



one of the team

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Back to School

Key health, safety and HR issues to consider before
your return to work

This information has been developed as a guide to allow you to think about some of the key areas that you will need to take into consideration before the re-opening of your school to a larger number of students and employees.

Health & Safety

Preparing for the wider opening of schools

On 10th May the Prime Minister announced a roadmap towards recovery, including plans for the phased return of some children to school from the week commencing 1st June. Having a set date may be somewhat daunting, but it does at least give schools the advantage of being able to plan within a time frame.

What do we need to consider first before anything else?

The very short answer is RISK ASSESSMENT!

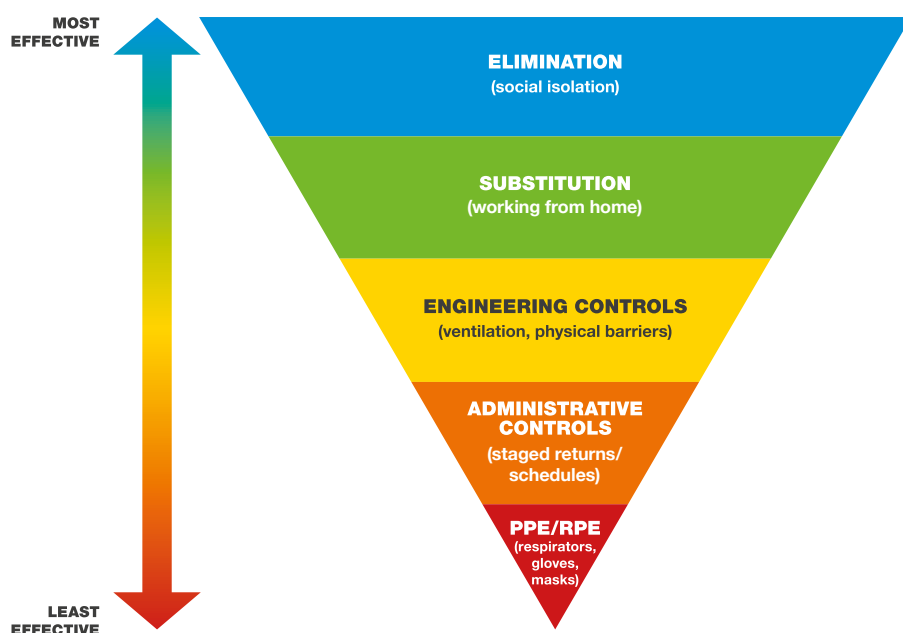
Some schools will have continued to have a limited number of employees and students occupying the site throughout the lockdown period and therefore, you will have already assessed the hazards posed from COVID-19. However, the number of employees and students is set to increase dramatically on the 1st June.

BACK TO SCHOOL TOOLKIT

To complement this guide, we have put together a [Back to School Toolkit](#) of useful documents and templates, including:

- Coronavirus Toolbox Talk for Schools
- Coronavirus Working in Schools Risk Assessment
- Coronavirus Wellbeing Questionnaire for Returning to Primary Schools
- Coronavirus Wellbeing Questionnaire for Returning to Secondary Schools
- Re-opening the School Inspection Sheet
- Screening questionnaire

COVID-19 hierarchy of control



For further advice, please see the [Government's Planning Guide for Primary Schools](#)

Before this date you need to firstly review your existing control measures to see if they are suitable for a much larger number of people on site. The principles will largely remain the same, however a full review of your risk assessment is required to ensure that you can adjust the control measures and implement new ones, where required, in order to reduce the risk to your employees and students to an acceptable level, so far as is reasonably practicable.

All schools are different in terms of size and pupil numbers, therefore posing very individual challenges. You will have already assessed hazards posed by different activities in your school – COVID-19 is just a new hazard that needs to be addressed as part of the risk assessment process. It is extremely important, not only for the safety, but also for the mental wellbeing, of your employees and students to ensure that the relevant control measures are in place and are able to be adhered to in order to open the doors to your school once again.

Planning for the 1st June – preparation is key!

With the review of the risk assessment complete, you now need to plan for the additional control measures that you have highlighted. You might not be able to implement all the additional control measures until 1st June, however, you still need to prepare.

Social distancing is of course going to be one of the main concerns for schools during this period – and addressing how this is going to be achieved as of 1st June should have formed a major part of your risk assessment review. Ensuring that all relevant parties are in the know, and that suitable information and instruction have been delivered to those parties, will be key to ensuring that the control measures run smoothly upon the wider opening.

