

Returning to school

Curriculum Guidance and Support for primary schools and settings

This document is in response to the announcement made on 10th May in relation to the planned phased reopening of schools and settings across Britain

The guidance which follows is intended to provide a level of reassurance and clarify the expectations on schools and settings from the Local Authority. We will support schools and leaders in their own decisions as this is guidance not proscription. Each school and setting is unique and will have individual challenges.

It is recognised by the DfE that the return to school or the 'new normal' will pose a great many challenges to all schools and settings, regardless of size and location.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/>

The true impact on overall emotional wellbeing, socialisation (and speech and language, particularly for our youngest pupils) and on learning behaviours can only be anticipated at this stage.

Schools need to take carefully planned actions to successfully remove the barriers to learning for all pupils before steps can be taken to even begin to address the gaps in learning across the broad curriculum.

This will take time!

Pupils need to feel safe, confident and happy in order for successful learning to take place.

Wellbeing

Children's emotional well-being is central to their capacity to learn effectively; if wellbeing is cared for the children will hit the ground running when they are ready and make up the lost learning relatively quickly as evidenced in other countries. (See well-being guidance).

As schools may reopen for nursery, reception, Y1 and Y6 this means that there is a continued need for a blend of home/school based learning. Schools need to consider what are the key priorities for their children. Each school must fill their curriculum with content and experiences they believe are best for the children of their school community. The DfE guidance 11th May states 'schools continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate all pupils during this period'.

Re-establishing expectations

The key here is re-establishing behaviour expectations, how we speak to each other, how we treat each other and our attitude to being in school. The learning will happen when this is all established. Daily talks with the class by the Headteacher to remind them all is well, creating a safe environment, reminding them they are loved and cared for. With this they are reminded of respect for each other, love for each other and what that looks like again, thus re-creating the ethos and culture within schools. This will move on to attitudes to learning and school

staff will need to make the skills for learning explicit in order to help children re-engage.

- Encourage the development of positive attitudes.
- Build on children's natural curiosity, develop problem solving.
- Encourage open-mindedness, self-assessment, perseverance and responsibility.
- Build on children's social skills to work cooperatively with others.
- Provide children with enjoyable experiences, so that they are motivated to know and learn more.

Differences in learning

Everyone must accept that children may not be at age related expectations at the end of this academic year. It is important to value and celebrate what children have learnt. Initially teachers need to create time to allow the children to 'show and tell' what they have been doing, what they have learned and what their lives have been like over the lockdown; we can then assess them academically as well as socially and emotionally. There are resources which can support the assessment of children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural development in all educational settings for example 'The Boxall Profile' which is an online resource.

<https://www.nurtureuk.org/introducing-nurture/boxall-profile>

Key to this is celebration and recognition, will be to remember that much of what children may have learnt may be very different to 'school learning' and certainly not on the curriculum. Teachers need to take time to find out who has learnt to bake a cake, build a den, identify the birds in their garden etc. Teachers' responses will be key to how children are able to reintegrate into school and the people that they will become.

For many schools there are divisions between access to learning during the lock down for different children. Successful accessing of learning from home depends on many factors. As children become older, they may become more independent in their learning, however, for the majority of children, learning will depend on the role of parent as 'teacher'. This depends on parental skills, interest and commitment. It is further impacted by the parents' work commitments, educational and language levels. Further issues include the space to learn, as well as access to physical and online resources. Many parents have not had the capability to get their child logged on and accessing the tasks for different reasons.

Some children may feel they have missed out. We must acknowledge that this may not have been their fault that they did not manage to carry out much 'learning'.

Whilst teachers can celebrate the 'learning' online teachers also need to look at what children are doing to entertain themselves, how they have shown resilience, patience and kindness at home so as not to discriminate against the children who have not been able to do much work online.

Children with special educational needs

The impact of all these issues will be even greater for those with special needs. Their learning will have been impacted as will issues of being or not being in school, managing change, routines and anxieties. There will be particular issues with managing transitions into school and where there is a change of setting

Curriculum Offer

With all this in mind what could the curriculum look and feel like for the remainder of this academic year, and possibly beyond? We know that schools will spend time focusing on wellbeing, safeguarding, routines, reassuring children and transition throughout June and July but in terms of curriculum subjects schools have developed progressive curriculums with agreed key knowledge and skills with as much as at least a term being missed there is a need to make adjustments.

The DFE guidance states ‘Where year groups are returning to school, we would expect school leaders and teachers to:

consider their pupils’ mental health and wellbeing and identify any pupil who may need additional support so they are ready to learn.

