording has softened slightly from the first draft. The wording 'prepare' suggests that they are beginning to understand the complexities of re-opening following comments by UNISON and other stakeholders and the possibilities of second spikes and local lockdowns. We believe it is important that schools and government should have a plan B and equal weight needs to be given to planning for potential lockdowns so to ensure pupils education can continue temporarily from home.*

We are very concerned that the government thinks that schools can plan to go back with the significant amount of additional work expected, but without more money. UNISON has called for increases in funding and for the debts of all schools to be wiped out as the government did for NHS hospitals.

We have said that more work needs to be done on test and trace as in one of UNISON's recent survey 80% of members did not know how to access the scheme (see section 7 below).

Purpose of the guidance

The guidance recognises that there is no one-size fits all model and places responsibility for ensuring that schools are safe on school leaders. It states that school leaders are best placed to make judgements and decisions to make schools COVID-secure.

UNISON note: *Once more the government has made schools and local employers responsible for implementing the guidance. This will mean that the pressure is on local employers, but it will also impact on our ability to take wider industrial action linked to health and safety law. Any intervention will have to be at school/employer level.*

Before schools re-open in September, we aim to issue joint union 'risk assessment checklists' and clear guidance on individual rights under health and safety laws covering situations where serious failings put staff and pupils at serious and imminent risk

The guidance says that measures to be taken make up a PHE-endorsed 'system of controls', building on the hierarchy of protective measures. It says that it expects schools and trusts to work closely with parents, staff and unions.

Section 1. Public health advice

This section reminds employers they need to comply with health and safety legislation, hygiene measures and enhanced cleaning. It also reminds employers that they must update any risk assessments that they have already drawn up. (There is also an appendix on risk assessment.)

UNISON note: Risk assessment details should not have been an appendix, but right at the front. Enhanced cleaning should mean additional staff/resources and not be added to other staff duties.

1. Prevention

This section deals with pupils, staff and others who have COVID-19 symptoms, and how they should be sent home. It refers on to other guidance: '[Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#)', which sets out that they must self-isolate for at least 7 days and should [arrange to have a test](#). Other members of their household (including any siblings) should self-isolate for 14 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms.

The section also covers isolating pupils awaiting collection and appropriate adult supervision, with social distancing. Any areas such as bathrooms will need cleaning, and PPE should be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection. The guidance says that PPE must be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection, if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained, and refers to PPE advice in the [safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) guidance.

UNISON note: At an early stage, staff and other parents should be alerted so that they can be on the lookout for symptoms in other pupils. The DfE guidance says that PPE is only needed if staff can't keep two metres away. UNISON is clear that PPE should be available for anyone supervising anyone with symptoms as you cannot predict if you will need to get closer to pupils.

The guide says that any members of staff who have helped someone with symptoms, or pupils who have been in close contact with them, do not need to self-isolate unless: they develop symptoms themselves; if the symptomatic person subsequently tests positive; or if they have been requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace.

UNISON note: We believe that all staff should be allowed to test as early as possible after possible contamination, as this will limit potential cross infection.

The guidance then deals with cleaning, including handwashing and the area around the person with symptoms, which must be cleaned with normal household disinfectant. See the [COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance](#).

UNISON note: This cleaning should be done by a cleaner or facilities staff with PPE and not by other school staff.

The next sections, 2 and 3, cover general handwashing and disposal of waste, which are in line with previous guidance. However, section 3 states that Public Health England does not recommend the use of face coverings in schools as pupils will stay in consistent groups, poor use could spread infection, and it might have negative effects on communication. However, face coverings are required at all times on public transport (for children, over the age of 11) or when attending a hospital.

UNISON note: This does not meet [Health and Safety Executive guidance](#) which says: 'If people choose to wear face coverings in work you should support them'. UNISON believes that all staff should be free to choose to wear face mask/coverings and protocols for face coverings should be agreed with schools.

4. Introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often using standard products, such as detergents and bleach.

UNISON note: Whilst this section contains practical advice on additional cleaning of rooms, toilets and touched surfaces. It does not say who can and cannot do this. UNISON is clear that enhanced cleaning should be done by cleaners and facility staff, not other support staff.

5. Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible.

This section says that schools must do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing while delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. To reduce contacts between children and staff they should be put in groups, or 'bubbles'. The distancing required will depend on the age and type of pupil, the layout of school and the impact on the curriculum. For young children, the emphasis will be on separating groups and avoiding touching. For older children, the emphasis will be on distancing.

How to group children

Maintaining distinct groups or 'bubbles' makes it easier to deal with pupils who catch COVID-19 and isolate others. It recommends small groups where possible, but bubbles can be bigger in some schools particularly in secondary schools and in particular groups at key stage 4 and 5 if needed to help to deliver a full curriculum and specialist teaching. Primary and younger secondary pupils (key stage 3) schools may implement smaller class size groups to reduce potential for numbers who might be infected if an outbreak happens.

It states that staff can operate across different classes and year groups, particularly in secondary schools, but they should try and keep their distance from others and ideally stay two metres apart from other adults.

