

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): INFORMATION FOR GOVERNING BOARDS

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) has provided an essential service to all governing boards with governance questions during the COVID-19 period. The service is available to all boards until September when it reverts to a service for NGA GOLD members.

Our annual GOLD membership is £275 for boards and provides access to all our best practice resources and expert tailored advice. [Sign up](#) to help your board save time and develop professional governance.

Contact GOLDline by email: gold@nga.org.uk or by calling 0121 237 3782. NGA GOLD members are asked to make a request through the usual route.

Preparing for full school opening

This document covers:

- an overview of [DfE guidance](#) for the full opening of schools at the beginning of the autumn term
- engaging with the risk assessment process
- ensuring appropriate plans are in place for full opening

Further NGA guidance is available:

[Governing in COVID-19 times: continuity and recovery](#)

[Webinar: planning for the autumn term, what do boards need to know](#)

[COVID-19 frequently asked questions](#)

From the beginning of the autumn term:

- all pupils are to return to school full-time
- attendance will become mandatory
- an essential 'system of controls' must be in place to manage COVID-19 risks
- schools are to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, with remote learning provision where needed

It is advisable for governors/trustees to read the DfE guidance and for governing boards to meet before the end of the academic year to review their school/trust plans for full opening. (If a board meeting is not possible, some form of consultation between members of the board and school leaders should take place). The meeting should consider how the guidance is being used to support risk assessment and subsequent plans.

The governing board's employment responsibilities include taking reasonable steps to make sure staff and pupils aren't exposed to health and safety risks. Carrying out risk assessment and monitoring remains the duty of executive leaders. However, governing boards should support and engage with this process through:

- testing risk assessments and plans for robustness (referring to the below control measures and DfE guidance)
- ensuring effective communication with stakeholders: listen to and address the concerns of parents, pupils and staff

Assessing risk and implementing effective control measures

Schools should consider how to apply the 'system of controls' in their own setting. Risk assessments have been carried out to support partial re-opening during the summer. However, it is a legal requirement to update risk assessments in preparation for the autumn term.

Essential control measures include:

- a requirement that people who are ill stay at home
- robust hand and respiratory hygiene
- enhanced cleaning arrangements
- active engagement with NHS Test and Trace
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts

The guidance asks schools to 'minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible'. Methods to reduce contacts will vary but, as much as possible, will include:

- grouping children together (in consistent 'bubbles' that could be classes or year groups)
- avoiding contact between groups (for example, using staggered start times)
- arranging classrooms with forward facing desks
- staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible (staff can move between bubbles but will, ideally, maintain 2 metres distance from other adults)

Welcoming staff back into school

The DfE expects that, given the relaxation of shielding measures, most staff will be able to attend school in the autumn. However, there are additional considerations during this period:

- School leaders are encouraged to take a flexible approach to staffing: reducing risks for vulnerable staff and deploying to support opening to all pupils.
- Boards and school leaders should continue recruitment activities (remotely for the time being) to support preparations for the autumn term.
- **Governing boards should seek assurances that specialist staff will be deployed to support pupils with SEND.**
- **School leaders have a limited amount of time to build plans for the autumn term. Governing boards, as ever, should be mindful of staff work-life balance and wellbeing.**

Attendance expectations

- Attendance will be mandatory from the beginning of the autumn term, except where: pupils are in the care of public health professionals, pupils are self-isolating in line with public health advice or infection rates rise locally and pupils are advised to shield.
- Where there is no valid reason for absence, fines may be issued again in the autumn. Headteachers continue to have discretion as to when to issue fines as a last resort.
- Parents may be reluctant to send children back to school; communication with parents needs to be clear and reassuring.
- The DfE have published a [behavior and attendance checklist](#) for school leaders to support full opening.
- Getting to school safely may be challenging for some pupils and staff. The government encourage walking, cycling and private transport. Schools may also need to consult with local transport partners.
- **Governing boards will need to work with school leaders to build confidence amongst the school community in the plan for full opening.**
- **Communications that reflect school values and ethos will help build confidence – governing boards can work with senior leaders to construct communications.**

Contingency plans for outbreaks

- In the event of infection in school or a local outbreak, the guidance specifies the steps to be taken (local advice will be given).
- Localised spread may result in full or partial school closure. In which case, schools should immediately enact their plans for remote education.
- **Governors/trustees should consider if plans are sufficiently flexible to cope with lockdown scenarios.**
- **Governing boards should seek assurances from leaders that remote education plans build on summer term experience. Schools should seek out opportunities to improve and build capability where needed.**
- **Governing boards should be satisfied that schools are able to monitor engagement with remote activities.**

Maintaining a full, broad and balanced curriculum

- The guidance specifies that the curriculum should be broad and ambitious; a wide range of subjects should be taught.
- In cases of school closure, or where a pupil is unable to attend school because they are complying with clinical and/or public health advice, schools should provide access to remote education immediately.
- Remote education should be closely aligned with in-school provision.
- DfE has supported the publication of a range of remote learning resources, such as the [lessons produced by OAK National Academy](#).
- Schools are encouraged to resume breakfast and after school provision, where possible, alongside protective measures.
- **Governing boards should ensure the curriculum responds to the needs of pupils and continue to ask: will the curriculum provide a rich and engaging learning experience?**
- **Governing boards should consider: will pupils educated at home have the support they need to make good progress?**

Discussing summer provision

- Schools are not required to continue educational provision throughout the summer holiday.
- The government has confirmed that out-of-school provision for children can operate over the summer holiday, fulfilling its important role in providing enriching activities and childcare.
- **Governing boards and school leaders should discuss arrangements to signpost families to summer activities.**
- **School leaders and governing boards should support existing summer activity provision in the local community or may seek to provide or commission their own.**

COVID-19: Previous information briefings for governing boards

Information briefings, along with guidance on business continuity and holding virtual meetings are available on the [COVID-19 resources page](#) of the NGA website.