



Return to Schools' Full Opening Policy

Autumn Term 2020

Introduction

The government's position is for pupils to return to school in the autumn term 2020. Published on 27 July, guidance from the government explained that circumstances have changed with the prevalence of COVID-19 decreased and therefore the balance of risk is now in favour of children returning to school.

We will continue to follow government guidance at all times, as schools prepare for, and open, in the new academic year. This policy aims to support staff, school leaders and governors in managing the return.

A system of controls: protective measures

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools> has been set out and the trust will follow these in order to reduce risks in our schools and create 'an inherently safe environment'. The system of controls is as follows:

System of controls

This is the set of actions schools must take. They are grouped into 'prevention' and 'response to any infection' and are outlined in more detail in the sections below.

Prevention:

- 1) minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school
- 2) clean hands thoroughly more often than usual
- 3) ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach
- 4) introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach
- 5) minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible
- 6) where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)

Numbers 1 to 4 must be in place in all schools, all the time.

Number 5 must be properly considered and schools must put in place measures that suit their particular circumstances.

Number 6 applies in specific circumstances.

Response to any infection:

7) engage with the NHS Test and Trace process

8) manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the school community

9) contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

Numbers 7 to 9 must be followed in every case where they are relevant.

Risk assessments are based on this system of controls and the experience of opening the schools in the summer term. The Trust's Scheme of Delegation for 20/21 places the responsibility for Health and Safety (H&S) with the Secondary Board and Local Academy Boards (LAB) and Heads – who know their schools well and can make the local decisions most knowledgably. We have seen this work well in the re-opening of the schools during the summer term 2019/20 to more pupils beyond the children of key workers or those who are vulnerable.

Opening and closing a school is an operational decision which is taken by school leaders. Clearly any decision made by school leaders will need to take into account the current DfE guidance, applying it to the school's individual context. School leaders must consult with their LABs, and notify the Trust, as the employer. Additional consideration of the duty of care to pupils and to employees must be made.

Guidance

The Trust and schools will have regard to the updated guidance available from the government, and the collection of documents can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

The Trust's H&S Policy and the schools' own policies and procedures are linked to this policy, as are the Trust's HR policies, and its Safeguarding Policy.

Approach

Throughout this continued period until the government gives an assessment that COVID-19 no longer poses a threat to staff, pupils and students, we will use a risk assessment approach.

Risk assessments will be undertaken and regularly reviewed by senior staff, in each school of:

1. Site, buildings/learning environment and recorded, including consultation with staff
2. Individual staff risk assessment profile undertaken with their line manager to ensure comprehensive understanding and support for each employee.

These documents are available in each school.

Any amendments/adaptations to risk assessments will always be recorded, initialled and dated to provide an on-going record, and reported to the Chair of the LAB routinely.

Obligations

The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) is the underpinning legislation, which places a duty on employers and employees. This requires what is reasonably practicable to be done.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) places an obligation on the employer to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks an employee may be exposed to whilst at work.

Employees also have a duty within this legislation: they have a duty to take care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions at work. Employees must co-operate with employers and co-workers to help everyone meet their legal requirements. For example, to wash hands regularly in the manner recommended by the government.

With testing now being available widely, the trust expects that any employee who has symptoms of COVID-19, must apply for a test. This can be done by visiting this website <https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test> or through the trust by emailing the CFO zbratt@abingdonlearningtrust.org and following the guidance regarding self-isolation until the test result is available.

The Trust also expects that employees will be ready and willing to engage with the NHS Test and Trace process beyond seeking a test for themselves or their family, including providing details of anyone that they may have been in close contact with if they test positive for COVID-19, and self-isolate according to the current government guidelines.

Once antibody tests are widely available, the Trust will hope that employees will take advantage of this, with payment for the tests provided by the Trust.

The results of a COVID-19 test must be shared with your line manager as soon as you receive it. The provisions of the GDPR cover sharing this sensitive information, and the result will only be used in supporting the individual's risk assessment.

Schools will liaise with the local health protection team over any instances of staff or pupils with symptoms of COVID-19, and the appropriate response, and in response to any local increases in the prevalence of the virus.

There is also the requirement to consider the risks to people who are not employees, such as pupils and students. Detailed risk assessments will be undertaken by senior school staff.

In responding to the legislation, the Trust will be following the guidance produced by the government Implementing Protective Measures in Education and Childcare Settings, published on 11 May 2020 (and relevant updates), and appropriate support through Oxfordshire County Council.