UNISON note: The DfE has avoided using the words "social distancing". This advice is clearly based on trying to get all pupils back to school and we believe this could undermine the safety of pupils and staff. UNISON is clear that smaller bubbles are best to restrict possible infection spreading and so use of larger bubbles must be rigorously risk assessed. The following section is better, with more detail, and takes on some UNISON points.

Measures within the classroom

It is strong advice that staff in secondary schools stay distant from pupils at the front of the class, and away from others where possible – ideally two metres. It is harder to maintain this in primary schools, but staff should avoid close face to face contact and minimise time within a metre of anyone. Working with pupils who have complex needs or who need close contact care should be provided as normal.

Older children should maintain distance and not touch others where possible. Primary schools should operate class size bubbles. Schools should adapt classrooms where possible, e.g. by seating pupils side by side and facing forwards and by removing unnecessary furniture out of classrooms.

UNISON note: *Some classrooms and furniture are not built to fit this model so this may be difficult.*

Groups should be kept apart and movement around school minimised. Schools should avoid having busy corridors, entrances and exits and have staggered break times and lunch times. They should allocate time for cleaning surfaces in the dining hall between groups.

Measures for arriving at and leaving school

Schools should consider staggered starts and finishes to keep groups apart, but should not reduce overall teaching time. Schools can consider staggering free periods or breaks while retaining the same teaching time and length of the day. Schools should look to avoid 'rush hours' and tell parents not to gather outside the school.

Everyone must wash their hands immediately on arrival and remove face coverings (see UNISON note above). They should dispose of temporary face coverings in a safe place and place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag and then wash their hands again before heading to their classroom. See also [safe working in education, childcare and children's social care](#).

Other considerations

Some pupils with SEND will need specific help and preparation for the changes. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and support staff should continue to support them. Temporary staff can move between schools but should minimise contact and maintain distance. Schools need to manage visitors and contractors before they arrive and if possible, arrange visits outside school hours. A record should be kept of all visitors.

If a child attends more than one setting, e.g. a mainstream school and alternative provision/special school, schools should work together to address risks and deliver a broad curriculum.

Staff and pupils should have their own frequently used equipment, e.g. pencils and pens. Shared resource, such as books and games can be used and shared within

the bubble, but along with frequently touched surfaces these should be cleaned regularly. Resources shared between bubbles such as sports, art or science equipment should be cleaned frequently between bubbles or rotated to allow them to be left unused for 48 hours (72 hours for plastics). Outdoor playground equipment should be cleaned frequently.

Pupils should limit the things they bring into school. They can take books and other resources home but should avoid unnecessary sharing.

UNISON note: *These sections again call for more cleaning – which means more cleaning time and resources will be needed.*

6. Where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)

The guidance says the majority of staff in education settings don't need PPE beyond what is required for their normal work and that it is only needed in a small number of cases. This includes where a pupil becomes ill with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms while at schools, and only then if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained; or where a pupil already has routine intimate care needs that involves the use of PPE. It recommends that you refer to [safe working in education, childcare and children's social care](#) for more information about infection and PPE.

UNISON note: *We strongly disagree with this guidance. Risk assessments should decide whether PPE is necessary. We do not think that the DfE should make this blanket statement. Schools must ensure that they have adequate supplies of PPE available at all times. UNISON believes that staff are best placed to assess their own need for PPE.*

7. Engage with the NHS Test and Trace process

Schools must understand the NHS Test and Trace process and how to contact their local [Public Health England health protection team](#). Schools must ensure staff and parents/carers understand they will need to be willing to [book a test](#) if they display symptoms. All children can be tested, including children under 5, but children aged 11 and under will need to be helped with home testing.

Staff must provide details of anyone they have been in close contact with if they were to test positive, and [self-isolate](#). Anyone who displays symptoms should get a test through the NHS [testing and tracing for coronavirus website](#), or by telephone via NHS 119. Education workers have priority access to testing.

This section states that by September all schools will get a small number of home testing kits. Schools should ask parents and staff to inform them immediately of test results. If someone tests negative, feels well and no longer has symptoms similar to coronavirus (COVID-19), they can stop self-isolating, unless they have another illness which could infect people.

If someone tests positive, they should follow the ['stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection'](#) and must continue to self-isolate.

UNISON note: We remain very concerned that the government's testing scheme is not currently fit for purpose. Maximum efforts need to be made to ensure that there is a fully integrated system nationally and locally by September. UNISON is committed to working with others to apply maximum pressure on government to make the necessary changes to the system. It is also important that staff, parents and unions are alerted to any positive tests as early as possible to look out for others who might show symptoms.

8. Manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the school community

Schools must contact the local health protection team if someone tests positive. The health protection team will carry out a rapid risk assessment to identify close contacts with the person during their infection period and ask them to self-isolate. Schools must send home those who have been in close contact with the person who tested positive, advising them to self-isolate for 14 days since their last close contact with that person, when they were infectious. Schools should keep records of pupils and staff in each group, and of contact with children and staff in different groups (see [section 5 of system of control](#) for more on grouping pupils).

