

Guidance and Support for 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. Each school and setting is unique and will have individual challenges they will need to consider.

It is recognised by the DfE that the return to school/settings 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/>

This document clearly states:

“Every setting should carry out a risk assessment before opening. The assessment should directly address risks associated with coronavirus, so that sensible measures can be put in place to control those risks for children and staff. All employers have a duty to consult employees on health and safety, and they are best placed to understand the risks in individual settings.”

A sample risk assessment format is an appendix to this document which you could use but it will need altering to suit your context. Every setting has its own context and you need to consider that in line with the government guidance when you prepare for wider opening. No two contexts are the same and you need to plan considering all aspects of the guidance to determine what you can offer.

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 and settings 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. It is vital that we support children’s well-being initially as they return to schools and settings to ensure they feel secure.

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/setting. The learning will happen when this is all established. Daily talks with children in their groups will help 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/settings. This will move on to characteristics of effective learning and

- Encourage the development of positive attitudes
- Build on children's natural curiosity, develop problem solving
- 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 if assessed now. It is important to value and celebrate what children have learnt. Initially practitioners 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 socially and emotionally and then academically.

Key to this is celebration and recognition, of what children have experienced at home. Practitioners need to take time to find out who has learnt to bake a cake, build a den, identify the birds in their garden etc.

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/setting, managing change, routines and anxieties. There will be particular issues with managing transitions into school/setting and where there is a change of setting.

Early Years Foundation Stage Learning and Development

Firstly, *there is absolutely no requirement or pressure* to teach, catch up or cram learning which the children have missed during the lock down period. There should be no attempt to undertake a rapid 'catch up' when children return. We must all acknowledge and accept that it is okay for some children not be where we would normally expect them to be as a huge chunk of time for learning has been lost.

For our EYFS curriculum children, thinking needs to be focussing on the essential skills, attitudes and behaviours that will help the children to recover, adjust back into school/setting routine and ensure that they are equipped for the learning.

The whole child experience – Think Maslow.

Firstly, as skilful, sensitive practitioners we must properly acknowledge and support PSED and wellbeing. It must be remembered that small children are very sensitive and have a strong need for social contact.

We need to sensitively and actively listen, allow them to talk about, recount and recall their individual experiences whilst they were away from school/setting. Help them to come to terms with

events such as the possible death of close family, loss of contact with friends. Generally being isolated away from others for some considerable length of time, and possibly only surrounded by adults for the weeks they have been at home.

Furthermore, whilst following the national lockdown recommendations, some children may have been confined to the indoors so we will need to address and support their physical needs and learning ensuring that we revisit and consolidate previously acquired skills before introducing new ones.

Finally, we need to make sure that if an individual child or family requires additional support, that we quickly signpost / access this as soon as possible. The long term effects from the lockdown experience may, for some children have a longer lasting impact and we all need to be sensitive and mindful of this over the coming weeks and months.

Helping young children to re-establish themselves back into school/setting, to support and continue to promote good behaviours for socialising and learning is vital for the short and longer term success for children after an extended disruption.

Early years settings need to use reasonable endeavours to deliver the learning and development requirements set out in the EYFS. Staff should continue to follow the EYFS curriculum, and begin by specifically focussing on all elements of the Characteristics of Effective Learning and Personal, social and emotional development as a priority. As children are settled and ready other areas of learning can be focussed on however it will be necessary to make simple appropriate assessments of where the children are in their learning at this point to enable practitioners to plan appropriate learning experiences for children.

EARLY YEARS ASSESSMENT

- Where parents have been liaising with schools/settings and providing up-to-date information regarding home learning, this can feed into summative assessment judgements within current record keeping systems.
- Early Years practitioner should continue to use their present formative and summative assessment systems to consider where a child is in their learning now and plan appropriately.
- Settings will not be required to undertake the progress check at age 2 during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- Considering transition for children moving to school the practitioner should use either the last formative judgement if the child is not attending or if the child is attending the setting use their best endeavours to make an assessment at the end of the summer to send to the school as part of the transition process.

TRANSITION

Back to setting

Children have been at home during this period of lockdown and they and their families may be anxious about starting back to setting. Support parents with clear communication before they start to ensure they know what to expect with all the changes that need to be made. If children are struggling to separate from parents you need to consider how and where to manage this to minimise the number of adults entering the setting e.g. a separate room, outside with some toys to help settle children.

Moving age groups

During this first period when children are starting back after lockdown you will need to think seriously as to if transitioning between rooms as children reach the appropriate age is right. It may be more

appropriate to keep children in the same groups or “bubbles” for the foreseeable future even if this means having mixed age groups.

Starting Reception

The regular and well-established practice of welcoming children into school (transition) has been seriously disrupted due to schools being closed. Early Years staff are keenly aware of this and will be considering using appropriate technology and phone contacts with parents and new children in order to continue the transition process remotely, this will look very different in different schools.

The LA recommend that settings continue to use their best endeavours to support transitions into school for children joining in the Autumn term, and that they continue to send learning journals to schools. They should hold professional discussions with previous teachers, to ensure that any additional needs of a child have been identified and measures put in place to support their transition in to the Reception class. This can be done by telephone or video calls.

Ideas and Things to consider:

As practitioners we need to ensure that everything we do or provide keeps ourselves and the children safe whilst continuing to reduce the chance of spreading the Covid-19 virus.

All settings are *individual*, but discussing and planning your provision (space, staff, resources etc) with careful consideration, some pre-planning and practical approaches we can carefully welcome children back into our settings. Although not endless, the information below can guide your decisions and plans. It is based on our experience of opening and supporting the county Early Years hubs throughout the entire Covid-19 pandemic.

