

Waltham Forest Council Coronavirus Update for Schools

6 November 2020

Second National Lockdown

This document picks up on questions from Headteacher briefings earlier this week and provides our response/advice at this current time. There was guidance issued by the Government on 31 October “New National Restrictions from 5 November” and this was followed by further guidance from the DfE published on 4 November “Education and childcare settings: New National Restrictions from 5 November 2020” and this document seeks to reflect this new Guidance.

The DfE have indicated that **schools are expected to ensure any changes required in light of national restrictions are in place as soon as practically possible, and by Monday 9 November at the latest.**

What have we learned so far?

The government continues to prioritise the well-being and long-term futures of our children and young people and will not be closing educational institutions. Senior clinicians still advise that schools help support children’s well-being and education and help working parents and guardians.

Schools have prepared well and implemented strong and positive Infection Prevention and Control measures. Isolation periods are **really** important: household members of children or staff with symptoms must stay at home until test results for the person with symptoms are received – a negative test means they can return, and a positive result means they must continue to isolate. Children or staff who are self-isolating as contacts of a confirmed case in school must complete the full isolation period – a negative test does not mean earlier return to schools. Also remember only those with symptoms of coronavirus should get a test.

In familiar settings, we can more easily drop our guard on social distancing, increasing the risk of spreading Covid-19.

Education settings and childcare settings must continue to take swift action when they become aware of a confirmed case of coronavirus. Schools should contact the DfE helpline (0800 046 8687) for advice on what to do, or schools can undertake their own risk assessment using the LCRC school resource pack provided by Public Health England. Our local public health team should also be contacted (Public.Health@walthamforest.gov.uk) You can contact both the DfE helpline and the local public health team single point of contact 7 days a week.

What changes do we now need to make?

Largely, none. Continue the school’s operation as you have since September 2020. This can include continuing to welcome visiting professionals into school (e.g. Music Teachers, Educational Psychologists, Sports/PE coaches, etc, assuming you and they are happy to do so and this is captured in your Risk Assessment, and arrangements for break times, use of play equipment etc can continue). Visits by parents into school should only be made if essential where meetings or appointments with parents cannot be done by virtual means as guidance for everyone is only to make essential trips during lockdown.

You should keep your risk assessment under constant review, and continue to remind all staff and pupils of the precautions you have in place and the things they need to continue to do to keep the school fully open and operating as normal. All new arrangements for the second lockdown period should be introduced by Monday 9 November 2020.

Can employees work from home?

Education is now listed as an essential service and so the guidance is clear that *‘Public sector employees working in essential services, including education settings, should continue to go into work. However, the guidance also says, ‘everyone who can work effectively from home must do so’.* Obviously, most school staff can’t work from home when the school is open, but you may have a very small number of staff who may be able to do some work from home during this period, or come in on a part time basis.

Can clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) staff be in school?

The latest guidance from the Government published on 31 October in relation to National Restrictions from 5 November states;

*“There is a further group of people who are defined, also on medical grounds, as [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) to coronavirus – that is, people with specific serious health conditions. Over this period, **we are advising the clinically extremely vulnerable to work from home. If you cannot work from home, you are advised not to go to work and may be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA)**”.*

Department for Education guidance published on 4 November states;

*“Those individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable **are advised to work from home and not to go into work.** Individuals in this group will have been identified through a letter from the NHS or from their GP and may have been advised to shield in the past. Staff should talk to their employers about how they will be supported, including to work from home where possible, during the period of national restrictions”.*

Identification of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

Following Government guidance, it is apparent that the approximately 2 million people that are categorised as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) are in the process of receiving their letters from the NHS via electronic mail. The template text of this letter is; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932842/Clinically_extremely_vulnerable_letter_5_November_2020_.pdf. Schools are expected to have effective measures in place for CEV employees by 9 November.

Staff with a recent letter from the NHS

It is the expectation of Waltham Forest Council that staff who receive a letter from the NHS in the last few days indicating they are CEV are supported to work from home and where this is not possible they are advised not to go to work. Whether or not these staff are able to work from home they should continue to be paid as normal in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions (Green Book for support staff and Burgundy Book/STP&CD for teachers).

Staff with a letter from their GP and/or those that shielded in the past

You will note that the DfE advice referenced above also indicates that CEV staff could have *“been identified through a letter from.....their GP, and may have been advised to shield in the past”.*

Where a member of staff indicates that these circumstances apply to them and that they don’t feel comfortable coming to work we would advise, as an interim measure, that they should be supported to work from home or where this is not possible advised not to go work. They should continue to be paid as normal for this period.

The [DHSC and PHE](#) currently identify people who are CEV. We are seeking urgent clarification from the DfE around categorisation of staff that are CEV and the guidance for this category of staff could possibly change significantly. We would advise schools to make clear that these are temporary arrangements where clarification is sought. We would anticipate that many staff in this group will be keen to come to work and the Council would support this approach if it is accompanied by a thorough, agreed Individual Risk Assessment.

