

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



ADDENDUM – Guidance for Schools & Educational Settings in Northern Ireland January 2021

From: Education Restart Programme

To: All Schools,

Date: 8 January 2021

Dear Colleague

ADDENDUM - Guidance for Schools & Educational Settings in Northern Ireland

Further to the recent statements from the Education Minister Peter Weir MLA and NI Executive, this correspondence provides additional information on a number of issues.

You will note that the recent decisions in no way suggest that schools are unsafe places for young people. Instead, limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households. The Executive has and continues to prioritise education and the needs of our young people.

The information in this update will be incorporated into the full DE Coronavirus Guidance for Education Settings in due course and issued to schools.

Education Continuity Direction

The Education Minister has issued a further Educational Continuity Direction to give legal effect to the operational arrangements in the education system from 7 January 2021 ([Educational Continuity Direction](#)).

Examinations and Qualifications.

In light of the current public health context, the move to remote learning and in order to ensure a common approach throughout the UK and that students in Northern Ireland are in no way disadvantaged, all exams and controlled assessments for CCEA GCSE, AS and A2 qualifications have been cancelled.

Work will continue on the alternative awarding arrangements for these qualifications and further details will be brought forward as soon as possible.



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Given the evolving public health measures, vocational and technical exams that are due to take place in January may still take place, where learning centres judge it right to do so. Alternative arrangements will be put in place by individual awarding organisations where it is not possible for learners to sit their exams in January.

Schools will therefore be permitted to facilitate these exams in January if they wish to do so. Further details should be sought from individual AOs and CCEA Regulation.

Bubbles and Social Distancing

While the number of pupils within settings are reduced schools should continue to reduce interaction and contact. New bubbles may be formed in line with PHA advice, but these should not exceed normal class size. With smaller numbers of pupils, it is acceptable to use a single room, provided that the 2m social distancing rule can be maintained between pupils, and staff can maintain this when supervising the class.

Remote Learning and Provision for Vulnerable and Key Worker Children

It is now a legal requirement for pre-school education settings and schools to provide remote learning to all registered pupils. The Department has provided updated guidance to support schools in the delivery of remote learning. This can be accessed at [further guidance for schools on supporting remote learning](#). In delivering remote learning, schools are required to have regard to this guidance.

The Department expects that vulnerable and key worker children who are attending school will engage with the same remote education tasks and lessons provided to their peers who are learning at home and in this way continue to receive high quality teaching and learning through remote education.

It is expected that teaching and/or non-teaching staff will supervise and support vulnerable and key worker children in engaging with the remote learning tasks and activities provided to all pupils.

This will include providing appropriate, support, explanations and directions in regard to the remote learning materials. Schools should differentiate teaching and learning activities in accordance with the age, ability, aptitude and Special Educational Needs (SEN), if appropriate, of all pupils.

Younger children and some children with statements of SEN will clearly require a greater degree of support and assistance to engage meaningfully. Further, if the remote learning requires a practical task or activity (e.g. for primary age children playing a game, making a model etc.) it is anticipated that teaching and/or non-teaching staff may support children to carry out these activities. It is also important to ensure that vulnerable and key worker children have access to devices to engage with



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online learning activities as required, whilst in school. These may be provided by the school or pupils may bring their own. In this way, the experience of vulnerable and key worker children will broadly mirror the experiences of their peers learning at home.

Classroom assistants who provide support to children with statements should continue to support these children - directly for those who attend school and remotely where they are at home.

In the first instance schools and parents/carers should liaise directly regarding vulnerable children and young people's access to school placements. The School Complaints Policy should be followed by parents/carers if required. Schools should liaise with their Education Welfare Officers or Special School Support Officers regarding individual pupils, if required.

The guidance for Special Schools is currently under review and will issue in due course.

Definition of Vulnerable Children and Young People and Key Workers

The definition of Vulnerable Children as set out in the cross-departmental Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan 2020 can be found [here](#).

The definition of a key worker can be found [here](#).

Vaccination for Education Staff

For clarity the Minister has sought the agreement of the Executive in order to prioritise vaccinations for **all** education staff who are in face to face engagement with children and young people.

With the suggested first priority to be given to staff within special schools given the physical contact required there, followed by any other education staff engaging with children (such as key workers and vulnerable children).

Face Coverings in Post Primary Schools

It is now compulsory for post primary pupils to wear face coverings in school and at drop off/pick up areas unless an exemption applies.

Note: Detailed guidance on face mask provision including information for the hearing impaired will issue separately.



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Home to School Transport

The EA will continue to provide home to school transport provision for children attending special schools as normal. The EA will be releasing guidance in relation to home to school transport provision for vulnerable and key workers' children.

Recording of Pupil Attendance

In line with DE Circular 2020/08 and associated addendum, the main attendance codes to use in the majority of cases relating to the current Covid-19 situation are as follows:

- For Pupils learning at home – Code] (Approved Activity)
- For Key Worker pupils / vulnerable children attending school – record as normal in the am and pm using Code / and \ (Present Code)
- For Pupils who are learning from home but have not evidenced their learning as required by school, Code } should be used (Unauthorised Absence)
- For pupils in special schools where agreement has been reached between school and parent, Code [“Covid-19 Self-isolating & Learning from Home” (Approved Activity) may be used.

It is important that schools update SIMS in a timely, accurate and complete manner. Any queries please contact attendance@education-ni.gov.uk. A full list of attendance codes can be found [here](#).

Engage Programme

The Engage programme which supports all primary and post primary schools can continue to be delivered remotely and schools are encouraged to explore how Engage resources can be best utilised in this context. Further FAQ guidance on Engage including staff pay arrangements is available [here](#).

Cross Operational Link Officers assigned to each school are also available to provide help and advice.

Guidance Update

Schools are encouraged to review their existing COVID-19 measures and risk assessments, and amend them as necessary to reflect the good practice set out in this guidance. The Department will provide revised guidance to reflect this position.

Regards
Education Restart Programme Office