Examples may include:

- **Staggered start/end times to the school day to reduce volume at the school entrance** – information will need to be given to parents to allow them to plan accordingly. It is also important to ensure that they understand the reasons why this decision might have been made. Also, have you informed all teaching staff of this decision?
- **Temporary changes to classroom layouts** – are you expecting teaching staff to rearrange their classrooms? Do you need to consider the possibility of having the caretaker/s assist with this and how is social distancing going to be maintained when doing so? If

ARRANGEMENTS

- Use warning signs around the site to keep raised awareness
- Keep employees (and students) updated on what is happening and why
- Give clear instructions on what you are expecting them to do

contractors are required in some cases have you planned for them to come in before 1st June?

You may need to spread out into different classrooms or spaces than is usually the case. If you are having to split, for example, a reception class and use a non-reception classroom for half class, you may need to move some essential resources into the non-reception room, if there is space to do so.

- **Arranging break and play times** – you may be forced to stagger the break times for employees and the play times for students. Have you planned how this is going to be achieved and informed relevant personnel? You will need to ensure that suitable supervision is provided for play times but also that those employees are aware of what is expected of them, e.g. where they're to be located, information to give students as to why they cannot come too close etc. Also, are the rest facilities large enough to cater for employees whilst maintaining social distancing? Are other rooms going to have to be made available and have these rooms been addressed?
- **Signage** – signage will need to be provided throughout the school to warn both employees and students of the hazards and the control measures in place. Signage may also need to be provided for the entrance to the school to inform parents and potential visitors of where they need to go, should you have changed the access and egress points. Have you ordered or made the signage yet?

There are also going to be several other control measures that do not involve social distancing. These control measures may involve new or additional equipment. The purchasing of this equipment should be considered before the wider opening, as you may experience low stock levels for in-demand products.

If you are bringing new cleaning substances on to site, have you thought about how hazardous these may be and the need to create a suitable and sufficient COSHH assessment for how you intend on using the substances within the school?

If there is new cleaning equipment being used, have you considered whether a certain level of competency is required to operate the equipment?

Ultimately, the control measures that have been decided upon should be planned for in the best way possible before the wider opening.

CONTROLLING ACCESS TO THE SITE

- Use alternatives to fingerprint scanners
- Door handles and latches should be cleaned frequently throughout the day
- Use barriers to ensure social distancing and screens to avoid physical contact
- Eliminate the use of visitor books or sign-in screens



How do we know our workplace is safe enough to return to?

Before allowing teaching staff, admin staff and students back into the school premises, we recommend that a full inspection of the premises and equipment is carried out. This would include:

- Gas heaters and appliances
- Classroom equipment (is the PAT testing all in date?)
- Water supplies (any relevant legionella checks should be carried out)
- Heating systems
- All catering and kitchen equipment
- Fire alarm systems should be subject to a complete test

Along with this, a full deep clean should be carried out on all toilet facilities and classrooms including desks, chairs and equipment children may come into contact with. Particular attention should be given to all surfaces and equipment where food will be prepared and served.

There is no requirement to rush any process of checking, adequate time should be allowed to complete all checks and cleaning processes to ensure all tasks have been done to a high standard, especially the cleaning processes.

WELFARE AND SCHOOL CANTEEN FACILITIES

- Hand gel should be available for teacher, dinner staff and children's use on entering the dinner hall.
- Stagger breaks in the school canteen to reduce number of children in there.
- Space tables and chairs out to ensure children are sat 2m apart.
- Allow enough time between sittings to ensure thorough cleaning down of tables and chairs and other surfaces that children may have come into contact with.
- Dinner ladies to wear gloves while serving food and drinks to children.
- Provide anti-viral sprays and wipes for the cleaning down of equipment in staff rooms, e.g. microwaves, kettles, toasters after use.

HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

Protect yourself and others against infection



HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

With younger children, teachers can demonstrate the correct handwashing procedure with children using hand gel and let them take part. Encourage the singing of a nursery rhyme to show the time it should take (20 seconds).

Should we provide our employees with PPE?

If your staff use PPE as part of their normal day-to-day duties, then continue issuing PPE as normal.

In reference to COVID-19, this would be identified as part of your COVID-19 risk assessment. We know it is a respiratory disease, but we also know it can live on surfaces for a period of time. With the enhanced cleaning of classrooms and dining halls, coupled with social distancing and the frequent washing of hands, there should be sufficient measures in place to prevent the need for PPE to be worn.

