



Coronavirus (COVID-19): eight priorities for schools during the Spring term 2021

This article will identify and focus on eight priorities schools will need to consider during the Spring term. It will detail any necessary required actions, with specific consideration to the challenges coronavirus still poses to schools' general responsibilities.

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[New] Adapting

Over the last few months, coronavirus (COVID-19) and its subsequent restrictions have forced schools to adapt. This has meant standard school events and procedures have been carried out very differently.

The national lockdown has required schools to close for all but vulnerable pupils and children of key workers, meaning schools have had to overcome even more challenges and revert to remote learning until further notice. The duration of partial school opening and remote learning is yet to be established; therefore, schools' priorities need to be adaptable in order to reflect the changing climate of Spring term.

So, how will coronavirus and the national lockdown affect general school life in the Spring term of 2021?

[New] One: ensuring a safe environment

Partial school opening has already rapidly reduced the risk of transmission; however, it is important schools remain mindful of health and safety regulations in order to minimise the risk of transmission for vulnerable pupils, the children of key workers, and staff who are still attending on-site provision. By law, schools are now required to consider these risks and try and mitigate them. To effectively do this, schools are obligated to conduct a coronavirus risk assessment, which should outline HSE guidance on working safely during lockdown.

A risk assessment should be treated as a 'living document' which is constantly kept under review in accordance with changing circumstances as they unfold. To access our up-to-date coronavirus risk assessment template, see [here](#).

Asymptomatic, rapid-result testing is another important way of ensuring schools remain a safe environment during the pandemic. The government has recently made rapid lateral flow devices (LFD) tests available to schools, colleges, alternative provision, and early years settings. Early years setting staff will be provided with LFD tests to complete at home. Schools can now offer regular, twice-weekly testing to their staff who are currently on site. The LFD tests can also be provided to pupils over the age of 12 on their return to school premises, either because they are attending on-site provisions or when full school re-opening happens. To do so, they must consent or have parental consent. Asymptomatic testing, although recommended, is not mandatory, but implementing this scheme will provide schools with an additional health and safety tool. For more information, please see our full [guidance](#) on the rapid-result testing scheme.

[New] Two: remote learning

As schools are only permitted to provide on-site education for vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers, teaching must now be provided via remote learning. The DfE emphasises that teaching pupils remotely needs to include both recorded or live direct teaching time and time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently.



It is a legal requirement for schools to conduct a coronavirus risk assessment – this should be viewed as a living document which is constantly reviewed and kept up-to-date.

The DfE has now confirmed that Ofsted inspections will consider the quality of schools' remote education; therefore, during Spring term it is vital schools familiarise themselves with the expectations for remote education set out in the DfE's '[Restricting attendance during the national lockdown: schools](#)'. Ofsted has also published some [guidance](#) which outlines its findings from interim visits, research and literature review, to provide useful tips on delivering quality remote education.

With ongoing disruption to education, it is important that schools continue to ensure they are doing everything possible to mitigate the loss of learning. Schools should have a remote learning policy in place to outline how they will minimise disruption to education – you can access our template remote learning policy [here](#).

Without equality of success to suitable technology, remote education will not succeed; therefore, in the Spring term, schools should implement government-led technology schemes, so that all pupils can access remote education. Read up on all the support schemes available [here](#). Support includes the free mobile data scheme for disadvantaged children, the offer of 4G wireless routers, and grants for setting up digital education platforms. Going forward, see our [Letter to Parents Regarding the Free Mobile Data Scheme](#).

[Updated] Three: exams

Ordinarily, the Spring term is a pivotal time for schools' exam preparation; however, with the cancellation of Summer exams, preparations in the Spring term 2021 will look very different. The details surrounding how Summer 2021 exams will be awarded is yet to be released; however, it has been confirmed that results will be led by teacher-assessed grades.

Ofqual and the DfE launched a [consultation](#) on how grades should be awarded, which is now closed – the final publication is expected around mid-February. To keep up-to-date with the unfolding exam procedures, see our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Exams and Assessments in 2020/2021](#) article, which will be updated and reviewed accordingly.

Schools should use the Spring term to familiarise themselves with the changes to the Summer 2021 exam season by reading the relevant guidance which should follow.

These changes to the Summer 2021 exams mean schools need to ensure they are as prepared as possible to implement the government's plans regarding teacher-assessed exams.



A few good practice tips:

- Consider all eventualities!
- Check in with pupils regularly
- Try and maintain as many regularities as possible

Good practice

[Updated] Four: budget review

Coronavirus has inevitably changed the way schools operate, especially regarding their budgets. Schools have had to make notable changes to their budget plans to accommodate the introduction of infection control measures, remote learning, and other unexpected expenditures required to ensure that education remains a safe place for pupils.

Moving forward, schools' budgets will need to reflect this. With an extra £400 million of funding being allocated to education in 2021/2022, it is important that schools take the time to make sure they find out exactly how their budgets will be affected in the coming months. The Spring term is the perfect time to review, take stock and reorganise your school's budget accordingly.

The government's '[Spending Review 2020](#)' also reveals that majority of pay rises for school staff will be paused in 2021/2022 and the schools budget will increase by £2.2 billion. These budget reviews are here to help schools catch up and offer supplementary support for FSM. See [here](#) for a more detailed analysis of the what the 'Spending Review' means for schools. To see a compilation of all our budgeting resources, check out our [Financial Efficiency Resource Pack](#).

