

ADVICE ON SAFETY IN SCHOOLS MARCH 2021

BRIEFING FOR EIS REPRESENTATIVES ON RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS

Reopening timetable March 2021

1. On 2 March, the First Minister announced that Phase 2 of the return to school would begin on 15 March, unless new evidence or new circumstances required this to be reconsidered.

2. It is the expectation of the Scottish Government that from 15 March all children in primary 4 to 7 will go back to school on a full-time basis. All primary school children will also be able to return to regulated childcare, including after school and breakfast clubs.

3. The Scottish Government also expects a phased return to secondary school from 15 March and that all secondary school pupils will return to spend some time in school from 15 March until the start of the Easter break.

4. These phasing arrangements were the result of decisions made by the Scottish Government and were not agreed outcomes of the CERG (Covid Education Recovery Group).

5. This resource is a key part of local campaigning on Covid safety in schools. The EIS will continue to provide support, advice and information to members in any workplace where there are concerns related to Covid health and safety issues. As a minimum, the EIS expects the following arrangements to be in place in all workplaces before they return to full opening:

- a review of all risk assessments which take into account the much higher transmission rates of the new variants
- measures to maintain physical distancing and to minimise mixing in classrooms and other indoor areas
- face coverings/masks to be always worn indoors, including in classrooms, by staff and pupils in secondary and by staff in primary and ASN settings
- greater emphasis being placed on adequate ventilation, by keeping windows open as much as possible, and doors open when operationally feasible and safe.

6. In terms of risk assessments, the Scottish Government advice is that these need to be conducted by the employers in conjunction with trade unions and LNCTs. Risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances change. Catering/cleaning and facilities management staff and any other contractors should be included in risk assessments.

Revised supplementary guidance 8 March 2021

7. On 8 March, the Scottish Government published revised supplementary guidance on the [arrangements for the phased reopening of schools](#). The revised supplementary guidance represents what could be agreed within the group. The introduction of physical distancing between pupils in secondary schools and the wearing of face coverings, for example, are welcome and should be applied

rigorously. The guidance does not, however, represent everything that the EIS was seeking.

8. From an EIS perspective, the guidance falls short in specific areas such as the lack of physical distancing arrangements in primary schools, the failure to require the wearing of and to provide surgical or medical grade face masks (FFP2 masks), smaller grouping/class sizes in Early Years/Primary and ensuring adequate ventilation.

Scotland’s Strategic Framework Update

9. New rules are set to make it harder for areas to drop down to lower tiers of Covid restrictions after lockdown is eased in Scotland in April. The Scottish Government has said a more stringent approach will be needed because of the new faster-spreading variants of the virus. Therefore, the need for new risk assessments and improved mitigations for schools is clear.

10. Under the new system, Councils which have a prevalence case rate of more than 150 cases per 100,000 are likely to end up in level four - when only essential shops can open and hospitality must close. The previous threshold for level four was 300 cases per 100,000.

11. Cases will also need to drop to below 50 per 100,000 in a local authority before it will be considered for level two, much lower than the previous rate of 150 per 100,000. That is the level where non-essential journeys outside the authority boundary are allowed and pubs can serve alcohol.

Level	New case rate range	Previous case rate range
0	Close to zero	Under 20
1	Under 20	20 – 75
2	20 – 50	75 – 150
3	50 – 150	150 – 300
4	150+	300+

Source: Scottish Government

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-strategic-framework-update-february-2021/pages/progress-and-the-state-of-the-epidemic/>

12. The return to a variable Levels approach will heighten concern from teachers in Level 4 areas around school safety and the surge in infection levels driven by the new variant. The change in the measurement of the case rate range will also make it more likely for schools to be operating in Level 4 areas.

13. The EIS nationally will continue to argue for a move to blended learning/remote learning in schools which are located in the new revised Level 4 areas. Suppressing the virus and successfully driving down community infection

levels will be key to the safe operation of school buildings. It is the view of the EIS that in turn, virus suppression within school buildings is key to minimising infection rates within communities. The national action in this regard will be supported locally to ensure that Councils make their workplaces safe.

