



2021-0050264RWPO

Robin Walker MP

Minister of State for School Standards

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Mr Iain Stewart MP

By email: iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk

Your ref: 1369365

25 November 2021

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your email of 22 October, addressed to the Department of Health and Social Care, enclosing correspondence from your constituents, regarding school safety measures. Your email has been passed to this Department and I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

We have worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to develop safety guidance for schools, which includes information about frequent and thorough hand cleaning and maintaining an appropriate cleaning schedule. This is available at: tinyurl.com/1ht2Yclx. Where schools implement the system of controls outlined in the guidance, in line with their own workplace risk assessment, the DHSC and UKHSA confirm that these measures create an inherently safer environment for children and staff, where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced.

We expect independent schools to follow the control measures set out in the guidance, which covers expectations for children with special educational needs and disabilities, including those with education, health and care plans in mainstream schools. Separate guidance is available for nurseries, childminders, further education colleges, special schools and alternative provision. Information for parents and carers about all children returning to schools, nurseries and colleges is available at: tinyurl.com/7zPdJdeo.

Regarding carbon dioxide monitors, on 21 August, the Department announced that, from September, all state funded schools will receive carbon dioxide monitors. The Government will be funding this with a £25 million investment. The new monitors will enable staff to act quickly where ventilation is poor and provide reassurance that existing ventilation measures are working.

The Government expects and recommends face coverings to be worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where pupils or staff may come into contact with people they do not normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college.

The reintroduction of face coverings for pupils or staff may be advised for a temporary period in response to localised outbreaks. Additionally, if the Government's Plan B for autumn and winter 2021 is implemented, the legal requirement to wear face coverings in some places may be reinstated.

Over the autumn and winter, the Government will aim to sustain the progress we have made and prepare the country for future challenges, while ensuring the NHS does not come under unsustainable pressure. Further information about the Government's autumn and winter plan 2021 is available at: tinyurl.com/cvmY423r.

School attendance is mandatory for all pupils, and the usual rules on attendance apply. Parents of school age children have a duty to secure their child's regular attendance at the school where they are registered. Schools and local authorities can issue penalty notices and conduct prosecutions. However, penalty notices and prosecutions are a last resort and parents will not be penalised if their child's non-attendance at school is as a result of following clinical or public health advice relating to COVID-19.

Where a pupil is unable to attend school because they are complying with clinical or public health advice, we expect schools to be able to offer them access to remote education. The remote education provided should be equivalent in length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school. Information about our remote education support package for teachers is available at: tinyurl.com/YY532GGd. Information and support for parents and carers of children who are receiving remote education is available at: tinyurl.com/iwxvzxev.

All children who were previously classified as clinically extremely vulnerable should attend school, unless they are one of the small number of children under paediatric or other specialist care and have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend. Our guidance for supporting pupils at school with medical conditions is available at: tinyurl.com/2J8P3254. Pupils who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable should continue to attend school as normal. Our guidance for those classified as clinically extremely vulnerable is available at: tinyurl.com/47xh9uad.

Testing will remain important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within schools. For the rest of the autumn term, pupils should continue to test twice weekly at home and staff should undertake twice weekly home tests whenever they are on site. Both these arrangements will then be reviewed at this time.

Secondary schools should also retain a small asymptomatic testing site (ATS) until further notice so they can offer testing to pupils who are unable to test themselves at home. Staff and pupils with a positive lateral flow device (LFD) test result will need to self-isolate. Everyone must continue to follow public health advice on when to self-isolate and what to do. This advice is available at: tinyurl.com/7e5fawmw. They should not attend school if they have symptoms, have had a positive test result, or in any of the other scenarios listed in the NHS advice above, all of which require them to stay at home.

If pupils or staff experience COVID-19 symptoms or receive a positive LFD test, they are required to undertake a confirmatory polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. If they receive a positive test, they will need to self-isolate from the day their symptoms started, or the day they had the test if they are asymptomatic, for the next ten days. Members of their household may need to self-isolate at the same time, unless any of the exemptions, outlined in the Government's guidance, apply: [tinyurl.com/nrJwsauh](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/self-isolation-guidance-for-people-with-covid-19-symptoms).

We are no longer recommending that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups or bubbles. This means that bubbles will not need to be used in schools from the autumn term. Close contacts will be identified via NHS Test and Trace, not by schools themselves via year or class bubbles.

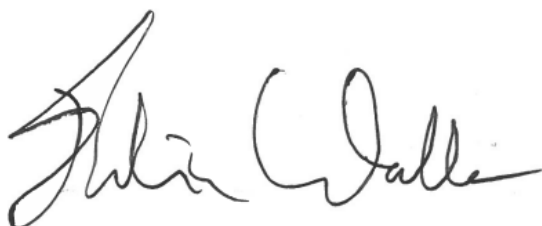
As of 16 August, children under the age of 18 are no longer required to self-isolate if they are defined as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case. Instead, children will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case to identify close contacts. Contacts from a school will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact.

Pupils who are 18 years old will be treated in the same way as children until four months after their eighteenth birthday, to allow them the opportunity to be fully vaccinated. At that point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and, therefore, if they choose not to get vaccinated they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

If there is extremely high prevalence of COVID-19 and existing measures have failed to reduce community transmission, restrictions affecting education and childcare may be necessary to reduce the overall number of social contacts in our communities and help protect the NHS. We have published a contingency framework outlining how schools should operate in the event of any restrictions, available at: [tinyurl.com/93vmamck](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contingency-framework-for-schools).

The Government will endeavour to give as much notice as possible of any need for such restrictions. In all circumstances, priority will continue to be given to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers to attend full time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Walker'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.