However, if teaching staff are going to be coming into close proximity with the children for long periods of time, then there may be a need to issue PPE, e.g. one-to-one teaching would mean being within the 2m distance for a prolonged period of time. This could also include SEN children who have an assigned teaching assistant sat with them all day.

Creating and staffing your temporary teaching groups

To be able to understand exactly what social distancing measures you can put in place and also to know who is going to be responsible for the implementation of other control measures, you will need to establish your temporary teaching groups.

You should look to carry out an audit on your employee group to ascertain who is able to be in school from the week commencing 1st June. This should include considering employees who fall into the varying brackets of vulnerability, or those who are living with someone who falls into those brackets.

You should ask your employees to inform you immediately should their situation change, or if they start showing symptoms, as this will naturally affect your audit. The audit should be reviewed regularly to ensure that you have a fully up to-date-list of available employees.

Once you have carried out the audit, the government has recommended a series of questions to be considered when determining your staffing ratios:

1. How many staff do you have available to work in school?
2. How many teachers do you have available to work in school?
3. How many support staff, including teaching assistants, do you have available for work in school?
4. Do you have a head or deputy available for work in school?
5. Do you have at least one person with paediatric first aid training available for work in school?

TOILET FACILITIES

When looking at the school's toilet facilities there are a few things you need to consider – these are:

- Reducing the number of children who can be in there at any one time, this can be achieved by taking every other toilet cubicle and sink out of use to ensure the 2m distancing is kept.
- Having someone to monitor the children while using the toilets to make sure they only enter when there is room for them to do so. This may mean having specific times of the day for children to use the toilet where possible, e.g. break and dinner times. If going during lesson time, then supervision should be given if provision allows.
- Displaying hand washing posters above the sinks for handwashing and ensuring the soap dispensers are kept topped up.
- With younger children, then supervised visits to the toilets should be carried out to ensure they are thoroughly washing their hands before leaving.
- More frequent cleaning of the facilities should be undertaken, especially after breaks and dinner times.

6. Do you have at least one person with up to date Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training available to work in school?
7. Do you have your special educational needs coordinator available for work, or an alternative staff member who could take on this role?
8. Do you have a caretaker and/or cleaning staff, and if necessary, at least one office staff member available during the school day?

If the answer to questions 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 is no, then you should try to find a solution to this before going further. You should speak to your local authority and/or trust who may be able to provide a suitable person temporarily to cover 5, 6, 7 or 8. In some cases, staff members may be prepared to temporarily undertake a different role.

Keep your staffing arrangements as consistent as possible. In instances where you do need to use staff from other schools, ensure cover is agreed on a weekly basis, not daily, to limit contact.

Should you have answered yes to questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 and you know exactly how many teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff you have who are available for work, you should begin the process of working out how you can support eligible pupils.

In so doing you should:

- Assume all eligible children will attend for the purposes of the first stage of planning, even if you think that is unlikely – that includes ensuring you follow the attendance expectations for vulnerable children
- Determine your half class groups (maximum size of 15), taking into account any limitations of your school buildings and outdoor space
- Include children of critical workers and vulnerable children who are in reception, year 1 or 6, in groups of 15 within their year group
- Determine your small groups (maximum size of 15) of children of critical workers and vulnerable children not in reception or years 1 and 6
- Assume that the staffing model will be one teacher per group (or 2 teachers sharing the week if you have existing job shares) – qualified teachers are eligible to teach any primary year group, including early years foundation stage (EYFS)
- If there are any shortages of teachers then teaching assistants can be allocated to lead a group, working under the direction of a teacher

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDER TRAINING

Looking after your employees' mental health should be a key consideration on their return to work. If your employees don't currently have access to a Mental Health First Aider or other mental health support, now would be a good time to put something in place.

Stallard Kane have several Mental Health First Aiders, and it's created a really positive culture change within the business.

So, if you'd like to discuss implementing this type of resource within your organisation, please contact **Stallard Kane Training** on **01427 678 660** or email training@skaltd.co.uk who will be able to assist with training courses and other advice.

As a result of this exercise, and in the light of your staffing audit and the school premises, you will know if you can cater for all eligible children, including those of critical workers, and vulnerable children of all ages.

If you do not have the staff available to be able to cover all the new teaching groups you have created, you will need to consider possible solutions with your local authority and/or trust. Without the required staffing levels, you won't be able to safely implement the control measures outlined within your risk assessment or the government recommendations.