Households of those sent home do not need to self-isolate unless the person self-isolating develops symptoms. If someone in a bubble that has been asked to self-isolate develops symptoms themselves within their 14-day isolation period they should follow '[stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#)'. Further guidance: [testing and tracing for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

9. Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

If schools have two or more cases within 14 days, or an overall rise in sickness absence where coronavirus (COVID-19) is suspected, they must work with their local health protection team who will be able to advise on additional action. e.g. that a larger number of other pupils self-isolate at home. The DfE guidance suggests that if schools follow the guidance, this will not generally be necessary.

UNISON note: We have seen some schools fail to inform all staff and unions of COVID cases in the school. This could significantly increase the risks to other staff and pupils. Transparency is critical. In addition, UNISON believes that when there is a 'suspected' case within a bubble the rest of the bubble should move to studying from home where possible until the test result is confirmed. With the promised speeding up of test results this would be a sensible measure to further reduce the potential spread of the virus across the school, hopefully preventing the need for a wider closure of the school.

Alternative Provision

Alternative provision (AP) settings should follow the same system of controls, minimising social contact and mixing as far as possible. The smaller size of

many settings, and the fact APs are not typically organised by year groups, means they can have a whole school bubble.

Section 2: School operations

Transport

The guidance gives different advice for dedicated school transport and wider public transport.

Dedicated school transport, including statutory provision

Pupils on dedicated school services do not mix with the general public on those journeys and tend to be a consistent group, so general social distancing advice for public transport will not apply. Dedicated transport should use the principles underpinning the system of controls set out above.

Pupils could be grouped together, where possible, to reflect bubbles. Recommended measures include; hand sanitiser on boarding and disembarking, additional vehicle cleaning, organised queuing and boarding, distancing in vehicles and face coverings for children over 11 where appropriate.

Schools must work closely with local authorities that have statutory responsibility for 'home to school transport'. New guidance to local authorities on providing dedicated school transport will follow. Given the pressures on public transport services it may also be necessary to work with local authorities to identify additional dedicated school transport.

UNISON note: *Our view is that pupils should always be expected to wear face coverings on all transport as this will protect drivers, and supplies should be available for pupils who use school transport, along with procedures for disposal and storage. We believe it will be necessary to increase school transport in many areas. Recommendations for staggered start times could cause problems for parents with different aged children in the same school.*

Use of public transport

Where possible, schools should work with partners to consider staggered start times to enable more journeys to take place outside of peak hours. Schools should encourage parents, staff and pupils to walk or cycle to school if possible. The government has asked local authorities to work with schools to: Survey parents on routes to school and potential alternatives; look to shift demand for public transport onto other modes; consider using traffic demand management approaches. Families using public transport should refer to the [safer travel guidance for passengers](#)

Attendance expectations

School attendance will be mandatory from the beginning of the autumn term and schools can issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices in line with local authorities' codes of conduct.

UNISON note: *We are completely against this approach. Schools should work with anxious families, not fine them.*

Pupils who are shielding or self-isolating

Changes in government advice from 1 August will mean far fewer pupils will be advised to shield and so most pupils will be able to return. See [current advice on shielding](#). However, a small number of pupils still won't be able to attend because they are self-isolating or are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus. Pupils unable to attend school because they are shielding should get access to remote education. Where children cannot attend school because they or their parents are following clinical and/or public health advice, they will not be penalised. If rates of the disease rise in local areas, children (or family members) from that area will be advised to temporarily shield and so may be temporarily absent.

Pupils and families who are anxious about return to school

Schools need to discuss the concerns of pupils, parents and households who may be anxious about returning and put support in place. This may include pupils who have been shielding, those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable, or those concerned about increased risks, including those from Black backgrounds or who have conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

Action for all schools and local authorities

The DfE makes clear that it expects schools to work with families to: secure regular school attendance from September; communicate expectations on attendance; engage with reluctant pupils; use the additional catch-up funding schools, pastoral services, and attendance staff; use pupil premium funding to put measures in place for families who need extra support and to work closely with other professionals to support the return to school.

School workforce

The guidance says that wider government policy advises those who can work from home to do so, but this will not be applicable to most school staff. For some roles e.g. administrative roles, this might be possible and appropriate.

Staff who are clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically vulnerable

This section refers to DfE advice on [clinically-vulnerable, including pregnant women](#) people. It says that individuals who were considered clinically extremely vulnerable and received a letter advising them to shield can return to work from 1 August, as long as they maintain social distancing. Advice for those who are extremely clinically vulnerable can be found in the [guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#). School leaders should be flexible in how those members of staff are deployed to enable them to work remotely where possible or in roles in school where it is possible to maintain social distancing. People who live with those who are clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable can attend the workplace.

UNISON note: This could be a key area leading to cases for branches as employers seek to return staff back to work. NJC guidance differs from this guidance. It says that extremely clinically vulnerable people should only return to roles where strict social distancing is possible. Given that the guidance does not require strict social distancing to apply in schools, UNISON believes that staff at increased risk from COVID-19 should be supported to work from home. We recognise that this may mean the employee taking on alternative duties where their current role cannot be done from home. Individual risk assessments are vital in this process.

Staff who are pregnant

Pregnant women are in the 'clinically vulnerable' category and are advised to follow guidance available for [clinically-vulnerable people](#).

