

## **Additional operational advice for schools from Calderdale Public Health**

Schools are working within the guidance, [Restricting attendance during the national lockdown: schools](#). The guidance states that: *Parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can.*

This is in line with the essential local and national message for people to stay at home where possible.

We know that every school is in a different context and the safe level for occupancy will vary. This advice is provided to support schools in determining their capacity to operate as safely as possible within Public Health Guidelines. As always, our Public Health team will support schools with any individual queries.

- 1) The default position is that everyone possible should remain at home.
- 2) Social distancing is more important in light of the new variant which is highly transmissible. Our local Public Health advice is that there needs to be a distance of 2m between all children, and an area at the front of the class that provides a 2m corridor for the teacher. We recognise that in some circumstances younger children find it difficult to maintain social distancing. However, allowing for adequate distance between children will ensure the space available is not overcrowded. For example, a room that is 10m x 10m could safely hold 1 teacher and 20 children, but a room that is 5m x 5m could only safely hold 1 teacher and 6 children.
- 3) Lateral Flow testing provides an additional safeguard and all staff should be encouraged to take part. This not only reduces the risk of transmission within schools but very importantly protects the people staff live with and also the wider community. This is not instead of existing safeguards, and anyone who has symptoms of COVID should still seek a PCR test through the usual test centre route at the first opportunity.
- 4) The use of face coverings (not PPE) should be encouraged within secondary school classrooms and for staff when in communal areas for circulation within primary schools. It is recognised that it may not be appropriate for staff to wear face coverings where 2m distance cannot be maintained and communication is important for example in special schools or with the youngest children. Whilst visors do not afford the same level of protection, they do provide some. However, it would be advisable for staff to wear a face covering when that will not impede their work with children.
- 5) Ventilation is more important in reducing risks with the new variant. The advice is therefore that schools should only use rooms that can be ventilated. Schools should ensure that rooms are ventilated at every opportunity whilst managing the need to protect pupils and staff from the cold. Where there are concerns about health affected by the cold, schools should manage that, keeping windows open a crack where possible.

- 6) Where pupils are eligible for a device through the DfE scheme and that has not yet arrived, there should be a clear message that devices are being provided by the DfE. They should remain at home until the device is received. Please do though work with local arrangements to source devices if needed as soon as possible.
- 7) Schools and colleges can determine if January vocational exams go ahead. This should only be considered where the group size is small enough to avoid bringing groups together and where robust controls are in place. Bringing groups together who are not normally in contact with one another in large numbers is not recommended. Consideration will also need to be given to social distancing of at least 2m in this context too.
- 8) Whilst schools are not limiting the number of pupils who can attend, following the Public Health advice to reduce transmission may result in there being insufficient capacity to safely accommodate all eligible children. In this case, it is reasonable that schools can look to offer places initially to vulnerable children where families choose to send them. Vulnerable children in this context are section 17 children (children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child) and children with an EHCP in mainstream education. This can be extended to those children who the school feels they need to have 'eyes on'.
- 9) Following allocation of places to vulnerable children, schools are advised to allocate places to critical workers. Where possible, children of critical workers should still learn remotely. Where all parents in the household are key workers, the following roles should be prioritised. Please note these are not in any priority order. Any school needing to prioritise within this group should contact Public Health for further support:
  - Frontline health professionals such as hospital doctors and nurses, GPs
  - Personnel involved in the vaccination programme, including administrative staff
  - Emergency services
  - Social care staff such as those in care homes, providing home care and social workers involved in safeguarding adults and children
  - Early years and education staff

If space allows, the school may be able to offer places to children of other critical workers not listed above.

- 10) Schools are advised not to allow visitors other than for essential reasons. This includes therapy services and safeguarding but should not extend to visitors such as music services and parental visits. The use of supply staff should be considered only for long term cover, not for odd days – and staff should wherever possible not move between settings.
- 11) We recognise that many parents are under considerable pressure to work, sometimes where employers are insisting they physically attend work as critical

workers where in fact their role does not meet the criteria. This is an enforcement issue so please do let Public Health know so that it can be followed up.

Our local Public Health Team will provide any further support or guidance so do please get in touch on the usual numbers if needed.