Staff that are CEV and want to come to work

We understand that there are staff who are concerned that not coming to work may have a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing. We would still advise that such staff should not go into work. If a worker nonetheless continues to wish to come to work, then the following should apply;

1. The individual should put the request in writing
2. There should be a note from the individual's GP or relevant specialist practitioner supporting the individual attending work
3. An individual risk assessment should be completed and signed by the school and member of staff
4. The arrangements should be formally reviewed at least weekly in the first instance. This review process should have particular regard to the incidence of COVID in the school/local community

Where a school considers supporting such an arrangement it should be aware that this is not something that the Council recommends, as we urge schools to follow government guidance.

What about staff who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable and who are also concerned?

These staff should still attend work.

Clinically vulnerable staff

Staff and children who are clinically vulnerable or have underlying health conditions but are not clinically extremely vulnerable, may continue to attend early years and childcare settings in line with current guidance.

What about clinically vulnerable staff who are now concerned about coming into work? Pregnant staff – has anything changed?

Staff who are considered to be clinically vulnerable should continue to attend work. The guidance says that for this group they

- should be especially careful to follow the rules and minimise contact with others
- should continue to wash hands carefully and more frequently than usual and maintain thorough cleaning of frequently touched areas at home and/or workspace

Pregnant staff are considered to be clinically vulnerable and there is no change in guidance to them unless they have an underlying health condition and they could be considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists states pregnant women should follow the latest government guidance on staying alert and safe and states that if you are in your third trimester (more than 28 weeks' pregnant) you should be particularly attentive to social distancing.

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>

What about staff who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable and who are also concerned?

These staff should still attend work.

Dependency leave

We understand the many challenges schools are facing both in terms of ensuring staffing sufficiency and managing significant budget pressures. Clearly when staff themselves are required to self-isolate this is on full pay for the duration of self-isolation.

Where a dependent is required to self-isolate then schools should apply the policy that their Governing Body has adopted on leave of absence. If your school has adopted the LA recommended policy, then in these circumstances the employee "may receive up to 5 days at full pay and thereafter any additional days will normally be unpaid". Clearly such requests will need to be managed on a case by case basis with regard to the age of the dependent. Where there are other adults available to support any dependent required to self-isolate we would expect the carer responsibilities to be reasonably shared.

Can after school clubs (as in the one for working parents) and breakfast clubs continue? . Do all other clubs need to stop (netball, drama etc) ?

The guidance says that for registered activities and those overseen by the school, "*parents will still be able to access some registered childcare and other childcare activities (including wraparound care) where reasonably necessary to enable parents to work, or for the purposes of respite care.*" Breakfast and after school clubs can continue. Staff-led activities can continue including sport using external staff (PPA support and after school). We believe however external activities such as football teams and other externally run events (even if using school sites) will not be able to operate. We expect further guidance on this.

It was reported over the weekend that after-school clubs and extra-curricular sport would be suspended until 2nd December. The DfE have confirmed, via The Association for Physical Education (AfPE) that this was not one of the Government's recommendations, and that schools can continue to offer after-school sports clubs. These must be risk assessed and be compliant with Government advice.

Are music teachers still able to come in and take their lessons from Thursday?

Peripatetic staff, including people from Health, music and sport, will be able to come into school providing social distancing and/or protective measures are in place in line with the current government guidelines. It is clearly a decision for each School as to whether they determine to carry on with these activities at this time.

Is education compulsory? What about a parent who is keeping her child at home as the parent is CEV/they have a relative living at home who is CEV?

Yes, it is – schools are open as usual. It would be appropriate to record this absence as unauthorised. You have discretion on fining, but we are not advocating this at the moment. There is no obligation to provide remote learning for children who are refusers but it would be good to support families who have a genuine need. This is supported by Public Health England who say that all pupils and students should continue to attend education settings unless they are one of the very small number of pupils or students under paediatric or other specialist care and have been advised by their GP or clinician not to attend an education setting.

What about a photographer booked to take the annual individual photos? They have been informed that they are still allowed to come in. However, as it is a full lockdown other than education and essential should schools be permitting this?

Schools are open as normal. If you can socially distance, this can go ahead under the current guidance which says *'Where people cannot (work from home) they should continue to travel to work/attend their workplace. This is essential to keeping the country operating and supporting vital sectors and employers.'* You of course have discretion and on balance this is probably an activity we would be discouraging during a lockdown.

What about wearing face coverings?

The guidance hasn't changed and there is no requirement to wear face coverings in the classroom unless an individual risk assessment requires this. The continued requirement, as we are in national intervention, is for staff and pupils in secondary schools to wear face coverings in circulation spaces where social distancing cannot be maintained. For all sectors, there is no need to wear a face covering in the classroom.

It is our view in Waltham Forest that the direction of travel is to expect the increased expectation or requirement that face coverings are used in schools. Whilst we believe that in the foreseeable future there will not be the expectation that face coverings will be used in classrooms, we anticipate that their use by staff in Primary schools in communal areas may increase. To be clear there is no change in guidance, we believe it is nonetheless helpful to share this as Headteachers plan for adjustments in Risk Assessments and procedures moving forwards.

