

COVID-19 – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Keeping our pupils and staff safe is our top priority. In line with government guidelines, we have put together a range of FAQs, and our 'safer classroom practices', which we hope will be helpful in outlining our approach to reducing the risk and spread of COVID-19. We know this is a worrying time for everybody, but really do want to encourage pupils to attend school because we know how important it is for their mental health, emotional well-being, social skills development and academic progress.

These FAQs were last updated on 20 May 2020. We will update and add to them as national and local guidance changes.

What are leaders doing to ensure everybody's safety?

Senior leaders hold a daily meeting with the chief executive to discuss COVID-19, including to ensure our policies and procedures continue to reflect the latest government guidance (which changes a lot!). A daily briefing and debriefing is held every day at every site with all staff members, reflecting our collective responsibility to ensure our schools are as safe and clean as possible.

How can you ensure 'social distancing' at school?

Across all our schools, we encourage *sensible* social distancing. Whilst we acknowledge and understand the importance of social distancing, we have to be realistic. We cannot possibly ensure that everybody maintains a two-metre distance at all times. Many have described social distancing with very young pupils as 'impossible'. Factor in the fact that our pupils have a range of complex social, emotional and mental health needs, and we have quite a challenge to face! However, we do our *absolute best to be sensible and to apply our common sense*.

We encourage:

- grouping and spacing pupils sensibly in classrooms
- staggering activities, including breaks and lunch times
- significantly reducing the number of visitors into school
- depending on pupil numbers, reducing the number of staff members in school
- classes and groups of pupils being kept the same, where possible.

We continually review the number of pupils attending. If attendance was to dramatically increase, leaders and staff will consider together how to achieve sensible social distancing.

Will staff be wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and gloves?

No. Government guidance clearly states that in education settings, there is no need for the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Schools should simply be following the principles of good hygiene and infection control. We do have a stock of PPE, but this is only for use in the unlikely event that a pupil is sent to school with symptoms or develops them whilst in school.

Furthermore, as all of our pupils have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for social, emotional and mental health needs. We believe that PPE would not be worn correctly and would actually increase risk as pupils would be constantly touching and rearranging it.

Will pupils be using equipment that could spread the virus?

Yes, of course, as pupils have to use resources to learn. However, unnecessary equipment and soft furnishings have been removed. Pupils are given their own stationery supply. We are promoting good hygiene practices (including lots of proper hand-washing) and staff are cleaning equipment regularly.

How often are the schools being cleaned?

The schools are being thoroughly cleaned on a daily basis, which includes sanitising all surfaces. 'Deep cleans' take place every three weeks. If a case of COVID-19 were to be confirmed, a deep clean would take place as rapidly as possible.

How are you promoting good hygiene?

Across all our schools, good hygiene is regularly promoted as follows:

- staff and pupils are encouraged to wash their hands regularly throughout the day
- staff and pupils all have access to hand sanitisers in classrooms
- staff have access to anti-bacterial wipes in classrooms
- the use of equipment and shared objects is limited
- our teachers and therapists have provided learning resources, teaching pupils the importance of hygiene and hand-washing techniques
- we use social stories to communicate information about safety and good hygiene practices
- we display and refer to our safer classroom practice posters on a daily basis.

What steps will be taken if a pupil or staff member develops symptoms in school?

If a pupil is displaying symptoms, the pupil will be isolated in school with a staff member, most likely in the medical room. Both will be provided with PPE to wear whilst a phonecall home is made to arrange for the pupil to be collected as soon as possible. A staff member would be sent home immediately. In both cases, a COVID-19 test should be completed as quickly as possible.

What steps will be taken if a pupil or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

If it is confirmed (we must see the official written outcome of any COVID-19 test) that a pupil or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, then the pupil's whole class, including the staff members, will be advised to self-isolate for a period of 14 days. If that pupil or staff member has been in contact with other pupils or staff members, it may be decided that part, or the whole school site, may need to close to allow everybody to self-isolate for a period of 14 days.

Who can be tested?

Anyone above the age of five with symptoms can be tested for COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

If you are an essential worker and have symptoms, you can also apply for priority testing: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-essential-workers>

Will I be penalised for not sending my child back into school?

No, you will not be penalised if you do not send your child back to school for the remainder of this academic year. However, all pupils with education, health and care plans should, where possible, return to school from 1 June 2020. As we have remained open throughout the pandemic, we want to actively encourage all pupils to return to school. However, those pupils who continue to not attend will continue to receive support via our remote learning and therapy continuity plan.

Should I send my child to school if I have a medical condition and am classed as vulnerable?

Government guidance states that any pupil or staff member who is living in a household with someone who is classed as 'clinically vulnerable' but not 'clinically extremely vulnerable', should attend school/work. This includes living with someone who is pregnant.

Any pupil or staff member who lives with someone who has been classed as 'extremely clinically vulnerable' and needing to shield (the 1.5 million people who received letters) are not expected to attend school/work and we will continue to support the pupil via our remote learning and therapy continuity plan.

If my child shares transport with another pupil, how can my child practice social distancing to and from school?

For pupils who travel on SEN transport, guidance suggests that neither PPE or social distancing are needed if pupils are not symptomatic. However, transport providers are reviewing their routes and the numbers of pupils on transport. Concerns about transport should be raised directly with the transport provider.

How are staff travelling to and from school?

The majority of staff travel by public transport. In order to reduce risk, we have revised our start and finish times for staff, to enable them to travel at less frequent times of the day. We have also reduced the number of days staff are required to be on site, whilst attendance is lower than it should be.

What happens if my child requires a physical intervention (a Team-Teach hold) to keep them safe?

Safety comes first, so if physical intervention is necessary, social distancing inevitably becomes a lower priority. However, physical intervention is always used as a final resort. Our approach focuses on de-escalation, using our therapeutic approach.

What are the schools doing when pupils spit?

Due to our pupils' complex needs, some pupils sometimes spit. Whilst no additional PPE is required or recommended, regular cleaning of surfaces, objects and toys will be undertaken. We may also sanction cognitively-able pupils who spit, for example with a fixed-term exclusion. In extreme cases we may have to decide that a pupil is not safe to be in school.

How many pupils will be in my child's class?

This varies across our sites however; our largest class size is no more than 7 pupils.

Will my child participate in physical activity, including playtime, lunch and PE?

Yes, however this will be restricted and staggered to maintain sensible social distancing. PE is part of the curriculum; however unnecessary equipment will not be used and equipment that is used will be cleaned more regularly.

Will my child have break and lunch times at the same time as the other pupils?

Yes, however due to our small class sizes, we are able to stagger and serve pupils one by one, avoiding queues and congestion.

May my child bring a packed lunch to school?

Yes. However, we provide freshly prepared lunches by our chefs. In terms of lunch equipment, pupils will be handed their own tray and cutlery by the chef who wears gloves. Everything is thoroughly washed after every use.

What will my child be learning in school during COVID-19?

All pupils will access a normal timetable throughout the school day.

What are 'our safer classroom practices'?

We have implemented the following safer practices in all of our schools and classrooms:

- pupils regularly wash and sanitise their hands every day
- pupils are grouped and spaced in classrooms sensibly
- pupils are provided with their own stationery
- surfaces and objects within classrooms are regularly cleaned
- unnecessary equipment, including soft furnishings, are removed from classrooms.