Physical distancing (Paragraph 27)

14. Since the second school lockdown began on 5 January, the EIS has urged the Scottish Government to err on the side of caution before planning school reopening. Following the Easter break, all pupils are expected to return to full-time schooling, subject to continued suppression of the virus and the requirement for 2m physical distancing between young people being removed. This proposed removal of the physical distancing requirements currently in place for Senior Phase students places those young people, and their teachers, at significant additional risk of contracting Covid. It also has the potential to undermine preparation work for qualifications.

15. In the meantime, strict physical distancing rules should be observed as a key mitigation to control the spread of the virus. 2m physical distancing should be put in place between secondary-aged learners, in addition to continuing to be in place for staff in secondary schools. This applies to all learners in secondary schools. Physical distancing requirements in primary schools remain unchanged. 2m distancing between adults not from the same household should be maintained. There should also be 2m distancing between adults and children whenever possible; where this is not possible, other mitigations such as the wearing of face coverings, minimising unnecessary physical contact and enhanced hand washing require to be in place.

Face coverings/Face masks (Paragraphs 35 to 39)

16. The EIS welcomes the revised guidance which states that face coverings should be worn at all times by staff and young people in secondary schools in classrooms, in communal areas and when moving about the school. This includes S1-S3 pupils (not just those in the senior phase). (Paragraph 38).

17. However, the EIS does not agree with the position of the CERG advisory sub-group that cloth face coverings, when combined with other mitigations of physical distancing and hand hygiene, are sufficient protection in schools. Local associations should continue to press for the provision of medical-grade face masks and other forms of PPE for staff to combat the spread of the virus. Where necessary, this will involve risk assessments and the utilisation of health and safety experts and other public health advisers. It should be noted that in countries such as Austria and Germany FFP2 masks are mandated by Government for public use when in enclosed spaces such as stores and public transport.

Ventilation (Paragraphs 40 to 42)

18. Revised supplementary guidance recommends that greater emphasis should be placed on ventilation, by keeping windows open as much as possible, and doors open when feasible and safe to do so. [The World Health Organisation](#)

[\(WHO\) has published a roadmap](#) to improve and ensure good indoor ventilation in the context of COVID-19.

19. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has updated its own guidance on [ventilation and air conditioning](#) which it hopes should help to strike this balance between fresh air and thermal comfort. Recent report from HSE 'spot checks' in schools highlighted that most schools were relying on windows and doors being open for long periods of time.

20. Additional funding has been provided by the Scottish Government to support the introduction of additional mitigations, including ventilation (Paragraph 42). Local associations should ensure that this additional funding is being used to improve and enhance ventilation in schools, e.g. through the purchase of CO₂ monitors.

21. An EIS Heating and Ventilation Checklist [is available here](#). It is intended for use as a guide for EIS reps to check that the arrangements detailed in the revised guidance on heating and ventilation are being implemented in schools. The checklist can be used as a basis to investigate complaints about heating and ventilation issues in buildings.

22. Following completion of the checklist, the headteacher's attention should be drawn to any issues that require to be addressed. A copy should also be sent to the LA Secretary to enable the EIS to monitor and provide support when required. In addition, EIS representatives should request an Action Plan from the headteacher which outlines the timescales for remedies to be provided which address the issues raised. The headteacher may require assistance from Council officers and other departments, such as facilities, for completion and implementation of the plan. The Scottish Government guidance was clear that ventilation issues will often require specialist advice and support.

Advice for members

23. Members should:

- ✓ Ensure that there is consultation on the updated risk assessment.
- ✓ Familiarise yourself with your establishment's updated risk assessment.
- ✓ Consider the points outlined in the 'Healthy Workplace Checklist' to ensure that relevant Health and Safety issues and CERG Guidelines issues have been appropriately identified.
- ✓ Meet with the school rep to clarify and, finally, agree on a satisfactory risk assessment.
- ✓ If there is not an updated risk assessment in place, or it does not adequately address the concerns of members, or is not followed, then your local association secretary, should be informed by the school rep or nominated individual.
- ✓ If you reasonably believe that the arrangements in your establishment would put you at personal risk, seek advice from your local association secretary.

Mental Health

24. At such a time of change and uncertainty, it is important that members do not neglect their own mental health. EIS advice is available on the website ('EIS Health and Wellbeing Support' - <https://www.eis.org.uk/Coronavirus/Directory>). Speak to your EIS rep if you feel you need support which you are not getting from the employer e.g. bereavement leave, counselling, or financial assistance.