The Trust expects that school leaders will communicate and consult with staff as needed, and maintain clear communication with parents.

From September onwards, the government's position is that full attendance is expected – to this end, parents who do not ensure that their children attend, unless there is a strong case for non-attendance such as shielding, may be fined for non-attendance. Schools will once again be held to account for attendance levels, in line with government guidance.

In the first few weeks of the new school year, staff will be focussed on supporting families for their children's attendance and DSLs will have additional time to work with those who may be anxious or concerned about a return to school.

Employment support and processes

The guidance from the government has changed, and the following follows current guidance, updated on 7 August,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

and with shielding measures having been paused from 1 August, those who are clinically extremely vulnerable can return to school in September, with the system of protective measures having been implemented (detailed earlier). Similarly, staff who are clinically vulnerable can return to school in September. Both groups of staff in school should follow the sector-specific measures to minimise the risks of transmission.

This includes taking particular care to observe good hand and respiratory hygiene, minimising contact and maintaining social distancing as identified in the government guidance for the sector. This provides that ideally, adults should maintain 2 metre distance from others, and where this is not possible avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of others. While the risk of transmission between young children and adults is likely to be low, adults should continue to take care to socially distance from other adults including older children/adolescents.

People who live with those who are clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable can attend the workplace.

Pregnant women are in the 'clinically vulnerable' category, and are generally advised to follow the above advice, which applies to all staff in schools.

Heads/line managers will conduct a risk assessment for pregnant women in line with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW).

The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (RCOG) has published occupational health advice for employers and pregnant women. This document includes advice for women from 28 weeks gestation or with underlying health conditions who may be at greater risk. We will seek advice from the Trust's occupational health provider for all pregnant women in the workforce.

Some people with particular characteristics may be at comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), as set out in the COVID-19: review of disparities in risks and outcomes report, which looked at different factors including age and sex, where people live, deprivation, ethnicity, people's occupation and care home residence. These staff can also return to school in September.

With the systems of control now in place, people who live with those who have comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) can also attend their workplace.

This current advice now allows for all staff to attend the workplace.

There may be situations where adaptation or adjustment has been made to the workspace or role in order to meet the system of controls required, and each school will have continued to consult with staff about the risk assessment and mitigations.

There may be situations where employees are concerned, even after the risk assessment and mitigations have been discussed, to return to work.

The Trust appointed a new occupational health provider from 1 August and all staff should have received an email regarding the services that are available. These are confidential between the member of staff and the provider and the service was started 'early' so that staff could familiarise themselves with the support available. This is aimed to help staff that may continue to feel concerned or have suffered as a result of COVID-19.

In September, if an employee remains concerned about the return to the workplace, they should talk to their line manager. The line manager will discuss the concerns with the member of staff, and if there persist to be concerns or anxieties that are not medically supported (by a fit note, for example), then unpaid leave may be agreed for a specified period of time, based on the Oxfordshire Emergency and Special Leave provisions – which allow for up to 13 days of leave in a rolling year. Starting the 'rolling year' at 1st June 2020, (the start of the last COVID-19 policy). This needs to be agreed with the Head, and is intended only as a short-term response.

Individual circumstances will be taken into consideration and recorded, so that employees can feel secure that their health and safety concerns have been taken very seriously. Advice from an appropriate medical or occupational health professional will be sought at this point. In extreme situations, continued

absence without a medical practitioner's support could result in disciplinary action.

There may be staff who have childcare needs due to COVID-19. In this situation, a short period of paid/unpaid dependant leave can be agreed with the Head, again based on the Oxfordshire Special and Emergency Leave scheme with 1 June 2020 being the start of the 'rolling year'.

Individual circumstances will be taken into consideration and recorded, so that employees can feel secure that their circumstances have been taken into account.

Mental health, welfare and wellbeing

The Trust's occupational health provider – Smart Clinic - has a range of services including: counselling, physiotherapy, a COVID-19 helpdesk, virtual GP, anxiety management and 24 hour helpline. Both manager and self-referral is available.

The Department for Education is providing additional support for pupils' and staff' wellbeing in the current situation. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-mental-health-support-for-pupils-and-teachers>

The Education Support Partnership provides a free helpline for school staff and targeted support for mental health and wellbeing:

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Additionally, each school has a Wellbeing Manager, who should be contacted if an employee has worries or concerns. Additionally, the members of each school's senior team are available, and the CEO is also available for staff to contact.