

A short guide to the government's plans for schools for September

NAHT has produced the following short guide to help members understand the **key changes** the Department for Education (DfE) is proposing as schools prepare for a 'full return' in September. These are the aspects of the plan that are likely to be of immediate interest to leaders and teachers when thinking about what a return in September will look like.

This document **does not cover all aspects of the DfE's guidance and shouldn't be read in isolation**. Instead, it aims to clearly and succinctly identify the main changes schools should be aware of as they consider plans for the autumn term. It could serve as a useful summary of key points to be shared with other members of the school staff.

This summary focuses primarily on the logistical questions that schools will likely want answers to. There are a number of important areas in the detailed guidance from the DfE that are not covered in this document. **Members should certainly make themselves familiar with what the DfE is calling the 'System of Controls' in section one of the [guidance](#).**

You can find more detailed information about accountability, exams, remote learning expectations, curriculum and performance tables in the government's guidance, and NAHT will be saying more about these issues in due course.

It is also important to note that the DfE has also published separate guidance for special schools and early years.

Key points

- The government has set out its intent and plan for all children to return to school full time from the start of September. It is based on a **twin strategy of limiting contact between pupils and implementing hygiene measures** (these are described in more detail within 'system of controls' in the published guidance - see section one)
- Schools are told that "**all elements of the system of controls are essential**", but "**the way different schools implement some of the requirements will differ based on their individual circumstances.**"
- Schools will be familiar with many aspects of the system of controls already, eg thorough and regular handwashing and promoting good respiratory hygiene (the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach)
- The main changes relate to how contact between individuals is to be limited in schools. Contact is to be limited in two main ways:

1. By ensuring pupils remain in consistent groups ('bubbles') wherever possible, thereby minimising the number of contacts between different people across the school
2. By maintaining distance between individuals wherever possible ('social distancing'). You can find more details on these measures below.
 - The DfE states "**if schools follow the guidance set out here, they can be confident they are managing risk effectively.**"
 - Schools are told that it is a **legal requirement that they now revisit and update their covid-19 risk assessments**
 - Schools are also being asked to prepare a 'plan b', ie arrangements to allow remote learning to take place should a partial or full closure of the school be required, at any point in the next academic year. The government has set out in its guidance expectations around what those arrangements should include (see section five). It has also outlined the optional support that will be offered to schools in the coming days and weeks to help them develop such arrangements.

Minimising contact - 'bubbles' and group sizes

- The main and most pressing logistical consideration for schools is determining **group or 'bubble' sizes for September**. The DfE has said that, ideally, bubbles will be kept as small as possible, ie the size of a class. **However, where this restricts a school's ability to deliver a full curriculum, schools have the flexibility to implement year group bubbles.** In many cases, particularly at secondary schools (and almost certainly at key stage four and key stage five), year group bubbles are likely to be the only workable option. Primary schools may find it is possible to work on the basis of class bubbles
- In special or small schools where pupil numbers are lower, schools may decide to have key stage bubbles. For example, in a small school where a class of 32 pupils is made up of multiple year groups or in special schools where groups include pupils from different year groups. This would be subject to the school's risk assessment and should remain true to the overarching principle of consistent groups wherever possible.

Social distancing within bubbles

- The DfE has stated that social distancing and bubbles should **not be seen as alternative options** and that both measures "will help". However, it points out that "the balance between them (social distancing and use of bubbles) will change depending on children's ability to distance, the layout

of the school and the feasibility of keeping distinct groups separate while offering a broad curriculum (especially at secondary)." It also states "when staff or children cannot maintain distancing, particularly with younger children in primary schools, the risk can also be reduced by keeping pupils in the smaller, class-sized groups."

- It goes on to say that "it is likely that for younger children, the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older children, it will be on distancing. For children old enough, they should also be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff where possible."
- Another important point it makes is that "both the approaches of separating groups and maintaining distance are not 'all or nothing' options and will still bring benefits even if implemented partially. Some schools may keep children in their class groups for the majority of the classroom time but also allow mixing into wider groups for specialist teaching, wraparound care and transport, or for boarding pupils, in one group residentially and another during the school day. Siblings may also be in different groups. Endeavouring to keep these groups at least partially separate and minimising contacts between children will still offer public health benefits as it reduces the network of possible direct transmission."
- The DfE has recognised that strict social distancing will not always be possible, especially with primary-aged pupils. The guidance specifically states "we recognise that younger children will not be able to maintain social distancing, and it is acceptable for them not to distance within their group."
- All schools, in particular primary schools, are encouraged to take a realistic and pragmatic approach in this regard. This may include reminding children of the need to give each other space where possible; some schools may consider using a simple 'no touching' approach to help children understand the need to maintain distance. However, the reality is that to fit all pupils in a classroom, they are likely to be in close proximity. The DfE has accepted that pupils will need to be sat close to each other in most classrooms (The DfE recommends that pupils sit side-by-side and do not face each other if this is possible)
- If older children can maintain social distancing, they are encouraged to do so. The DfE states "for children old enough, they should also be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff where possible." If this is possible for older children in primary too, that is to be encouraged, but as the DfE has made clear, it is not an essential requirement
- The DfE has stated that pupils passing each other briefly in a corridor or playground (eg walking past each other) is a relatively 'low risk', but that schools should try to avoid large groups of pupils mixing together in these spaces at the same time.