[Updated] Five: parents' evenings

Parents' evenings are an important event on the school calendar for teachers, pupils and parents. As social distancing measures will continue in the Spring term, face-to-face parents' evenings will not be viable.

Maintaining communication with parents has been a challenge since the start of the pandemic, and, with pupils learning from home, establishing and continuing a rapport with parents is now more paramount than ever.

In the Autumn term, schools may have felt it was necessary to delay previously scheduled parents' evenings to focus on reintegrating pupils back into school life during the pandemic. Moving forward, however, schools should consider how they can modify traditional parents' evenings during the Spring term to accommodate their new arrangements.

So, how can schools adapt the traditional parents' evenings to cater for coronavirus restrictions?

Schools should consider organising virtual parents' evenings to overcome the challenges caused by coronavirus, or opt for virtual contact and more informal evening meetings.

In order to consider all the factors when planning and conducting a virtual parents' evening, we recommend having a look at our comprehensive guide [here](#). We have also recently updated our [Parents' Evening Risk Assessment](#) to include a specific section for a virtual parents' evening.

Six: open events and option evenings

Option evenings and open events are also significant occasions on the Spring term calendar. Such events are similar to the previously mentioned parents' evenings, as they give schools the opportunity to communicate with parents in person. With the start of a new calendar year, thoughts often turn to the upcoming academic year and the preparations needed.

Specific year groups are required to make important choices regarding GCSE, AS- and A-level options, and attending an informative option evening often helps ease this process.

In addition to the option evenings, schools would ordinarily welcome prospective pupils and their families in for an open event that allows them to get a feel for the school, and subsequently make informed decisions regarding where they decide to send their children to school.

As infection control and social distancing measures have prevented large gatherings of this kind on school premises, schools will need to consider how they can offer pupils and parents reassurance in an engaging and personal way.

Creating a virtual tour of your school is a perfect example of modifying these traditional events to fit in accordance with social distancing guidance. This could include a 360-degree virtual tour, a video tour, a series of photographs, or a live videocall. To find out more about what a virtual tour consists of, read our [article](#) on organising virtual tours for open events, which details how you can make this process run as smoothly as possible.

Seven: compulsory relationship education, RSE and health education

The compulsory relationships and health education in primary schools and RSE and health education in secondary schools must be delivered during the remaining academic year. Due to the impact of coronavirus, the government has granted schools some flexibility regarding the timeframe of implementation; however, the teaching of this subject should start no later than the start of the Summer term in 2021.

This means that the Spring term will be a crucial point for delivery. Schools that have not yet implemented these lessons are advised to begin preparations within the Spring term, making sure they meet the outlined requirements by the Summer term. If this is not feasible, given the time lost in school and competing priorities, the Spring term can be used to allocate time for these lessons during the final Summer term.

We have also put together a useful up-to-speed [article](#) about the introduction of statutory relationships education, RSE and health education. Our [Relationships, Sex and Health Education Resource Pack](#) can help you prepare for these changes.

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“Through these subjects, we want to equip them [pupils] for adult life and to make a positive contribution to society” – [the DfE's RSE guidance](#)

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[Updated] Eight: pupils' wellbeing and support

The strain of coronavirus is undoubtedly being felt by all, but young people in particular are amongst the most vulnerable to the challenges coronavirus presents. With social distancing and ongoing disruptions, the Autumn term was full of abnormalities and dissimilarities. The psychological effects of this should be addressed as schools move forward into the Spring term, taking into consideration the impact that the added pressures of remote learning and a national lockdown can have on pupils.

There should be a concerted effort and emphasis placed on pupils' wellbeing and mental health. In an increasingly isolated time, schools should continue to make a concerted effort to reach out and assess how pupils are feeling. The social effects of coronavirus could leave a lasting effect, which extends long after the physical health implications have been dealt with.

Schools are encouraged to talk about the impact of coronavirus within the compulsory relationships education and RSE lessons.

The DfE, in collaboration with NHS England and Public Health England, has also hosted a [free webinar](#) for schools on how to best to support student mental wellbeing.

We also provide wellbeing resources which can help schools support their pupils, including our [Planning a Pupil Wellbeing Audit](#) guidance.

[Updated] What's next?

The Spring term is going to be crucial for schools. Months of disruptions and the partial closure of schools have generated a lot of uncertainty. Spring should be a time where schools take the necessary steps to take stock and reassess pupils' progress and wellbeing. There is no doubt that obstacles will continue to hinder traditional school life; however, focussing on the relevant priorities and the necessary preparations for these can help schools to overcome these obstacles and ensure that their pupils are receiving the best quality of education possible during this difficult time.

Schools have adapted throughout this pandemic and will continue to do so. Moving forward, schools should continue to keep an eye on government guidance, take the time to review the latest announcements, and consider how they can mitigate the impact of coronavirus on their pupils' education and wellbeing.

Making sure pupils can access remote learning and are supported with their education is imperative for their development and wellbeing during Spring term.

Remember to keep an eye on our [New & Updated Resources](#) page, which will help you keep track of all the relevant changes to government policy.

Next steps

- Read our article: [The Latest Coronavirus Updates for Schools](#)
- Use our template: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Risk Assessment for Schools](#)

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