Examples of where education leaders might decide to recommend the wearing of face coverings - for pupils, staff and visitors - in communal areas of the education setting include:

- where the layout of the school or college estate makes it particularly difficult to maintain social distancing when staff and pupils are moving around the premises
- where on top of hygiene measures and the system of controls recommended in the full opening guidance to schools and FE colleges and providers, permitting the use of face coverings for staff, pupils or other visitors would provide additional confidence to parents to support a full return of children to school or college

In primary schools where social distancing is not possible in indoor areas outside of classrooms between members of staff or visitors (for example, in staff rooms), head teachers will have the discretion to decide whether to ask staff or visitors to wear, or agree to them wearing face coverings in these circumstances. Schools may invite parents and carers to wear face coverings when dropping off or collecting children from school, this is something that we encourage.

The latest government guidance says: 'In out-of-school settings, face coverings should be used where it is a requirement of the indoor setting and where the teaching, training or activity is taking place in an area in which children aged 11 and over or staff are likely to come into contact with other members of the public (complying with relevant coronavirus (COVID-19) sector guidance).

In addition, face coverings should be worn by adults and children aged 11 and above when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms or activity rooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained'.

Face coverings must be worn by pupils aged 11 or above on public or dedicated school transport.

Does the second national lockdown mean that in some areas the government will invoke the Tier Two Guidance for schools?

Our interpretation of the guidance suggests that this is not the case, and this will only be invoked if locally it is decided this is the best course of action to prevent the spread of Covid. The contain framework is a separate part of guidance to the lockdown update.

Can secondary schools (and Trusts) choose to move to rotas – particularly if there are not enough staff to maintain in-school provision?

Our view is that this is not a choice currently but if there is a risk around the health and safety of a school operating with reduced staff, this is a better option than a simple remote learning offer. Some education unions are promoting this idea. Schools will need to have in place a revised risk assessment that leads to this conclusion, will need to notify the LA / DfE (depending on status / transport requirements) and communicate to parents this situation. I would refer schools to the guidance issued earlier this week regarding the local gateway process for the Council to sign off proposed school closures.

How should schools keep good ventilation during the colder weather?

To balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature:

- Open higher-level windows in preference to lower sited windows to prevent draughts
- Increase ventilation when spaces are unoccupied
- Provide flexibility to allow suitable indoor clothing
- Rearrange furniture where possible to avoid direct drafts
- Consider how the school day is organised to seek to prevent groups remaining in the same classroom without breaks to enable the room to be properly ventilated

Will exams take place?

The Prime Minister and Education Secretary have been clear that exams will go ahead next summer, as they are the fairest and most accurate way to measure a pupil's attainment. Pupils now have more time to prepare for their exams next year, as most AS, A levels and GCSEs will be held 3 weeks later to help address the disruption caused by the pandemic

What about sport and physical education?

It is important that children continue to remain fit and active and, wherever possible, have the 60 active minutes of daily physical activity recommended by the Chief Medical Officers.

Schools have the flexibility to decide how physical education, sport and physical activity will be provided whilst following the measures in their system of controls.

Sports whose national governing bodies have developed guidance under the principles of the government's guidance on team sport and been approved by the government are permitted. Schools must only provide team sports listed on the return to recreational team sport framework. Competition between different schools should not take place, in line with the wider restrictions on grassroots sport.

Pupils should be kept in consistent groups and sports equipment thoroughly cleaned between each use by different individual groups.

Outdoor sports should be prioritised where possible, and large indoor spaces used where it is not, maximising natural ventilation flows (through opening windows and doors or using air conditioning systems wherever possible), distancing between pupils and paying scrupulous attention to cleaning and hygiene. This is particularly important in a sports setting because of the way in which people breathe during exercise. External facilities can also be used in line with government guidance for the use of, and travel to and from, those facilities.

Schools are able to work with external coaches, clubs and organisations for curricular activities where they are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

Schools should consider carefully how such arrangements can operate within their wider protective measures.

Activities such as active miles, making break times and lessons active and encouraging active travel help to enable pupils to be physically active while encouraging physical distancing.

What about children's social care, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people?

Children's services and social care provision will continue as they have been to protect and support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people for the duration of the national restrictions.

Local authorities are reminded of the [guidance for children's social care](#) that was issued at the start of the first national restriction. We continue to recommend that no one should have to leave care during this period if they do not feel confident to do so. Where young people do leave care during the national lockdown, it should be right for that young person and take account of their wishes and feelings. Settings they are moving into should be safe in relation to risk factors arising from coronavirus (COVID-19).

As set out in the [guidance for full schools opening](#) and [FE autumn term guidance](#), schools and colleges should continue to take steps to ensure vulnerable children and young people who can't attend their school or college are able to access their remote education. Contact should be maintained to ensure they are doing so. Vulnerable children include those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, children with a social worker and children who are 'otherwise vulnerable'.