EIS Heating and Ventilation Checklist Spring 2021

	Yes	No	Comments
A. Risk Assessments			
1. Have the existing risk assessments been updated in line with the revised CERG guidance?			
2. Are heating & ventilation included in the revised risk assessments?			
3. Do the risk assessments include how to deal with pockets of stagnant air in occupied spaces and/or where temperature may be problematic?			
4. Have you asked for & received a copy of the revised risk assessment?			
5. Has an appropriate balance been struck between providing adequate heating and ventilation?			
B. Heating			
1. Is the temperature above the regulatory minimum first thing in the morning? (16°C)			
2. Is the temperature in workspaces regulated by thermostats?			
3. Are reasonable room temperatures maintained by the heating system at all times during the working day?			
4. Are sufficient numbers of thermometers provided?			
5. Are temperatures regularly monitored?			
C. Ventilation			
1. Are all rooms well ventilated?			
2. Are draughts avoided for those seated near windows and doors?			
3. Do windows open to allow fresh air to enter the workspace?			
4. If windows do not open, does the ventilation system employed circulate fresh air effectively?			
5. Are all air vents clear of obstruction?			
6. Has the installation of CO ₂ monitors been considered as a mitigation in classrooms where ventilation is problematic?			
D. Resolving Disputes			
1. Have any members complained about heating and ventilation issues?			
2. Internally, are mechanisms in place to address any complaints made effectively and quickly?			

Revised Healthy Workplace Checklist Spring 2021

The following revised checklist should be used as a guide when considering Health and Safety issues and Scottish Government Guidelines issues relating to the control of Covid-19 within the workplace. They are by no means exhaustive.

Cleaning protocols

1. In addition, has the school's hot water system, lighting, electricity etc been checked? (You may wish to speak to other staff in the school about this, including ensuring that their own risk assessments are followed)
2. Are there enhanced cleaning provisions in place daily?
3. Has clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets been issued to ensure they are kept clean and physical distancing is achieved as much as possible?
4. Have additional staff been employed, such as cleaners and other facilities management staff, to implement enhanced environmental cleaning regimes, in order to support a successful reopening of your school?
5. Are procedures in place to ensure that commonly touched objects and surfaces (e.g. desks, handles, dining tables, shared technology surfaces etc.) are cleaned at least twice daily?
6. Has careful consideration been given to the cleaning regime for specialist equipment (e.g. in practical subjects or for children with additional support needs), sensory rooms, practical subjects with specialist equipment and dining halls, etc. to ensure safe use?

Hygiene and physical distancing measures

7. Are measures in place with sufficient time allocated for pupils and staff to clean their hands (with soap & warm running water or sanitiser) when they arrive at school, return from breaks, change rooms and before and after eating?
8. Is there access to enough sinks with hot water and soap for the number of staff in school?
9. Is there a hygiene protocol providing for regular hygiene breaks of sufficient length during the day? (Restrict the number of people using the toilet facilities e.g. using an engaged sign if necessary).
10. Is personal protective equipment (PPE) required? Is it adequately provided to staff?
11. Are arrangements in place which ensure 2 metre physical distancing is maintained between adults and other adults, and adults and children/young people who are not from the same household, wherever possible?
12. Are arrangements in place which ensure that staff maintain a 2 metre distance from other staff and students at all times?
13. In secondary schools, are arrangements in place which ensure that students maintain a 2 metre distance from other students at all times?

14. Does every class have a supply of hand sanitiser (minimum alcohol 60%)?
15. Are arrangements in place to ensure every classroom and other work areas are always supplied with tissues?
16. Are lidded bins with double bagging available in every classroom and work area?
17. Does the school have appropriate signage alerting all to the need for high standards of hygiene?