Staff who may otherwise be at increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19)

Some people with particular characteristics may be at comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), as set out in the [COVID-19: review of disparities in risks and outcomes report](#). The reasons are complex and there is ongoing research to understand and translate these findings for individuals in the future. If people with significant risk factors are concerned, we recommend schools discuss their concerns and explain the measures the school is putting in place to reduce risks. School leaders should try as far as practically possible to accommodate additional measures where appropriate. People who live with those who have comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) can attend the workplace.

UNISON note: This is a wholly inadequate section. UNISON asked that this section should highlight the higher risks to specific groups such as older staff and Black workers. These workers should be given individual risk assessments to ensure that they are safe to return. UNISON believes that working from home must be supported by the employer where that is the best way of reducing the risk.

Employer health and safety and equalities duties

Schools have a legal obligation to protect employees and others from harm. They should continue to assess health and safety risks and consider how to meet equalities duties in the usual way. Following the guidance will mitigate the risks to pupils and staff and help schools to meet their legal duties to protect employees and others from harm.

Supporting staff

Governing boards and school leaders should have regard to staff (including the headteacher's) work-life balance and wellbeing. Schools should ensure they have explained to all staff the measures they are proposing putting in place and involve all staff in that process. Employers have a duty of care to their employees, including their mental health. Mechanisms to support staff wellbeing will be particularly important, as some may be anxious about returning to school. Information about

the [extra mental health support for pupils and teachers](#) is available. The [Education Support Partnership](#) provides a free helpline for school staff and targeted support.

UNISON note: *We have complained many times to the DfE that its mental health resources only refer to teachers. Its response is that the same materials can be used for all staff. We don't think this is good enough.*

Staff deployment

Schools may need to alter the way in which they deploy their staff and use existing staff more flexibly. Managers should discuss and agree any changes to staff roles with individuals. Planning should avoid increases in unnecessary and unmanageable workloads and schools may wish to draw on DfE's [workload reduction toolkit](#). The DfE has also published other resources, including [case studies to support remote education](#) to help address staff workload. Schools with concerns about staffing capacity are urged to talk to their local authority or trust.

UNISON note: *This section should say that they should also discuss changes with unions. We think that there will inevitably be more pressure on staff as additional tasks such as cleaning and staggering hours impact on workloads. We believe that the government will need to put more money into schools to increase staff numbers.*

Deploying support staff and accommodating visiting specialists

Schools should ensure that appropriate support is available for pupils with SEND, for example by deploying teaching assistants and enabling specialist staff from within and outside the school to work with pupils in different classes or year groups.

Where support staff capacity is available, schools may use this to support catch-up provision or targeted interventions. Teaching assistants may also be deployed to lead groups or cover lessons, under the direction and supervision of a qualified, or nominated, teacher (under the Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations 2012 for maintained schools and non-maintained special schools and in accordance with the freedoms provided under the funding agreement for academies). Any redeployments should not be at the expense of supporting pupils with SEND. Headteachers should be satisfied that the person has the appropriate skills, expertise and experience to carry out the work, and discuss and agree any proposed changes in role or responsibility with the member of staff. This includes ensuring that safe ratios are met, and/or specific training undertaken, for any interventions or care for pupils with complex needs where specific training or specific ratios are required.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has published guidance on [making the best use of teaching assistants](#) to help primary and secondary schools.

When deploying support staff flexibly it is important that headteachers consider regulated activity and ensure only those who have the appropriate checks can engage in regulated activity. Full guidance is provided in part 3 of [keeping children safe in education](#).

UNISON note: *This section is inadequate and would allow for exploitation of teaching assistants. UNISON has worked with the Education Endowment*

Foundation in the past to ensure appropriate deployment of staff and so we are happy with their involvement.

We requested that this section be expanded as per the following paragraphs. The DfE did not include them – so branches should raise these points locally.

Suitably experienced teaching assistants should only be asked to 'lead' classes in situations known about in advance, for example where a teacher is working from home due to being in a vulnerable group, and where another teacher is not available. Further, suitably experienced teaching assistants are those whose job description already included this occasional responsibility, usually HLTAs (working at levels 4 and 5 according to [the NJC model job profiles](#)), and who are paid at the appropriate grade.

Cover supervision may be needed for a teacher's short-term absence from the classroom where the absence was not known about in advance (for example, to cover short-term sickness). Ideally, to protect the integrity of the class/bubble, the allocated teaching assistant should provide this cover.

To undertake cover supervision, TAs should have skills and knowledge of at least level 3 and be paid at the appropriate grade for this level (see the [NJC model job profiles](#)). In this situation there is no expectation that active teaching takes place. Rather, pupils should carry out a pre-prepared exercise under supervision. For more information see our [factsheet on cover supervision](#). Schools should consider contingency arrangements for appropriate cover supervision in their planning.

Recruitment

Recruitment should continue as usual.

Supply teachers and other temporary or peripatetic teachers

Schools can continue to use supply teachers and other supply staff during this period. Schools can use the DfE and [Crown Commercial Service's agency supply deal](#) as this lists preferred suppliers that must be transparent about the rates they charge. Supply staff and other temporary workers can move between schools, but school leaders should consider how to minimise the number of visitors. Schools may wish to use longer contracts and agree a minimum number of hours. This section also applies to support staff working on a supply basis, peripatetic teachers such as sports coaches, and those engaged to deliver before and after school clubs.

