

GMB

UNION

Planning Guide for Secondary Schools

Joint Union Checklist

Partial Opening Period

January 2021

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Joint union checklist for partial opening period to February

During the current desperate public health situation, it is imperative that the way schools operate during lockdown does not make matters worse.

This supplementary joint union checklist is provided to help schools review their risk assessments and implement measures which firstly reflect the known greater transmissibility of the new variant and secondly meet the specific requirements of partial opening.

The measures set out below are recommended for immediate implementation during this period of partial opening. Please also refer to the **full joint union checklist** for safe opening for guidance on measures that should continue to be in place.

Given the changing situation, this advice may be updated over the coming weeks so please check via your union website that you are using the current version.

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments must be urgently revised to reflect the known greater transmissibility of the new variant and meet the specific requirements of partial opening.

Members and reps should be consulted on the new risk assessments. Where this is refused, members should contact their union to seek advice on taking this forward.

Numbers on Site

- To protect communities and the NHS, schools should limit the number of staff and pupils on site, with a maximum of 15 per cent of normal whole school student capacity in attendance on any given day. This should ensure that numbers don't exceed the figures from March 2020.
- Arrangements should reflect the current requirements of the Coronavirus Regulations 2020 which state that people must work from home unless it is not reasonably possible to do so. Government guidance is that even if parents are eligible for a school place, they should keep children at home where possible.
- There should be no blanket requirement for all staff to be on site. Only those staff providing direct support to students should be on site. Staff delivering online learning should not be required to be in

school, unless there are specific valid reasons.

- The risk assessment should identify the maximum numbers of staff and students (children of key worker and vulnerable students) who can be safely accommodated in each classroom, based on the size and layout of the premises and availability of staff.
- Where the number of students seeking a school place is too high to maintain safety, head teachers should assess the position of all students to establish which vulnerable learners could be offered time in schools. Head teachers should prioritise those who most need to attend school and consider different arrangements, including part-time attendance for some.
- Head teachers are responsible for the safe operation of their school on a day-to-day basis and are therefore entitled to exercise their professional judgement as to what is safe, despite DfE guidance that there is no limit to the number of key worker children who may attend.
- In special schools and alternative provision, it will not be possible, or even appropriate, for every child to receive face-to-face provision every day.
- Systems should be in place to ensure a fair balance across the whole staff in respect of working from home and working on site.

- Where staff have to use public transport to get to work, their work should, where possible, be adjusted to avoid or reduce the requirement to travel on busy transport.
- Measures should be in place to limit non-essential visitors on site but should not be applied in such a way as to obstruct the employment of supply and agency staff.
- Where staff working from home wish or need to go into school to collect materials, they should follow safety measures and avoid contact with other staff as far as possible.

Social Distancing

Given the known greater transmissibility of the new variant, student numbers need to be reduced, along with equivalent reductions in staff on site so as to secure and maintain maximum achievable distancing between everyone in classrooms and other indoor areas, including staffrooms.

Bubbles and Group sizes

- Bubble/class sizes should be at a level so as to maintain social distancing.
- An appropriate system should be in place to facilitate breaks and toilet breaks.
- Staff should not work across bubbles/classes.
- Staff should remain in the same area as students in their bubble/class, including during lunch breaks.

Testing

- Where lateral flow testing centres are set up for weekly asymptomatic testing of staff, positive results should mean instant isolation.
- Where a positive case or cases are picked up through the weekly testing process for staff, we recommend that all contacts of these positive cases should self-isolate. Lateral flow testing should be seen as a helpful additional measure to reduce risk, but the tests are far from totally accurate. Therefore, relying on them to allow staff and pupils who have been in contact with a positive case to continue to go into school is an unnecessary risk.
- Members should not be expected to sign consent forms accepting that they do not isolate in these circumstances.

Face Coverings and PPE

- Schools should go beyond Government recommendations on face coverings, which require that staff and pupils in year 7 or above should wear face coverings in communal places, and require face coverings at all times indoors, including in the classroom, for staff and pupils in secondary schools, and the same for staff in primary schools and SEND settings.
- PPE should be required for all personal care activities and where social distancing

cannot be maintained, for example in some special schools and nurseries.

Ventilation

Revised risk assessments must consider whether ventilation is sufficient to address the increased transmission risk of the new variant.

See Sage guidance:

[S0973_Ventilation_Actions_Summary_16122020_V2.pdf](#)

(publishing.service.gov.uk)

Staff at greater risk, including pregnant staff

In line with updated [Government guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#) (www.gov.uk), schools must allow all clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) staff to work from home.

All staff with CEV household members and dependants who are isolating should be allowed to work from home. The NJC have written to schools confirming that the circulars from the March lockdown, in particular:

NJC 17 March circular – [Coronavirus and working at home](#) and;

NJC 23 March circular – [COVID-19: critical workers](#) apply to this lockdown

In line with updated Government guidance for pregnant employees, risk assessments should be carried out for pregnant women who should only continue working in the workplace if the risk assessment advises that it is safe to do so.

If, for example, pregnant women are not able to follow social distancing guidance at work, they should be offered suitable alternative work or working arrangements (including working from home) or be suspended on normal pay. The joint unions continue to advise that all pregnant staff in the third trimester should work at home.

For further advice on staff who are clinically vulnerable (CV) or in known higher risk groups, please refer to the joint union advice and your union's specific information or contact your branch for more information.

Cleaning and Hygiene

The known greater transmissibility of the new variant means that effective cleaning is even more important. Schools should introduce enhanced cleaning throughout the school day and support cleaning staff, including via additional paid hours and hiring additional staff where necessary, as well as by providing full appropriate PPE.

School transport

Apply public transport rules on social distancing and face coverings to all school transport – and apply to all age groups.

Make arrangements for additional cleaning of vehicles.

Put protocols in place for drivers/escorts to report to staff if any child is unwell on a journey to school, including isolating other students the transport, as well as the driver and escort.

Parents/carers collecting children

Strict measures around social distancing of parents/carers at the beginning and end of sessions should be enforced. Face coverings should be worn and those waiting to collect children should observe at least 2 metre distancing.

Remote learning

It is important that staff follow appropriate safety measures when working at home during this period of greater home working. Refer to your union's guidance on this.

Pay

Schools should ensure full pay for staff who have to self-isolate or take time off to look after their own children who are self-isolating or ill or other

vulnerable family members who are ill. Staff who are working at home should be on full pay.

Schools should ensure that full pay is also in place for all contractor staff (for example catering and cleaning staff) if they are in school on rota or at home as a result of the partial closure.