

Schools reopen to all pupils on 8 March

The Department for Education (DfE) have published [updated operational guidance for schools](#) in preparation for full reopening on 8 March. This information sheet summarises key elements of the guidance and outlines the role of governing boards in supporting reopening.

From 8 March:

- Attendance will be mandatory for all pupils (except those who are clinically extremely vulnerable or need to self-isolate).
- Schools are required to provide remote education for pupils who are unable to attend school because they are following government guidance.
- Essential control measures must be in place to minimise COVID-19 transmission.
- Secondary schools can phase the return of pupils during the first week to facilitate testing.
- Schools will need to review risk assessments (and update where necessary) in advance of 8 March.

Implementing operational plans is the responsibility of school leaders and this will be their focus in the lead up to 8 March.

The role of the governing board

Governing boards should seek assurance from school leaders that risk assessments are being carried out in preparation for reopening and that relevant policies are brought up to date as needed. As always, safeguarding and the wellbeing of pupils and staff should be a priority.

Governing boards should engage with school leaders in the approach to 8 March (through usual monitoring routines where possible), giving due regard to the published guidance. Most of the control measures set out in the updated guidance replicate those implemented in September 2020. However, we've highlighted some new and important elements below:

Asymptomatic testing for all school staff, and for secondary school pupils

- Secondary and primary school staff will be given kits for twice weekly testing at home.
- Returning secondary pupils will be tested three times at school (three to five days apart) and will be provided kits for at-home testing thereafter.
- There will be no testing of primary pupils.
- All testing carried out in school will use lateral flow devices (LFD) which provide a result in 30 minutes.
- Staff and pupils with a positive LFD result will need to follow self-isolation guidance and obtain a PCR test to confirm the result.
- Close contacts of anyone who tests positive must not attend school for ten days.
- **All testing is voluntary.**

Extended use of face coverings in secondary schools

- Previously, the guidance asked secondary pupils and staff to wear face coverings in indoor communal areas.
- The new guidance extends this recommendation to all indoor environments in secondary schools **(including classrooms) when social distancing cannot be maintained.**
- Exemptions (such as pupils who rely on visual signals for communication) apply.

Wraparound care and extra-curricular activities to resume

- From 8 March, schools are encouraged to resume before and after school activities that help parents to attend work and support pupils' wider education.

Supporting parents, pupils and staff

- The DfE have recognised that some families and school staff may be feeling anxious about school resuming.
- The guidance encourages schools to discuss any concerns and “provide reassurance on the measures you are putting in place to reduce any risks”, reiterating that pupil attendance is mandatory.

Adjusting start and finish times

- Whilst overall teaching time should not be reduced, schools can stagger start and finish times to keep groups apart as they arrive and leave.
- Schools should think about how best to communicate changes to parents and remind them not to gather outside the school entrance.

Governing boards continue to offer valuable support to school leaders, as they have done throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Control measures will be in place until at least Easter, when the end of term will provide an important rest period for school staff.

Further reading

Visit the NGA Knowledge Centre where our [COVID-19 hub](#) will be updated with essential guidance and information for governing boards in the lead up to 8 March and beyond.

NGA's [GOLDline advice service](#) provides governing boards with independent and timely advice. Our expert team of advisers will respond to any question relating to the role and duties of governing boards and provide the advice that is needed to deliver effective governance in challenging circumstances.

Our annual GOLD membership is £275 for boards and provides access to all our best practice resources and expert tailored advice. [Sign up](#) to help your board save time and develop professional governance.