It must be remembered that most young children will not understand physical distancing, so you can only use your ‘best endeavours’.

Numbers in the room

Try to maintain the minimum number of children and adults in any one room. If you have more rooms, then use them so that you can physically spread children and adults out over a wider area. Use your outdoors for more focussed group activities as well as physical exploration.

Consider how many children you can have in your space at any one time. Plan numbers to ensure that you can try to maintain social distancing. Although young children will not understand the social distancing idea fully, reduced numbers of children in your setting at any one time can help you to manage this better. You will need to consider what staff you have available to support this as this will impact on numbers you can have in the setting.

Consider the hours and sessions you will offer to parents. This will mean you need to think about space and staffing to consider this. You may not initially be able to offer the full entitlement to normal funded hours and only be able to offer part time places. Every setting is different only you can decide what is right for your setting.

“If necessary, settings have the flexibility to focus first on continuing to provide places for priority groups and then, to support children’s early learning, settings should prioritise groups of children as follows:

- early years settings - 3 and 4 year olds followed by younger age groups
- infant schools - nursery (where applicable) and reception
- primary schools - nursery (where applicable), reception and year 1”

(Page 8 of the guidance [DfE Guidance : Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020](#))

Although it goes against the fundamental ethos of the EYFS and its principals to some degree, plan to have more individual based activities such as jigsaws, painting, individual small world. Encourage children to be busy and focussed in their ‘own space’ or ‘personal area’ when on activities. Small carpet squares, trays, or place mats can help you to manage this and keep activities within a certain boundary. A more structured open ended play based approach could help to manage the social distancing more effectively than “in the moment planning” would.

Experience has shown us that we need to reduce the resources and items available. Stripping back resources that they have access to helps us to manage and reduce cross-infection through direct surface contact.

Having less is better. Removing role play including clothes, hats, bedding, bags etc reduces the chance of contamination and constant washing of softer items. Having some cushions is fine, but ensure that these are washed and cleaned every day. If softer items can’t be washed daily, remove it from your setting for now.

Consider removing those resources that can easily spread infection e.g. play dough, sand. At this stage of the pandemic, for Early Years, less is definitely better. Turn cupboards around or remove items that you do not want the children to use so they are out of sight.

Dare we suggest it, but plastic, wooden and ‘hard’ resources are more suited as they can be easily and effectively cleaned between use. Introduce more creative based activities which generally provide less movement and more focus for children. Painting, modelling and drawing tend to be more singular, individual activities which work well.

Think about how you move children around as a group. How do you change from the indoors to the outdoors? How can you swap to another location or resource? How do you manage toilets, snacks, lunches, coats etc?

Attendance of children should be thought about to prevent a lot of mixing of different groups, so consider having the same children in at the same time on the same day. Are you able to create social groups who attend at the same times? Can children from the same families attend on the same day? You will probably be running with reduced numbers, so discussing this with parents and the need to keep everyone safe is a top priority.

Arrival of children and managing parents.

Staggering arrivals and departures from the setting is essential, not only for the children but for parents and staff alike. How is the ‘hand over’ undertaken consider is it safer to do this at the setting door and avoid having parents/carers in the rooms? How do you hand over letters, bags and other items?

Managing emotions and personal care.

Handwashing is vital and we must ensure children are doing this frequently during the day however on arrival, before and after eating, after toileting and when they come in from outdoors is essential. Consider how to encourage to do this to ensure children are washing their hands for the minimum 20 second (happy birthday twice or twinkle, twinkle twice). Work with parents and see what routines they may already have taught children that we could all share and learn together.

As Early Years people, we are sensitive to children's emotional needs and are very skilled at stepping in when they begin to wobble. We should still continue to do this, but consider different ways in which you can successfully do this without putting yourself in any close contact.

When a child is sad, hurt, or just needs a cuddle, try placing them on the floor next to you and support them by rubbing their arm, their back etc. This still gives that all important human contact, but it is managed and reduces the risk of close face or fluid (tears, snot) contamination as you are less likely to be in personal or intimate space (face to face etc).

First aid and intimate care (changing) should be carried out in line with your current policies. Ensure that you have a dedicated clean area, appropriate PPE equipment (gloves, aprons), cleaning resources (soap and water), and a way of hygienically disposing of used items.

Cleaning and washing.

One of the best things you and staff can do repeatedly and regularly is to clean resources, surfaces, children and yourselves frequently. Increase the times that you disinfect resources.

As a minimum, soap (or detergent such as washing up liquid) water and a disposable 'J' cloth is sufficient. Clean all surfaces, handles, toys, and all those 'things' children and adults regularly touch. Plastic resources can be secured in a pillowcase and washed in a washing machine or plastic resources can be put in a dishwasher.

Follow the government / Public Health England with their advice on handwashing. Ensure that all children and staff maintain their own personal hygiene. Also be very mindful of younger children and babies who may drip and put things in their mouth.

Good hygiene and cleaning will help to reduce and spread of the virus.

<https://www.earlyyearseducator.co.uk/news/article/coronavirus-government-strengthens-advice-around-social-distancing-in-early-years-settings-and-schools>

Child illness Policy

Review your sickness policy to ensure it covers Covid- 19. Be clear on your sickness policy and how you will handle a child who may begin to show symptoms while in your care. Ensure this is shared with parents when you re-open /take more children. Look atlink to guidance

Appendix 1- Risk assessment template which could be completed prior to opening or use your own template

Appendix 2 – EYFS websites and Apps that may be helpful

Appendix 3 – Frequently Asked Questions