UNISON note: References to support staff were put in at UNISON's request.

Expectation and deployment of ITT trainees

This is a section on teacher training.

Staff taking leave

This section acknowledges the hard work that staff have been doing and their need for leave, which could be to countries that might mean them needing to quarantine on their return. It recommends that school leaders discuss arrangements with staff before the end of the summer term. Where it isn't possible to avoid a member of staff having to quarantine during term time, school leaders should consider temporarily amending working arrangements to enable them to work from home.

Other support

Volunteers may be used to support the school as usual. They should be properly supported and given appropriate roles. When utilising volunteers, schools should continue to follow the checking and risk assessment process set out in the volunteer section in Part 3 of [keeping children safe in education](#). Under no circumstances should a volunteer who has not been checked be left unsupervised or allowed to work in regulated activity. Mixing of volunteers across groups should be kept to a minimum, and they should remain 2 metres from pupils and staff where possible.

UNISON note: *We asked that this section state that volunteers should not be used to replace normal jobs.*

Safeguarding

Schools should consider revising their child protection policy to reflect the return of more pupils. Schools must have regard to the statutory safeguarding guidance, [keeping children safe in education](#) and should refer to the [coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers guidance](#). Designated safeguarding leads (and deputies) should be given more time, especially in the first few weeks of term, to help provide support to staff and children regarding any new safeguarding and welfare concerns and the handling of referrals to children's social care and other agencies. Services should prepare to work together to actively look for signs of harm. Communication with school nurses is important for safeguarding and supporting wellbeing, as they have continued virtual support to pupils who have not been in school.

Catering

We expect that kitchens will be fully open from the start of the autumn term and normal legal requirements will apply about provision of food to all pupils who want it, including for those eligible for benefits-related free school meals or universal infant free school meals. School kitchens can continue to operate, but must comply with the [guidance for food businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

UNISON note: *This paragraph is inadequate. Currently most schools are delivering a limited catering service. There will need to be detailed planning for any move back to hot meal provision. This will include challenges of social distancing in small kitchens, pupils eating at staggered times and cleaning of shared equipment. Thorough risk assessments will be needed. UNISON believes additional specific guidance on provision of catering in the autumn term is needed.*

Estates

The DfE does not consider it necessary for schools to make significant adaptations to their sites for September. Nor does it think schools will need to deliver any education on other sites because class sizes can return to normal and spaces used by more than one class or group can be cleaned between use. Following a risk assessment schools may determine that small adaptations are required such as additional wash basins.

It is important that, prior to September all usual pre-term building checks are undertaken. If buildings have been closed or had reduced occupancy during the COVID-19 outbreak, water system stagnation can occur due to lack of use, increasing the risks of Legionnaires' disease. Advice on this can be found in the guidance on [Legionella risks during the coronavirus outbreak](#). Additional advice on safely reoccupying buildings can be found in the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers' guidance on [emerging from lockdown](#).

Once the school is in operation, it is important to ensure good ventilation. Advice on this can be found in Health and Safety Executive guidance on [air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak](#).

Educational visits

In the autumn term, schools can resume non-overnight domestic educational visits. These trips should include any trips for pupils with SEND connected with their preparation for adulthood (for example, workplace visits, travel training etc.). Visits should be done in line with protective measures, keeping children within bubbles, and COVID-19 secure measures in place at the destination. Schools should also make use of local outdoor spaces to support delivery of the curriculum. Schools should undertake thorough risk assessments for all educational visits including what control measures need to be used and awareness of wider advice on visiting indoor and outdoor venues. Schools should consult the [health and safety guidance on educational visits](#).

School uniform

It is for the governing body/academy trust to make decisions regarding school uniform, but the DfE encourages all schools to return to their usual uniform policies in the autumn term. Uniform can play a valuable role in contributing to the ethos of a school and setting an appropriate tone. Uniforms do not need to be cleaned any more often than usual, nor do they need to be cleaned using methods which are different from normal. Schools should consider how pupil non-compliance is managed, taking a mindful and considerate approach in relation to parents who may be experiencing financial pressures.

Extra-curricular provision

Schools should consider resuming breakfast and after-school provision. This will be logistically challenging for schools, particularly for clubs that offer support across years, where parents use multiple providers, or where childminders pick up/drop off pupils. Schools should carefully consider how they can make provision work with

protective measures, including keeping children within their year groups or bubbles where possible. If it is not possible to maintain bubbles being used during the school day then schools should use small, consistent groups.

Guidance produced for summer holiday childcare [Protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) is helpful if schools are planning extra-curricular provision. This includes schools advising parents to limit the number of different wraparound providers they access, as far as possible. Where parents use childcare providers or out of school activities for their children, schools should encourage them to use providers that can demonstrate they are considering safety. As with physical activity during the school day, contact sports should not take place.

UNISON note: *We have raised the point with the DfE that support staff as well as pupils will move across these areas and that staffing and social distancing will be an issue.*

Section 3: Curriculum, behaviour and pastoral support

Curriculum expectations

This section sets out key principles and expectations for curriculum planning in school-based nursery, mainstream and special schools, and alternative provision (AP), so that all pupils – particularly disadvantaged, SEND and vulnerable pupils – are given the catch-up support needed to make substantial progress by the end of the academic year.