Do I need to know anything about my employees and students?

You will need to know about any change in someone's circumstances while they have been away from school, this will allow you to implement any adjustments that may need to be put in place for them.

It is also important that you are aware of any exposure they may have had to COVID-19 or any symptoms they may have experienced themselves. They may also have had some other form of health changes since they were last in school.

For this reason we would advise giving a **screening questionnaire** – not only to all the school employees, but also sending out a family screening questionnaire to all returning children and monitoring their return for completion and any relevant information which will need to be logged on their personnel files.

What about our employees' and students' mental health?

This is going to be a topic of conversation for months, maybe years to come – “what effect did the lockdown have on our mental health”. Just because the threat of the virus is starting to diminish, and we are seeing glimmers of hope that we can start to see some sort of normality returning, this does not mean there won't be lasting effects on our friends, families and students.

During the lockdown, it is quite feasible that some of the children or your employees may have lost a loved one due to the COVID-19 pandemic and not had the chance to say their goodbyes as they normally would by attending a traditional funeral with family and friends. This could mean that their emotions are very fragile at the minute. As an employer, you need to be aware that your employees' and children's mental health is also your responsibility while they are at school.

Other things which may be affecting them are:

- Anxiety about returning to the school for fear of becoming ill with the virus
- Social awkwardness and anxiety due to being isolated with a lack of social interaction with anyone for a long time
- Emotions are still going to be high due to the lack of physical contact with loved ones and family members

A good practice in schools is to have access to a Mental Health First Aider. These individuals in your school could mean the difference between a smooth transition back into school, or a very bumpy one.

One of the most important things to remember in planning the return to school is to give people the time they need to prepare properly. If these things are rushed, you may run the risk of the school and members of staff or children being put in danger. The UK lockdown has been a testing time for everyone emotionally and economically, to move too quickly could undo all your hard work.

We have a **'Wellbeing Questionnaire for pupils returning to Primary/Secondary school'** (these are both tailored towards the age groups) which gives pupils the chance to put down their feelings or questions which can be answered by their teachers as a class discussion to get the children talking about their feelings, or it could be a private chat with the child if this is the option they have requested.

Mental Health First Aider training

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What do I need to consider before anything else?

Planning of the workforce. Even with the lifting of some restrictions, the government guidance is clear, in that any employee who can undertake their work from home should continue to do so. A return to work should only be for those who cannot undertake their work from home.

Employers may find that their employees face additional challenges in their availability to attend work during their usual working hours, due to a range of different issues, such as additional caring responsibilities, shielding or being in a vulnerable category or living with an individual who is shielding or in the vulnerable category, to transport issues with their commute to work.

The Company should take all of the above into consideration and may need to be more flexible in their approach to accommodate these additional needs of employees.

What if I only have enough work for certain employees and not others?

A return to the workplace will not necessarily mean a return to full capacity and in fact, measures put into place to ensure social distancing may reduce a company's ability to have all employees in the workplace at one time.

It has been announced that the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will remain open until at least the end of October 2020, with the Chancellor having already extended this deadline twice.

Therefore, companies will be able to bring back some employees, whilst others remain furloughed until the end of October. If necessary, companies are able to rotate individuals who are working and on furlough, however in order to be able to claim the grant, employees need to be 'furloughed' for a minimum period of 3 weeks at a time.

You may find that after bringing employees back from furlough that work slows down, in which case you may need to place employees back on furlough for another period.

Alternatively, if your contract allows, you may wish to look at bringing employees back into work on reduced hours. This may allow the company more flexibility in planning its workforce by having

WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS JOB RETENTION SCHEME?

- Available to UK businesses whose operations have been seriously affected by COVID-19
- Allows employers to place employees on 'furlough'
- Grant covers 80% of usual monthly wages
- Open from 1 March – 31 October 2020
- Minimum furlough period of 3 weeks

employees starting and finishing at different times, taking into consideration some employee's reduced availability, due to caring responsibilities etc.

What if an employee refuses to return to the workplace?

Should any employee refuse to return to the workplace, be it because they have received a letter stating that they or someone within their household needs shielding for 12 weeks (or until 30 June, according to some of the more recent NHS guidance), or they or someone in their household falls within the vulnerable category, because of additional caring responsibilities due to the COVID outbreak, or finally because they do not feel it is safe to return to work, in the first instance it is advised that the company should discuss their concerns with them. Their fears may be allayed by discussing the measures the company have put in place to ensure the workplace is safe and the government guidelines are being followed.