Establishment Operations

18. Has a rota of staff been organised with varying start/finish times?
19. Are arrangements in place for parents/carers to drop off and collect children and young people which ensure that large gatherings of people are avoided and physical distancing between adults and children of different groupings is maintained?
20. Is there a one way system in place in the school (ingress and egress)?
21. Are rooms labelled to identify the maximum number of people to respect physical distancing requirements?
22. In primary schools, does the school plan to restrict the size of classes to no larger than one class?
23. What steps have been taken to minimise the extent to which teachers move between classes?
24. Has the lay out of classrooms been adapted and furniture removed to increase distance between staff and pupils and between staff and other staff?
25. Has the lay out of classrooms been adapted to ensure children and young people are seated side by side and facing forwards, rather than face to face?
26. Has the number of people in staff rooms at any one time been limited to ensure distancing can be maintained?
27. Have arrangements been made to ensure that physical distancing arrangements can be maintained in the school library?
28. Dining halls, offices, staff bases and rest areas – has the schools minimised the number of chairs to maintain 2m rule?
29. Dining halls, staff bases and rest areas – has the school established staggered breaks to reduce the number of people in the area?
30. Has the movement of children, young people and staff between classrooms been minimised wherever possible?
31. Where movement cannot be avoided, is there provision of appropriate cleaning supplies to enable desk/chair/surfaces to be cleaned regularly?
32. Where limited catering facilities are provided, is there guidance on the need for food to be wrapped and only disposable cutlery provided.

Class Groupings

33. In line with the scientific evidence, and to reduce the risk of transmission, have sufficient efforts been made to keep children and

young people within the same groups for the duration of the school day?

34. Have additional teachers been employed to provide a range of additional support to help with recovery work?
35. Have sufficient efforts been made to keep groups apart from other groups where possible? For example, in open plan settings with large numbers of children or young people (for example multiple classes in one open plan space) has consideration been given to ensuring clear demarcation and separation between the areas in which different groups learn?

Health

36. Is there a designated person with responsibility for keeping up to date with any changes to NHS, Health Protection Scotland or Scottish Government guidance?
37. Do you know the medical conditions (physical and mental) of individuals attending the school during this Covid19 crisis period?
38. Is there a designated person in the school responsible for ensuring that everyone in the school is aware of up to date symptoms of Covid19?
39. Is there a protocol for what to do where an individual develops Covid19 symptoms during the day?
40. Is there provision of an isolation area where any employees showing symptoms can be directed until they are able to leave site?
41. Is there a protocol for ensuring the testing staff who have symptoms? (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested/>)
42. What additional control measures are in place to reduce the risk of any necessary visitors bringing the Covid19 virus into school or college inadvertently?

Travel

43. What consideration has been given to transportation difficulties for those staff who usually use public transport, with safeguarding being paramount, along with logistical issues?
44. Are car parking spaces clearly set out?
45. Has consideration been given to the arrangements for parents/carers of children and young people with additional support needs who may normally drop their children off within the school building, and those who arrive at school using school transport, including taxis?

Visiting Specialists/Peripatetic Staff

46. The Scottish Government [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#) makes it clear that 'movement between schools (e.g. of temporary/supply/visiting specialists/ peripatetic staff, etc.) should be kept to a minimum' (paragraph 94).
47. Where it is concluded after collegiate discussion that staff providing essential services key to the delivery of children's care or educational plans, for example visiting teachers, educational psychologists, nurses, social workers, youth workers and those providing therapeutic support,

- are required to visit schools, then risk assessments should be conducted and appropriate mitigations identified to prevent transmission of the virus in and between settings. Risk assessments should be undertaken or revisited by the school in co-operation with the service provider and with the involvement of trade unions.
48. Given that lockdown conditions remain in place, the EIS would recommend that careful consideration is given to the use of peripatetic staff at this time. The question should be asked whether their attendance is essential within this phase of school reopening.
 49. If, after collegiate discussion, the attendance of peripatetic staff is considered necessary, then 'movement between schools ... should be kept to a minimum' . In ensuring the strict application of this government advice, efforts should be made to consolidate their attendance in one location.

Consultation

50. Have all staff been consulted and involved in all of the above?
51. Management should involve union reps at the outset and consult staff as widely as possible and practicable. Has this happened, involving union workplace reps and health & safety reps?
52. Does Management have an updated written Covid19 risk assessment register?
53. What formal process is there for reviewing the updated risk assessments and implementing revised control measures where appropriate and necessary?
54. Are Management reviewing updated risk assessments and protocols at regular intervals and when circumstances change, in consultation with staff and union representatives?
55. If control measures cannot be maintained within the school, what is the plan? Are staff aware of the plan?