

Partial school closures announced in January: Monitoring priorities for the governing board

This information sheet compiles the monitoring priorities that we recommend governing boards pay particular attention to at this time, including:

- [Risk management and safeguarding](#)
- [Wellbeing across the school community](#)
- [Providing remote education](#)
- [Maintaining the curriculum and continuity of learning for all pupils](#)
- [Support to reduce the impact of lockdown on disadvantaged pupils](#)
- [Resource allocation and management](#)
- [Asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for all pupils and staff](#)

We recommend reading the following NGA guidance and information alongside this document:

- [Remote education](#): information on safeguarding, expectations and monitoring
- [Disadvantaged pupils](#): reducing the impact of partial school closures
- You may also wish to consult our [frequently asked COVID-19 questions](#)

Following the announcement of a national lockdown on 4 January, schools across England are closed to most pupils. Only vulnerable children and the children of critical workers will be able to attend school until at least after February half term. The Department for Education (DfE) have updated their guidance [Actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak](#), detailing what all schools will need to do from the start of the autumn term. Governing boards will be supporting their executive leaders as they seek to respond to the situation.

Partial school closure does not change the role and responsibilities of the governing board. The governance duty is, above all, to drive relentless ambition for the outcomes of young people, whatever the circumstances. Governing boards also have a duty of care to those working in their schools and trusts. As such, they should continue to show support to senior leaders in a proportionate fashion, offering guidance when necessary, without adding to the immense pressure of the situation.

We recognise that, in some cases, discussion of the priorities outlined in this document may lead to wider questions and concerns being raised about current policy and the clarity and viability of published guidance. NGA continues to represent the views and interests of our members; we have already gathered significant feedback from members, and we are working with partner organisations and liaising directly with the DfE to establish responses to questions and concerns raised.

Risk management and safeguarding

It is a legal requirement that schools should revisit and update their risk assessments (building on the learning to date and the practices they have already developed). Governing boards should continue to have oversight of ongoing risk assessments. Implementing operational plans is the responsibility of school leaders, however, governing boards should seek assurance that the measures in place are working effectively in the current circumstances and that safeguarding remains the highest priority.

- Have the school/trust risk assessments been updated to date to reflect changing national, local and personal contexts?
- Have risk assessments been conducted for vulnerable and higher-risk staff (e.g. linked to age, ethnicity, sex and pregnancy)? *Following the reintroduction of shielding, clinically extremely vulnerable staff are advised that they should not attend the workplace.*
- Have safeguarding protocols (and associated policies) been updated to reflect changes in the day-to-day running of the school?
- Have staff raised specific concerns about safety of the working environment - have these been addressed through the risk assessment and control measures?

- Have updated safeguarding protocols and policies been communicated effectively to all stakeholders?
- Do the protocols and policies encompass arrangements in place to keep children who are not physically attending school safe, especially online. How are concerns about these children progressed?
- Have effective control measures been implemented and/or adapted to reflect updated risk assessments and safeguarding protocols?
- Is there sufficient cover and staffing capacity to facilitate the opening of the school to the children of key workers and vulnerable children?
- What steps are being taken if the school or trust is unable cater for large numbers of vulnerable and key worker children attending?
- What is the rationale for any decision made to move to partial opening for these groups?
- How are parents and families of children affected being supported to deal with the implications of the decision?
- Are transport services in place for pupils continuing to attend school? Has social distancing whilst travelling been maximised?
- Is external support being utilised effectively?
- Are internal welfare and pastoral systems working well?

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.

- 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)?
- Is wraparound provision being offered to pupils attending school? *These are enriching activities that improve wellbeing and support education.*
- How is the school or trust communicating with stakeholders to maintain engagement and provide assurance (e.g. the safety of the environment and the commitment to providing continuity of education)?
- 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?
- Have organisational changes impacted on staff work-life balance?
- What steps have been taken to pare back workload activities to the absolute essentials?
- Is staff absence impacting workload for staff who remain in school?
- 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?

Providing remote education

All state-funded school age children must be provided with “immediate access to remote education” should they miss school due to COVID-19. Our [guidance](#) on remote education emphasises the importance of governing boards scrutinising their school’s strategy and plans for delivering remote education to pupils at home. In particular, the ability of the school or trust to switch quickly and efficiently to online (blended) learning.

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](#).

- Does remote education provision meet the minimum requirements set out in [DfE guidance](#)?
- Has the school been able to switch quickly and efficiently to online (blended) learning?
- How are we supporting our pupils and their families 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?
- Is remote education aligned with in-school provision?
- How are pupils and staff supported, educated and encouraged to stay safe and behave appropriately online?
- What support, resources and CPD are available to teachers to deliver online learning and adapt the curriculum for online learning to best meet the needs of pupils?
- Is remote education tailored to meet the needs of pupils with SEND?
- Is the delivery of remote learning impacting on the wellbeing of teachers and support staff? – do plans support a good work-life balance?

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 being maintained and responding to the needs of pupils. Also, in the absence of data that would normally be available to the governing board, the school's assessment of what pupils have learned and the extra support they may need.

- Are all pupils continuing to receive a broad and balanced curriculum? What, if any, adjustments have been made to the curriculum?
- Has the uniform policy been adapted to suit the current circumstances?
- 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. Details are being fine-tuned in consultation with Ofqual, the exam boards and teaching representative organisations and this guidance will be updated in due course. 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.

The DfE have also announced the cancellation of SATs primary assessments this academic year, in recognition of the additional burden that this would place on schools following partial closure.

Support to reduce the impact of lockdown on disadvantaged pupils

Despite the best efforts of schools to provide continuity of education for all pupils over the last few months, there is no doubt that disadvantaged pupils and their families will have experienced greater challenges than most of their peers. Our [guidance](#): reducing the impact of partial school closures on disadvantaged pupils encourages governing boards to focus on this issue, take a strategic approach and includes questions to ask of executive leaders, such as:

- What have we learned about the impact of lockdown and missed time in school on the disadvantaged pupils in our school(s)?
- How are we applying what we have learned to support those pupils and their families?
- What specific strategies and initiatives is the school or trust undertaking?

- What are the plans for spending the catch-up premium funding and how will impact be measured?
- Do new and/or different priorities mean adjustments to our strategy for spending our Pupil Premium grant funding are required?
- How can we increase parental engagement?
- How are we supporting and developing our staff to close the disadvantage gap?

Free school meals

In addition to ensuring continuity of education for disadvantaged pupils, governing boards should seek assurance that arrangements have been made for eligible pupils to continue to receive free school meals.

- During the period of national lockdown, schools should continue to provide meal options for all pupils who are in school.
- Meals should be available free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals who are in school.
- Schools should also continue to provide free school meals or food parcels for pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals who are not attending school.
- Where schools are unable to provide meals or food parcels directly to families who are eligible, the government has announced the free school meal voucher scheme will be available once again.

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?

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 the financial resources available.

The programme of COVID-19 testing for all pupils and staff in secondary schools continues for those on site, with daily testing of close contacts available to pupils and staff and weekly testing available for staff. Primary staff will be included later in January as planned, and more detail will be set out in due course about reaching all secondary pupils as they return to face-to-face education.

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.