Following discussions, should an employee still not want to return to work, the reason for their refusal should be taken into consideration before deciding on the next step. If the employee can do their job from home, then this is the preferred option. If that is not the case and an employee cannot return to work because they are shielding or because of caring responsibilities, the government guidance has been clear that those individuals could continue to remain furloughed. Alternatively the company may take these individuals off furlough and place them on unpaid leave for the duration of time they are unable to return to the workplace. Please be aware that there would be no real benefit to the company doing this, other than holiday accrual, and could lead to grievances and potential claims of discrimination. The government guidance has also stated that those employees who have gone onto unpaid leave after 28th February 2020 could also be placed on furlough.

For individuals who are either in the vulnerable category or live in the same household of an individual who is vulnerable, employers should take these concerns into consideration. Again, for those who can work from home, they should continue doing so. For those employees who are unable to do so, the company could extend the period of furlough. Alternatively these employees could be taken off furlough and placed onto unpaid leave for the duration of their unavailability. As above, there would be a risk of potential disability discrimination or discrimination

WHO CAN BE FURLOUGHED?

- Employees who were on your payroll on or before 19 March 2020
- Employees who stopped working after 28 February
- Employees who were placed on unpaid leave after 28 February
- Those who have been advised to 'shield' or who are in the same household as someone shielding
- Those with caring responsibilities
- Other non-employees

by association claims here. The same could be said if employers try to force these employees back into the workplace.

If the refusal to return to the workplace is unreasonable, in that the employee in question is not shielding, vulnerable or living in the same household as someone who falls within the vulnerable category, or has caring responsibilities due to the COVID outbreak, the company may take this employee off furlough and either place them on unpaid leave or class this as a period of unauthorised absence and deal with this accordingly via the company's disciplinary procedures, if necessary.

Advice should be taken on this point before proceeding.

Do I need to undertake a return to work interview with employees returning after a period of furlough?

Whilst not the same as a period of sickness absence, it is advised that when an employee is returning to the workplace following a period of closure and furlough, that the company undertakes a return to work assessment with the individual. How this is done will depend upon the numbers the company are bringing back into the workplace at one time. It would not be advisable to hold big group return to work meetings and therefore, alternative methods should be put into place, such as the meetings being held individually whilst ensuring social distancing measures are adhered to.

Alternatively, employers could send out a return to work pack to employees electronically before they start back at work. This would give the employer the opportunity to outline the control measures that have been put into place, along with company policy, relevant risk assessments, documentation and any other change of procedure ahead of the individual's return to the workplace.

We have developed a Coronavirus Policy, Risk Assessment, Toolbox and Screening Questionnaire that would be beneficial during the return to work assessments – all available on the [Back in Business](#) page on our website.

Individual employees should be given the opportunity to raise any concerns they may have with the company ahead of starting back at work.

WHO CAN'T BE FURLOUGHED?

- Anyone who is working on reduced pay
- Anyone who is working reduced hours
- Where your business is in operation, anyone who is off due to short-term sickness (unless for a business reason)

How do I manage those who are working from home or that are away from the workplace?

It is important from a duty of care perspective, health and wellbeing, and workload management that managers keep in regular contact with all employees, including those that are working from home and even those who have been furloughed.

Platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Skype can be utilised to facilitate video or conference calls to ensure all employees remain connected and do not become isolated.

Although the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme prevents furloughed employees from undertaking any work that would generate revenue for the business, there is nothing stopping companies contacting furloughed staff to check on their wellbeing and keeping them up to date with any further developments.

For employees working from home, the use of weekly worksheets and catch up calls will help ensure workloads are managed accordingly and expectations from all parties can be set out.

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING WHILE WORKING FROM HOME

For those employees who still have to work from home, it's important to help them manage their own wellbeing.

A lack of social interaction can cause isolation, routine change, anxiety and worry.

- Encourage a routine to distinguish between work and home time
- Encourage daily exercise
- Encourage movement/ exercise at desk
- Allow flexibility
- Promote healthy eating
- Encourage communication with colleagues, family and friends

ANY QUESTIONS?

If you would like to speak to one of the team regarding any of the subjects covered in this guide, please contact us on 01427 678 660 or email admin@skaltd.co.uk

FREE DOWNLOADS
Back to School
Toolkit

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All Risk Assessments and other templates are meant as a guide and should be adapted accordingly to make them appropriate for your business.