School staff

- The DfE has said that teachers are permitted to move between bubbles. While it is advisable to minimise movement if and where possible, the reality is that this will not always be possible, especially in a secondary context. This also means that PPA teachers can teach across different groups
- Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers, therapists and other specialists are permitted to move between schools. These teachers are advised to ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff
- An important section on staffing and social distancing states "it is strong public health advice that staff in secondary schools maintain distance from their pupils, staying at the front of the class, and away from their colleagues where possible. Ideally, adults should maintain two-metre distance from each other and children. We know that this is not always possible, particularly when working with younger children, but if adults can do this when circumstances allow, it will help. In particular, they should avoid close face-to-face contact and minimise time spent within one metre of anyone. Similarly, it will not be possible when working with many pupils who have complex needs or who need close contact care. These pupils' educational and care support should be provided as normal... When staff or children cannot maintain distancing, particularly with younger children in primary schools, the risk can also be reduced by keeping pupils in the smaller, class-sized groups." NAHT believes there remains some ambiguity around the expectations here, and we are seeking further clarity
- The guidance suggests that use of staffrooms should be minimised and staff should aim to maintain social distancing within such spaces.

Other important measures

- There should be **no large gatherings** bringing different groups together, eg whole-school assemblies
- Schools are encouraged to **consider staggered break and lunchtimes**, and schools must clean dining halls between groups
- Where possible, schools have also been asked to consider **staggered start and finish times** to keep different bubbles apart as they arrive at and leave schools. However, schools are asked to ensure that the total amount of teaching time pupils receive remains the same, eg an earlier start would mean an earlier finish for pupils.

Breakfast and after school clubs/wrap around care

- Schools can run breakfast and after-school clubs, although they may need additional time to get these back up and running. The DfE has stated that ideally schools would keep to the bubbles used during the school day, but recognised this **might not be possible**. It has stated that **"if it is not possible to maintain bubbles being used during the school day, then schools should use small, consistent groups."**

The DfE has stated the following:

- For individual and very frequently used equipment, such as pencils and pens, it is recommended that staff and pupils have their own items that are not shared
- Classroom-based resources, such as books and games, can be used and shared within the bubble; these should be cleaned regularly, along with all frequently touched surfaces
- Resources that are shared between classes or bubbles, such as sports, art and science equipment, should be cleaned frequently and meticulously and always between bubbles, or rotated to allow them to be left unused and out of reach for 48 hours (72 hours for plastics) between use by different bubbles
- Outdoor playground equipment should be more frequently cleaned
- It is recommended that pupils limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day to essentials, such as lunch boxes, hats, coats, books, stationery and mobile phones. Bags are allowed
- Pupils and teachers can take books and other shared resources home, although unnecessary sharing should be avoided, especially where this does not contribute to pupil education and development. Similar rules on hand cleaning, cleaning of the resources and rotation should apply to these resources.

PE

- The DfE has stated that "pupils should be kept in consistent groups, sports equipment thoroughly cleaned between each use by different individual groups, and contact sports avoided."
- Furthermore, "outdoor sports should be prioritised where possible, and large indoor spaces used where it is not, maximising distancing between pupils and paying scrupulous attention to cleaning and hygiene."

Curriculum and remote learning

- While separate from the logistical details outlined above, NAHT wants to draw members' attention to the government's new expectations that schools should be able to provide a remote learning offer for all pupils in the event of a localised or national lockdown, or for pupils who are having to self-isolate. We strongly advise members to read the relevant section of the DfE's document covering this topic (see section five) and consider what it might mean in their context. As we learn more about this, we will update our advice
- In terms of the curriculum, the document states "school leaders will be best placed to understand the needs of their schools and communities, and to make informed judgments about how to balance delivering a broad and balanced curriculum."
- It also states a key principle that **"the curriculum remains broad and ambitious: all pupils continue to be taught a wide range of subjects**, maintaining their choices for further study and employment."
- For key stages one and two, it specifically states "the curriculum should remain broad so that the majority of pupils are taught a full range of subjects over the year, including sciences, humanities, the arts, physical education/sport, religious education and relationships and health education." You can find more detailed guidance about key stages three and four within the guidance (see section three)
- Within the curriculum guidance, the government has set a series of key expectations. **NAHT recommends that members read these in full**. However, an important point is "up to and including key stage three, prioritisation within subjects of the most important components for progression is likely to be more effective than removing subjects." In practice, this means that schools will naturally be looking at whether or not they need to make adjustments to their curriculum based on their assessments of pupils' learning and progress as they return to school. This is likely to involve considering which key concepts missed from the summer term now need to be covered.

Additional points

- Domestic day trips (not overnight) are permitted to resume in the autumn term, subject to protective measures being taken
- Face coverings are still not currently required in schools
- PPE guidance remains largely the same as previously
- The usual rules on attendance now apply – school is mandatory again from the autumn term

- The DfE expects that kitchens will be fully open from the start of the autumn term and normal legal requirements will apply about the provision of food to all pupils who want it
- You can find more detailed guidance on issues such as accountability, inspection, exams, curriculum and remote learning within the DfE's guidance document.