

Up-to-speed on: the coronavirus (COVID-19) contingency framework for schools

Following the full re-opening of schools, the DfE has updated the '[Contingency framework: education and childcare settings](#)' guidance. This article breaks down the essential points that you need to know.

Key Points

The key points are as follows:

1. [Any restrictions on education should only be initiated following a ministerial decision](#)
2. [All settings should have a contingency plan](#)
3. [Priority will be given to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers](#)
4. [Contingency measures have been outlined for a number of settings](#)
5. [Remote education plans should be in place for pupils not attending school](#)
6. [Schools should protect clinically extremely vulnerable individuals](#)
7. [Schools should review their safeguarding policies](#)
8. [Schools should continue to provide school meals](#)

Read on to learn more about each key point.

Any restrictions on education should only be initiated following a ministerial decision

The government has made it clear that any decision to initiate local restrictions to childcare or education settings can only be made by ministers within the DfE. The guiding principles are that any restrictions to attendance on-site should be kept to a minimum, made on an area-by-area basis in the light of local and national circumstances, and lifted as soon as the public and scientific advice says it is appropriate to do so.

All settings should have a contingency plan

Although the default position is for schools to continue operating as normally as possible, the situation may arise where, to help contain the spread of coronavirus, a revision of the usual delivery model is required. Schools should ensure that they have contingency plans in place for how they would operate if any of the approaches for easing and tightening of restrictions became necessary in their area. Schools can use our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Contingency Plan](#) as a template to demonstrate its preparedness for such a scenario.



Priority will be given to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers

Regardless of what restrictions are in place, priority will be given, in all circumstances and settings, to vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers to attend on-site full time.



Contingency measures have been outlined for a number of settings

The exact nature of the restrictions being imposed will depend upon local circumstances and the scientific advice given to ministers. The DfE has, therefore, stated that more detailed operational guidance will be issued to schools as and when the need arises. The current published framework gives an outline of the operational measures that the DfE may advise for different settings if attendance needs to be limited:

Early years settings

- Only vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend

Primary schools

- Only vulnerable pupils, children of critical workers and pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 should be allowed to attend; or
- Only vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend.

Middle schools

Middle schools which have both primary and secondary year groups may need to adopt a combined approach depending on the restrictions being placed on these year groups locally.

Secondary schools

- Vulnerable pupils, children of critical workers, pupils in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13, and other pupils who were due to take external exams in the 2020/2021 academic year should be allowed to attend; or
- Only vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend.

Special schools

Attendance expectations in special schools will remain in line with the equivalent age groups in mainstream schools; however, as many pupils attending special schools may fall within the definition of vulnerable, pupils in special schools will continue to be eligible for face-to-face provision where appropriate.

Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare

Providers who run community activities, before- or after-school clubs, tuition, and other out-of-school or childcare provision (including wraparound childcare) for children over the age of 5 should be able to continue to open for both indoor and outdoor provision.

Where restrictions are required, they should only offer face-to-face provision for those children that are eligible to be in school full time, or who are electively home educated and of equivalent age to those eligible pupils.



Remote education plans should be in place for pupils not attending school

As part of their contingency planning, schools need to consider how they would ensure that every pupil receives the quantity and quality of education and care to which they are normally entitled, whether on-site or remote. High-quality remote education should be provided for all pupils who are not attending in person – schools can use our [Pupil Remote Learning Policy](#) to help ensure they are prepared for this.



Schools need to update their risk assessments

Schools need to continue to follow the DfE's 'system of controls', outlined in its guidance for [schools](#), [early years settings](#), [FE colleges](#), [special schools](#), and [out-of-school settings](#).

All schools should update their risk assessments, in consultation with staff and unions, to reflect their contingency models and review the implementation of their control measures in light of this.



Schools should protect clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

For pupils and staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable, schools should follow national guidance regarding formal shielding measures in place at the time.

In the event of contingency framework measures being employed, schools should consider the opportunities for staff to work at home, given reduced numbers of pupils on-site and the use of remote education for pupils expected to be at home.

Employers should have regard for staff work-life balance and wellbeing, and should continue to operate within the terms and conditions of teachers' and staff employment. Our model [Working from Home and Overtime Policy](#) has appendix that covers working at home during the pandemic.



Schools should review their safeguarding policies

If restrictions are implemented, schools must continue to adhere to 'Keeping children safe in education' (KCSIE). DSLs or their deputies should also review their child protection and safeguarding policies so that they reflect the local restrictions, ensuring they remain effective.

The DfE has advised that including an addendum to safeguarding policies may be more appropriate than re-writing and reissuing a whole policy and staff should be made aware of any changes to safeguarding policies and procedures. Schools can use our [Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy](#) for this purpose.

Schools should continue to provide school meals

Schools should provide meal options for all pupils who are in school and FSM should be available to eligible pupils. Schools should continue to provide FSM or food parcels for eligible pupils who are not attending school due to coronavirus, including where they are not attending as a result of the implementation of the contingency framework.

What's next?

- Read the DfE's contingency framework in full [here](#).
- We have updated our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Letter to Parents about the Contingency Framework](#) which schools can use to explain to parents what the framework will mean for them and their children.
- We will be updating our relevant resources in line with the contingency framework, including our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Contingency Plan](#) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Risk Assessment for Schools](#). Add these articles to your 'Watch list' to be notified as soon as they are ready.

Bibliography

DfE (2020) 'Contingency framework: education and childcare settings' (as reissued 8 March 2021) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-restrictions-in-education-and-childcare-settings/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings>> [Accessed: 9 March 2021]