The key principles are:

- education is not optional.
- the curriculum remains broad and ambitious
- remote education, where needed, is high quality and aligns as closely as possible with in-school provision: schools and other settings continue to build their capability to educate pupils remotely, where this is needed.

The DfE asks that schools and other settings meet the following key expectations if considering revisions to their school curriculum for academic year 2020 to 2021:

- Teach an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects from the start of the autumn term but make use of existing flexibilities to create time to cover the most important missed content.
- Aim to return to the school's normal curriculum in all subjects by summer term 2021.
- Plan on the basis of the educational needs of pupils
- Develop remote education so that it is integrated into school curriculum planning

UNISON note: *If schools can't get all pupils back in at the start of September or if there are further lockdowns due to local spikes in infection rates, pupils will be required to use online resources again. UNISON believes that all vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils should get the resources they need to learn at home if that becomes necessary. They will need access to books and creative resources, as well as free laptops/wi-fi, provided by the government.*

UNISON has recently met the national Oak Academy. This is an organisation that provides remote learning. It was set up by teachers to provide online classes and resources. The DfE has now sponsored them to continue their work. Whilst we have some questions about the procurement process that led to their funding, we have no doubt about their intentions. They are keen to work with unions and they are aware that teaching assistants are being used to deliver classes without the necessary support. UNISON will be running a webinar with them in July to show what support they can give to our members. <https://www.thenational.academy/>

Music lessons

The guidance notes that there may be additional risks of infection in environments where you or others are singing, chanting, playing wind or brass instruments or shouting. This applies even if individuals are at a distance. Schools should consider how to reduce the risk, particularly when pupils are playing instruments or singing in small groups such as in music lessons by, for example, physical distancing and playing outside wherever possible, limiting group sizes to no more than 15, positioning pupils back-to-back or side-to-side, avoiding sharing of instruments, and ensuring good ventilation. Singing, wind and brass playing should not take place in larger groups such as school choirs and ensembles, or school assemblies. Further DfE guidance will be published shortly.

Physical activity in schools

Schools have flexibility to decide how PE, sport and physical activity will be provided whilst following the measures in their system of controls. Pupils should be kept in consistent groups, sports equipment thoroughly cleaned between each use by different individual groups, and contact sports avoided. Outdoor sports should be prioritised, and large indoor spaces used where not, maximising distancing between pupils and paying scrupulous attention to cleaning and hygiene. This is particularly important in sports because of the way in which people breathe during exercise. External facilities can also be used in line with government guidance for the use of, and travel to and from, those facilities.

Schools should refer to the following advice:

- [guidance on the phased return of sport and recreation](#) and guidance from [Sport England](#) for grassroots sport
- advice from organisations such as the [Association for Physical Education](#) and the [Youth Sport Trust](#)

Schools can work with external coaches, clubs and organisations for curricular and extra-curricular activities where they are satisfied that this is safe to do so. Schools should consider carefully how such arrangements can operate within their wider protective measures. Activities such as active miles, making break times and lessons active and encouraging active travel help enable pupils to be physically active while encouraging physical distancing.

Catch-up support

This section plugs the governments additional £1 billion to help pupils make up for lost teaching time, with extra support for those who need it most. £650 million will be spread across all state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in the 2020 to 2021 academic year. The DfE recommends that school use Education Endowment Foundation [guidance on effective interventions to support schools](#).

A [National Tutoring Programme](#), worth £350 million, will be available to deliver proven and successful tuition to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people via targeted tutoring.

UNISON note: *This money is helpful but spread across over 20,000 schools will not go very far. Schools will need more resources to be able to cope with new demands*

and the need for pupils to catch up. We also believe that the debts of schools should be wiped out in a similar way that the government did for NHS Trusts.

Pupil wellbeing and support

This section recognises that pupils may be experiencing a variety of emotions, such as anxiety, stress or low mood, particularly be the case for vulnerable children, including those with a social worker and young carers. Some may need support to re-adjust to school, others less so. The DfE is hosting a free webinar on 9 July on supporting returning pupils and students [DfE - Supporting pupil and student mental wellbeing](#) this will be recorded and available afterwards.

The Whole School SEND consortium will deliver training for mainstream schools on supporting SEND pupils to return and on transition to other settings. Details are on the [events page](#) of the SEND Gateway. Whole School SEND's [community of practice](#) has additional events/resources.

DfE has published the first of the relationship, sex and health education training modules [teaching about mental wellbeing](#), to improve confidence in talking and teaching about mental health and wellbeing in the classroom. It was published early given the importance of supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing at this time.

Schools should consider pastoral and extra-curricular activities to all pupils designed to:

- support the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement
- address and equip pupils to respond to issues linked to coronavirus (COVID-19)
- support pupils with approaches to improving their physical and mental wellbeing

Schools should also provide focused pastoral support where issues are identified, using external support where necessary and possible. Schools should also consider support needs of particular groups they are already aware need additional help (for example, children in need), or those newly vulnerable.

