

## Schools reopen fully on 8 March: monitoring priorities in the coming weeks

As schools prepare to welcome back all pupils on 8 March, we expect governing boards to stay informed about school plans. Governing boards (chairs in particular) should continue to engage with school leaders through their usual monitoring routines, organising additional support and discussion where appropriate.

In the lead up to reopening, and in subsequent weeks, we recommend that monitoring activity is focused on the following areas:

- [Risk management and safeguarding](#)
- [Asymptomatic testing](#)
- [Wellbeing across the school community](#)
- [Maintaining the curriculum and continuity of learning](#)
- [Continuing remote education where required](#)
- [Resource allocation and management](#)

### Risk management and safeguarding

#### Implementing control measures

The Department for Education (DfE) have published [updated operational guidance for schools](#) in preparation for full reopening.

Most of the COVID-19 control measures set out in the updated guidance replicate those implemented in September 2020. However, **we recommend that you read our [summary of new and important elements of the guidance](#).**

Implementing operational plans is the job of school leaders, however, governing boards should assure themselves that school plans result in:

- **Full attendance** – all pupils (barring specific exceptions) are expected to return to school on 8 March.
- **Full occupancy** – the measures in place should not limit capacity or restrict the curriculum (schools should not plan for rotas or reduced class sizes).
- **Adequate teaching time** – staggered start and finish times may help keep groups apart but should not reduce overall teaching time.

#### Monitoring risk assessments

**Governing boards should seek assurance from school leaders that risk assessments are being carried out in preparation for reopening and that relevant policies are brought up to date as needed.**

**Once pupils and staff have returned to school, the board should focus on seeking assurance from school leaders that control measures have been implemented effectively. Risk assessments should be treated as ‘living documents’ that build on previous experiences.**

- Have the school/trust risk assessments been updated to date to reflect changing national, local and personal contexts?
- Have control measures been implemented and/or adapted to reflect updated risk assessments and safeguarding protocols?
- What arrangements are in place to check that the controls are effective and working as planned?
- Have safeguarding protocols (and associated policies) been updated to reflect changes in the day-to-day running of the school?

- Have updated safeguarding protocols and policies been communicated effectively to all stakeholders?
- Have risk assessments been conducted for vulnerable and higher-risk staff (e.g. linked to age, ethnicity, sex and pregnancy)? *Clinically extremely vulnerable staff are advised that they should not attend the workplace.*
- Have staff raised specific concerns about the safety of the working environment - have these been addressed through the risk assessment and control measures?

### **Asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for all pupils and staff**

**Governing boards should keep abreast of the capacity in their schools and trusts to deliver lateral flow testing to pupils and staff based on the guidance and financial resources available.**

- Secondary and primary school staff will be given kits for twice weekly testing at home.
- Returning secondary pupils will be tested three times at school (three to five days apart) and will be provided kits for at-home testing thereafter.
- Secondary schools can phase the return of pupils in the first week to facilitate testing.
- There will be no testing of primary pupils.
- Testing is voluntary.

### **Wellbeing across the school community**

**Governing boards should engage with stakeholders and school leaders to understand the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on pupil and staff mental health and wellbeing. Discussions should focus on the support in place and its effectiveness.**

- Has the school provided appropriate reassurance to parents, pupils and staff who may be feeling anxious about school resuming?
- How can we best implement the pastoral policies of the school or trust to provide support where it is needed (for pupils, families, staff and those governing)?
- Has before and after school activity and wraparound provision resumed? *These are enriching activities that improve wellbeing and support education (the government expects schools to restart these activities from 8 March).*
- Are there any concerns about the wellbeing of pupils from particular groups (such as pupils with SEND or those who are disadvantaged)? How are these concerns being addressed?
- What is the overall assessment of staff wellbeing?
- How are staff who need to work from home being supported?
- Are school leaders maintaining a sustainable and healthy work-life balance? Is dedicated leadership time available?
- Is external support being utilised effectively to support wellbeing across the school community?

### **Maintaining the curriculum and continuity of learning for all pupils**

**Discussions with school leaders should focus on how continuity of learning and the curriculum is responding to the needs of pupils. In the absence of data that would normally be available, boards should also discuss the school's assessment of what pupils have learned and the extra support that will be required to help all pupils progress.**

- Are all pupils continuing to receive a broad and balanced curriculum? What, if any, adjustments have been made to the curriculum?
- How are teachers working to understand the different effects of missed education for each pupil?
- How is pupil progress through the curriculum being monitored during this period?
- Are there areas of learning where targeted support is needed? (perhaps for disadvantaged pupils or those with SEND).

### **Examination and assessment**

As a result of partial school closures, GCSE and A-level students will receive grades based on teacher assessment rather than examination in 2021. Further guidance on these arrangements will be available

soon. Governing boards in the secondary phase should discuss with the executive leader how their school(s) are preparing to provide teacher assessment grades, including the training and support provided to teachers to ensure grades are awarded fairly and consistently.

Primary assessments including key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests (commonly referred to as SATs) will not take place this academic year – the DfE recognise the additional burden that this would place on schools following partial closure.

### Continuing remote education where required

**From 8 March, attendance will be mandatory for all pupils, except those who are clinically extremely vulnerable or need to self-isolate.**

**Schools are required to provide remote education for pupils who are unable to attend school because they are following government guidance.**

Where pupils are unable to attend:

- Does remote education provision meet the minimum requirements set out in [DfE guidance](#)?
- Is remote education aligned with in-school provision?
- How are pupils and their families supported to engage with remote learning?
- Have pupils and families with limited or no access to the technology required for remote education been identified? Are they receiving appropriate support?
- How are pupils and staff supported, educated and encouraged to stay safe and behave appropriately online?

Keeping pupils and teachers safe during remote education is essential. DfE guidance on [delivering remote education safely](#) outlines considerations and resources for schools, including guiding principles for communication with parents when education is taking place remotely. This guidance should be read alongside statutory safeguarding guidance: [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#).

### Resource allocation and management

**Governing boards need to consider the resource implications of new/different operational plans. It may be necessary for school leaders to change how resources are allocated; boards should continue to oversee financial performance and ensure money is well spent.**

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the school(s) budget to date and what is the projection for this academic year?
- What are the key assumptions underlying any financial projections?
- Are required staffing levels being maintained?
- What are the plans to maintain staffing levels in light of COVID-19 infections (or potential infections)?
- Do the governing board understand the financial impact of any temporary staffing structure changes/re-deployment?

### Further reading

Visit the NGA Knowledge Centre where our [COVID-19 hub](#) will be updated with essential guidance and information for governing boards in the lead up to 8 March and beyond.

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) provides governing boards with independent and timely advice. Our expert team of advisers will respond to any question relating to the role and duties of governing boards and provide the advice that is needed to deliver effective governance in challenging circumstances.

Our annual GOLD membership is £275 for boards and provides access to all our best practice resources and expert tailored advice. [Sign up](#) to help your board save time and develop professional governance.