

COVID-19 – Keeping schools safe: monitoring priorities for governing boards

The Department for Education (DfE) [operational guidance for schools](#) sets out the actions that school leaders should take to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The guidance has been updated to align with Plan B restrictions being lifted.

This information sheet:

- summarises the control measures in place in schools
- describes the monitoring priorities that NGA recommends governing boards focus on
- provides example questions to ask of executive leaders

Current control measures

Measure	Details
Face coverings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In secondary schools, face coverings are now no longer recommended in classrooms for adults and pupils. ■ From Thursday 27 January, face coverings are no longer recommended in communal areas for adults and pupils.
Asymptomatic testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ School staff and secondary pupils should continue to test twice-weekly at home. ■ Secondary schools should retain a small testing facility on-site for pupils who are unable to test themselves at home. ■ Schools are strongly encouraged to ask parents and other visitors to take a lateral flow test before entering the school.
Self-isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fully-vaccinated adults and children aged between five and 18 years and 6 months should take daily lateral flow tests for a week after coming into contact with someone who has COVID-19. This means they can stay in school if they are negative, rather than self-isolating.
Vaccination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pupils aged 12-15 are being offered the vaccine via a school-based programme, administered by the NHS School Age Immunisation Service (SAIS). ■ Liability for vaccinations rests with the NHS; not schools.
Travel and quarantine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pupils (and staff) arriving from abroad will need to isolate and test on arrival. ■ Schools should consider whether to go ahead with planned international educational visits (in light of testing and isolation requirements).
Hygiene, ventilation and cleaning	<p>Schools should continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve ventilation where possible, making use of carbon dioxide monitors (and air purifiers where necessary and available) provided by the DfE. ■ Ensure good hygiene for everyone, including frequent handwashing. ■ Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes.

Additional measures: contingency plans

All schools should have contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) in place. The DfE COVID-19 [contingency framework](#) outlines what these plans should cover and how schools should operate in the event of local outbreaks, including responding to variants of concern.

Public health advice may mean that school leaders need to put additional control measures in place, such as:

- increased testing
- limiting visits and events
- restricting attendance as a short-term measure and only as a last resort
- temporary wearing of face coverings

In such cases, additional measures should be kept under regular review.

What governing boards should monitor

Governing boards should assure themselves that school/trust plans:

- Continue to prioritise the delivery of face-to-face, high quality education to all pupils.
- Allow for flexible delivery that utilises all available teaching and non-teaching workforce to maximise on-site education for as many pupils as possible.
- Prioritises the face-to-face education of the [children of key workers and pupils considered vulnerable](#) in the event of a partial closure.
- Maintain capacity to provide high quality remote education.
- Include a separate contingency plan which outlines how the school would operate in the event of local outbreaks, in line with the DfE COVID-19 contingency framework, and kept up to date.
- [In secondary schools] – take into account the space and time needed for SAIS to administer vaccinations.
- [In secondary schools] – provide on-site lateral flow testing and offer testing to pupils who are unable to test themselves at home.

Managing risk

Governing boards should seek assurance from school leaders that risk assessments and relevant policies are up to date, effective and working as planned. Risk assessments should be treated as ‘living documents’ that build on previous experiences.

- What arrangements are in place to check that the controls are effective and working as planned?
- Have additional measures been implemented under public health advice? – are these measures subject to regular review such that they can be removed at the earliest opportunity?
- Have staff, union representatives and health and safety representatives been engaged in the process?
- Have staff raised specific concerns about the safety of the working environment – have these been addressed through the risk assessment and control measures?
- Have safeguarding protocols (and associated policies) been updated appropriately?
- How is capacity being maintained to provide high quality remote education provision?
- What, if any, plans are in place to address the financial impact of COVID-19 on the school or trust?

It's important that schools communicate to parents and staff the actions they are taking (to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission) and especially any further action that is taken within the contingency framework.

Wellbeing across the school community

Governing boards should engage with stakeholders and school leaders to understand the impact that COVID-19 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)?
- Are there any concerns about the wellbeing of pupils from particular groups, such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or those who are disadvantaged? How are these concerns being addressed?
- What is the overall assessment of staff wellbeing?
- Have staff been redeployed to help maintain face-to-face teaching? What is the impact on workload and wellbeing?
- 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?

Curriculum and education recovery

Discussions with school leaders should focus on the ongoing assessment and response to the impact lockdown has had on the education and wellbeing of pupils in the school or trust.

- How are teachers working to understand the different effects of missed education for each pupil?
- Has the curriculum changed or been adapted to support education recovery?
- Has the curriculum been adapted as a result of teaching and support staff being redeployed?
- Is the school/trust continuing to offer a broad and balanced curriculum?
- Are there areas of learning where targeted support is needed? (Perhaps for disadvantaged pupils or those with SEND).

Further reading

Visit the NGA Knowledge Centre where our [COVID-19 hub](#) is updated with essential guidance and information for governing boards.

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.