Staff can access the free MindEd learning platform for professionals, which includes a [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) staff resilience hub](#) with materials on peer support, stress, fear and trauma and bereavement.

Schools should work with school nursing services to support health and wellbeing. School nurses as leaders of the [healthy child programme](#) can offer a range of support including:

- support for resilience, mental health and wellbeing including anxiety, bereavement and sleep issues
- support for pupils with additional and complex health needs
- supporting vulnerable children and keeping children safe

Schools and school nurses need to work together to ensure delivery of the healthy child programme (which includes immunisation), identifying health and wellbeing needs which will underpin priorities for service delivery.

UNISON note: Much of this section in the full document refers to teachers – we have made the point that a lot of SEND and pastoral care support is provided by support staff. We also pointed out that this is an area that saw significant job losses during the last decade of austerity and that additional funding will be needed to support pastoral and outreach work by schools and local authorities.

Behaviour expectations

There is a detailed section on behaviour, which acknowledges that some pupils will come back with anxiety, having suffered traumas, bereavement or lost routine and discipline during a long period away. Vulnerable children may be particularly affected. So schools will need to work with pupils and will also need to consider updating their behaviour policies. Resources are available at [behaviour and discipline in schools](#). This is particularly the case when considering new restrictions on movement within school and new hygiene rules. Schools will need to work with staff, pupils and parents to ensure that behaviour expectations are clearly understood.

Section 4: Assessment and accountability

Inspection

Ofsted inspections will remain suspended for the autumn term, but they will visit a sample of schools. Visits will be collaborative discussions and will not result in a judgement. A brief letter will be published following the visit. The insights that inspectors gather will also be aggregated nationally to share learning with the sector, the government and the wider public. In addition, Ofsted has the power to inspect a school in response to any significant concerns, such as safeguarding. It is intended that routine Ofsted and ISI inspections will restart from January 2021, with the exact timing being kept under review.

UNISON note: *We have called on the government to delay any Ofsted intervention until at least after half term.*

Primary assessment

The DfE is planning on the basis that statutory primary assessments will take place in summer 2021. The early years foundation stage profile, and all existing statutory key stage 1 and 2 assessments, should return in 2020 to 2021 in accordance with their usual timetable.

UNISON note: *We have called for assessments to be suspended.*

Exams

The DfE is planning that GCSEs and A levels will take place in summer 2021 but with adaptations, including those which will free up teaching time. Ofqual will launch a consultation on proposed adaptations to exams shortly.

Accountability expectations

Performance tables are suspended for the 2019 to 2020 academic year, and no school or college will be judged on data based on exams and assessments from 2020. More information is set out at [coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school and college accountability](#).

Section 5: Contingency planning for outbreaks

Process in the event of local outbreaks

If a local area sees a spike in infection rates appropriate authorities will decide which measures to implement to help contain the spread. The DfE will be involved in decisions at a local and national level affecting a geographical area and will support authorities and settings.

Contingency plans for outbreaks

For individuals or groups of self-isolating pupils, remote education plans should be in place. These should meet the same expectations as those for any pupils who cannot yet attend school at all due to coronavirus (COVID-19). (see section on [remote education support](#)).

In the event of a local outbreak, the PHE health protection team or local authority may advise schools to close temporarily to help control transmission. Schools will also need a contingency plan for this eventuality, which may involve a return to remaining open only for vulnerable children and children of critical workers and providing remote education for all other pupils.

Remote education support

Where a class, group or small number of pupils need to self-isolate, or there is a local lockdown schools should offer immediate remote education. Planning will be particularly important to support a scenario in which the logistical challenges of remote provision are greatest, for example where large numbers of pupils are required to remain at home.

The DfE has produced a [quality assured list of remote education resources](#) which are available to schools and parents for free over the summer term. Where pricing models have changed, schools may consider using some of their catch-up funding on remote resources in line with the access to technology section of the [EEF's COVID-19 support guide for schools](#)

The Oak National Academy will make available video lessons covering the entire national curriculum, available to any school for free.

Google for Education or Microsoft Office 365 Education. Schools can apply through [The Key for School Leaders](#). The Key also provides feature comparison and case studies on how schools are making the most of these platforms.

Help and support on effective use of tech for remote education that can be accessed through the [EdTech Demonstrator Programme](#).

Laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers have been made available to local authorities and academy trusts to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children (specifically, care leavers, children and young people with a social worker, and disadvantaged year 10 pupils).

The DfE is working in partnership with BT to offer free access to BT WiFi hotspots for disadvantaged pupils and with other telecommunications companies to expand this offer and provide access to free additional data where pupils are required to learn from home and access social care services online. More information on [increasing internet access for vulnerable and disadvantaged children](#) is available.

Further support is available from the National Cyber Security Centre, on [which video conference service is right for you](#) and [using video conferencing services securely](#) and annex C of the guidance on [Safeguarding and remote education during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), as well as statutory guidance on online safety in Annex C of [keeping children safe in education](#).

UNISON note: We have printed the following section in full as it is key for UNISON.

