

Up-to-speed on: returning to school in January 2021

The DfE has published [guidance](#) regarding the return to school at the start of the Spring term. On 30 December 2020, the Education Secretary made a [statement](#) about changes to the original plan for bringing pupils back in January 2021. This article breaks down what you need to know.

Key points

The key points are as follows:

1. **[Updated]** [Majority of primary schools will return on 4 January, but some settings will have to restrict attendance](#)
2. **[New]** [Unions calling on government to close primaries to most pupils](#)
3. **[New]** [Full return of secondary schools has been delayed](#)
4. **[New]** [Remote education should be prioritised for pupils in exam years](#)
5. **[New]** [Secondary schools to use first week of Spring term to prepare to deliver mass testing](#)

Read on to learn more about each key point.



[Updated] The majority of primary schools will return on 4 January, but some settings will have to restrict attendance

[New] The majority of primary schools will open on 4 January. In a small number of areas, where infections rates are highest, the DfE's existing contingency framework will be implemented – this means that only vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers will be able to attend on site provision. The list of areas (which does not include all tier 4 areas) that will be subject to the contingency framework can be found in the 'Contingency framework: implementation guidance', available [here](#). The implementation of the contingency framework is being used as a last resort and the affected areas will be reviewed regularly.

[Updated] All other primary schools should deliver full, on-site provision for all pupils from the first day of the Spring term. Early years settings should continue to allow all children to attend as normal; however, school-based nurseries in primary schools have the discretion to follow the arrangements in place for their primary schools. These settings should continue to apply the existing infection control and social distancing measures at all times.

[New] Ongoing testing for primary school staff will follow later in January; however, no exact date has been announced. The DfE is also working to establish a testing programme for primary schools to help break chains of transmission.



[New] Unions calling on government to close primaries to most pupils

Teaching unions including the ASCL, NAHT and NASUWT have called on the government to close primary schools to all but vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers until at least 18 January 2021, with remote education provided for all other pupils. The ASCL and NAHT have also launched legal proceedings against the DfE with regards to the scientific advice the government is following, through to the proposed mass testing in secondary schools. NEU members have been issued advice on their legal rights to not have to work in an unsafe environment under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996. The DfE has not yet changed its stance on primary schools returning in January.

As always, we will keep you updated with the progress and outcome of any changes to government policy. Add this article to your 'Watch list' to be notified when we update this up-to-speed.



[New] Full return of secondary schools delayed

For secondary schools, the government had originally planned for all pupils in exam years (primarily Years 11 and 13), all vulnerable pupils and all children of critical workers to return to school on 4 January. The Education Secretary has now announced that only vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers will return on 4 January. This is to allow schools more time to be able to fully roll out mass testing. During this first week of term, exam year pupils will receive remote education.

Pupils in exam years will return during the week beginning 11 January, with all secondary pupils returning to full-time on-site provision from 18 January.

The DfE's contingency framework will be applied in secondary schools in areas with very high rates of infection. This will require secondary schools to offer face-to-face education only to pupils in exam years, vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers. Remote education must be given to all other pupils.



[New] Remote education should be prioritised for pupils in exam years

Secondary schools need to prioritise resources for remote education for exam year groups, i.e. Years 11 and 13, starting from 4 January. Remote education should also be prioritised for pupils who are eligible for on-site provision from the start of term but who cannot attend because they are following public health advice. Remote education should be provided to all other pupils from 11 January.



[New] Secondary schools to use first week of Spring term to prepare to deliver mass testing

Secondary schools should use the first week of the Spring term to prepare to test as many staff and pupils as possible.

The 1,500 military personnel that have committed to supporting schools to roll out mass testing will be available to provide virtual training and advice on establishing the testing process – teams will also be on standby to provide in-person support if required.

The current plan for rapid-result testing in secondary schools remains in place. Two rapid tests will be available to all secondary pupils and staff at the start of term to identify asymptomatic cases.

Schools should make preparations in the week commencing 4 January so that as many pupils and staff as possible can be offered two lateral flow tests. Staff, vulnerable pupils, the children of critical workers, and pupils in exam years should be prioritised for testing.

All other pupils should be tested over the course of the week commencing 11 January and all pupils should return to face-to-face education on 18 January. Pupils will be encouraged to have a test but should not be required to have had one as a condition of being allowed to return to school on 18 January.

The first starter pack of up to 1,000 test kits will arrive at all secondary schools on 4 January. Daily testing of all staff and pupils that have been a close contact of a confirmed case will continue to be available to all secondary schools from the first week of term, along with weekly rapid tests for all staff in secondary schools.

Testing for primary school staff will follow in the second half of January.

For more information on the rapid-result testing programme in schools, read our [article](#).



What's next?

- The government's current guidance on returning to school in January can be read [here](#).
- The government's guidance on the rapid-result testing scheme for schools can be read [here](#).
- Our article on the rapid-result testing scheme can be read [here](#).
- Add this article to your 'Watch list' to be notified of any updates as they come.

Bibliography

DfE (2020) 'Contingency Framework – Implementation Guidance'

DfE (2020) 'Schools and childcare settings: return in January 2021' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-and-childcare-settings-return-in-january-2021>> [Accessed: 30 December 2020]

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