- assess where pupils are in their learning, and agree what adjustments may be needed to the school curriculum over the coming weeks.
- identify and plan how best to support the education of high needs groups, including disadvantaged pupils, and SEND and vulnerable pupils.
- support pupils in Year 6, who will need both their primary and secondary schools to work together to support their upcoming transition to Year 7’.

Curriculum planning

All subject leaders need to work with senior leaders/teachers and support staff to identify potential gaps in learning. Subject leaders can then adapt long term plans.

Some schools will decide to reassess where pupils are for example in phonics; programmes could then be established to help and support pupils back to where they were and put them in a good position to springboard from there. English or reading leaders need to support staff in providing additional bridging activities for younger children in particular.

There may be a need to introduce an additional ‘quiet reading time’ for older independent readers to help them get back into the swing of regular reading. Look at introducing reading buddies depending on rules of social distancing. Look for more opportunities to provide children with reading challenges, encourage children to keep a ‘reading journal’ on what they are reading for pleasure, on a novel that the whole class is reading, or on an audio book they are given to listen to. This might be supported with prompts, to draw out likes and dislikes, observations, feelings, questions, connections and links, and predictions. Ensure children are carrying out research which requires them to read to obtain the information they need.

For writing it may be appropriate to set pupils short written tasks with quite closed objectives – to practise learned techniques at sentence level as well as longer, more open tasks, supported with models (such as annotated examples) and scaffolding, to challenge and to aid independence, such as questions, sentence stems, paragraph plans, writing frames? Ensure children are sometimes given a choice of tasks, to promote personal investment? Ensure that children are also challenged to write in an engaged, authentic way, and – sometimes – at greater length for example could children sometimes build ‘portfolios’ of written pieces around a topic.

In science the programmes of study for science are set out year-by-year for key stages 1 and 2. Schools are, however, only required to teach the relevant programme of study by the end of the key stage. Within each key stage, schools therefore have flexibility. Subject leaders could combine units where possible and revisit themes where opportunities allow.

For example, the Y1 objectives for plants could be combined with the Y2. So that pupils should be taught to:

Y1 - identify and name a variety of common wild and garden plants, including deciduous and evergreen trees identify and describe the basic structure of a variety of common flowering plants, including trees.

Y2 - observe and describe how seeds and bulbs grow into mature plants find out and describe how plants need water, light and a suitable temperature to grow and stay healthy.

Or the Y4 work on states of matter could be combined with the Y5 work on properties and changes of materials.

For the foundation subjects, adjustments can be made over a longer time, with learning being spread over a longer period. Leaders of Foundation subjects need to consider which topic areas have been missed and to assess if these can be visited through other topics later in the key stage. For example; if a unit on World War 2 was missed could aspects of this learning be included in a local study?

Think about the spiral curriculum model; one where there is an iterative process revisiting topics, subjects or themes. Children revisit a topic, theme or subject several times throughout their school career; the complexity of the topic or theme increases with each revisit; and new learning has a relationship with old learning and is put in context with the old information.

Timetables

Whilst it is essential to develop routines a degree of flexibility is needed; build in PHSE and think carefully about afternoon activities when children may become tired and engagement may be more challenging. Consider points in the day where children home learning and those at school could complete the same activity for example <https://www.worldofdavidwalliams.com/elevenses/>

Effective use of staffing

Some staff will be self-isolating therefore effective deployment of staff needs careful consideration. Teachers and support staff should work with the same group of children and this will not necessarily be a year group they are used to. Support staff can be utilised to lead groups of pupils under a teacher's direction.

Staff will need support with this and if staff are leading a group of children they need to be prepared have the resources and the answers to questions which may have been set by another member of staff.

Where staff are self-isolating, you may need to think about utilising their skills supporting the home learning which will need to continue for many children, especially with limited numbers attending each day.

Phases of return

Every school and setting is different and how you manage pupils return will need to be carefully considered within each schools' risk assessment depending on the size of the school and the available staffing.

The DFE guidance states 'prioritise younger children in the first phases of wider opening' consider staggering the start date of groups of children to enable children to settle into school in smaller groups. As you phase more pupils back into school review start and end times to ensure that social distancing of parents can be observed.

Transition

Transition is important for all children and each school will consider how best to approach this. Things to consider include:

- Creating a video clip/labelled pictures of the setting which will help parents to explain to their children about the routines they can expect this can be shared on website or via email. Ensure that the video focuses on aspect such as where they will place their coats, where various play areas are, etc.
- Transition meetings could be held online with pre-school settings and secondary schools.
- Ensure the Y6 have the opportunity to mark the end of their primary phase.