Annex A: Health and safety risk assessment

Coronavirus (COVID-19) specific

- Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks from coronavirus (COVID-19). This means school employers and leaders are required by law to think about the risks the staff, pupils and young people face and do everything reasonably practicable to minimise them, recognising they cannot completely eliminate the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19). School employers must therefore make sure that a risk assessment has been undertaken to identify the measures needed to reduce the risks from coronavirus (COVID-19) so far as is reasonably practicable and make the school COVID-secure. General information on how to make a workplace COVID-secure, including how to approach a coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment, is provided by the [HSE guidance on working safely](#).
- Schools should undertake a coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment by considering the measures in this guidance to inform their decisions and control measures. A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in the workplace, and the role of others in supporting that. The risk assessment will help school leaders and employers decide whether they have done everything they need to. Employers have a legal duty to consult their employees on health and safety in good time. It also makes good sense to involve pupils (where applicable), young people and parents in discussions around health and safety decisions to help them understand the reasons for the measures being put in place. Employers can do this by listening and talking to them about how the school will manage risks from coronavirus (COVID-19) and make the school COVID-secure. The people who do the work are often the best people to understand the risks in the workplace and will have a view on how to work safely. Involving them in making decisions shows that the school takes their health and safety seriously.

Sharing your risk assessment

- Schools should share the results of their risk assessment with their workforce. If possible, they should consider publishing it on their website to provide transparency of approach to parents, carers and pupils (HSE would expect all employers with over 50 staff to do so).

Monitoring and review of risk controls

- It is important that employers know how effective their risk controls are. They should monitor and review the preventive and protective measures regularly, to ensure the measures are working, and taking action to address any shortfalls.

Roles and responsibilities

- All employers are required by law to protect their employees, and others, from harm. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the minimum employers must do is:
 - - identify what could cause injury or illness in the organisation (hazards)
 - decide how likely it is that someone could be harmed and how seriously (the risk)
 - take action to eliminate the hazard, or if this isn't possible, control the risk
- Given the employer landscape in schools is varied, we have set out here what the existing DfE [Health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools](#) guidance states about the roles and responsibilities for health and safety in schools: the employer is accountable for the health and safety of school staff and pupils. The day-to-day running of the school is usually delegated to the headteacher and the school management team. In most cases, they are responsible for ensuring that risks are managed effectively. This includes health and safety matters. Schools must appoint a competent person to ensure they meet their health and safety duties. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides more information on the role of headteachers and employers in the guidance [The role of school leaders - who does what](#) and a simple guide to who the employer is in each type of school setting in its [FAQs section](#), under 'Who is accountable for health and safety within a school?'. References to actions by employers in this guidance may in practice be carried out by headteachers in schools, but the employer will need to assure themselves that they have been carried out, as they retain the accountability for health and safety. If not already done, employers should ensure that a coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment for their school is undertaken as soon as possible. As some pupils are already attending at school, the employer is likely to have gone through a lot of this thinking already. We recommend that those employers use this document to identify any further improvements they should make.

Wider guidance on the risk assessment process

- Health and safety risk assessments identify measures to control risks during education and childcare setting activities. Health and safety law requires the school employer to assess risks and put in place measures to reduce the risks so far as is reasonably practicable. The law also requires employers to record details of risk assessments, the measures taken to reduce these risks and expected outcomes. Schools need to record significant findings of the assessment by identifying:
 - The hazards
 - how people might be harmed by them
 - what they have in place to control risk

- Records of the assessment should be simple and focused on controls. Outcomes should explain to others what they are required to do and help staff with planning and monitoring.
- Risk assessments consider what measures you need to protect the health and safety of all:
 - Staff
 - Pupils
 - Visitors
 - Contractors
- Schools will need to think about the risks that may arise in the course of the day. This could include anything related to the premises or delivery of its curriculum or activities, whether on-site or in relation to activities offsite.

Consulting employees (general)

- It is a legal requirement that employers must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, a representative chosen by staff. As an employer, you cannot decide who the representative will be.
- At its most effective, full involvement of staff creates a culture where relationships between employers and staff are based on collaboration, trust and joint problem solving. As is normal practice, staff should be involved in assessing workplace risks and the development and review of workplace health and safety policies in partnership with the employer. Consultation does not remove the employer's right to manage. They will still make the final decision but talking to employees is an important part of successfully managing health and safety.
- Leaders are encouraged to ensure that consultation on any changes to risk assessments that will be in place for the start of the autumn term commence with staff before the summer break, to ensure that those that are on term-time only contracts have adequate time to contribute.

Resolving issues and raising concerns

- Employers and staff should always come together to resolve issues. As providers widen their opening, any concerns in respect of the controls should be raised initially with line management and trade union representatives, and employers should recognise those concerns and give them proper consideration. If that does not resolve the issues, the concern can be raised with [HSE](#). Where the HSE identify employers, who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, they will consider taking a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks. The actions the HSE can take include the provision of specific advice to employers through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements.

UNISON note: Whilst this section is generally ok and good for schools and leaders who are not experienced in health and safety, UNISON branches will need to ensure that employers carry out their responsibilities. The section says that employers should consult with health and safety representatives, but we know that in schools we are short of these and so we expect schools to consult with local UNISON branches.

We also believe that rather than 'consider' publishing risk assessments on websites it should be a priority for schools to reassure pupils, parents and staff that the school is safe.