

# Ulster Teachers' Union

## Advice on the Return to School Settings

---

*24 August 2020*

*Version 1*



# Return to School Settings

The Ulster Teachers' Union represents around 6500 teachers and school leaders in special schools, nursery, primary and post-primary school settings.

Members work in a variety of school settings and will have their own circumstances, fears and concerns about the covid-19 situation.

Schools have been directed to reopen for pupils and staff from 1 September. Our guidance has been produced to support members in their return to work. The advice and documentation regarding to the COVID-19 situation may well change. The UTU will update members via email and our website if advice changes.

The COVID-19 situation is a challenging and worrying time for our school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. As an employee your employer must ensure that risks are minimised to protect your health and safety. As your Teacher Trade Union, we are available to support you at this time.

**If you have any concerns or questions regarding your school setting,  
please contact us at [office@utu.edu](mailto:office@utu.edu)**

**There are some useful links on page 7 and 8.**

## Staffing

Staff are expected to be available for work. Your Principal or Line Managers will be discussing your return to school including risk assessments and measures that are in place for your safety. If you are pregnant, clinically vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable or live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, you should raise your concerns and follow the relevant guidance. Risk assessment, templates are available and must be completed by the line manager.

Further information can be found in the Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to Schools - (UPDATED 10 AUGUST 2020).

In the New School Day guidance, 19 June 2020, Pg 58, it gives clear consideration and a staffing checklist that should be followed.

## Social Distancing

On the 6 August 2020 the Executive agreed that the stringent application of social distancing requirements between pupils will be relaxed from 17 August. Public Health guidance with respect to social distancing of 2 metres (2m) will remain in place between adults and as far as possible between adults and pupils. Schools should endeavour strenuously to implement as much social distancing as is practical where physical capacity and curriculum delivery permit.

Face coverings must be worn in staff rooms and during adult to adult meetings lasting more than 15 minutes and by adults visiting the school site.

Where possible schools are advised to have staff meetings remotely.

## Hand Washing

Pupils (and staff) are expected to wash their hands using soap and water on immediate arrival in the school setting. Tepid / lukewarm water is suitable for this purpose and disposal hand towels should be used. Hand dryers are not recommended to be used. Schools should endeavour to ensure that frequent hand washing facilities are available at the start of the school day and throughout the day. Hand sanitiser points may be needed at entry and exit points and should be provided for staff. If you feel that your school had not adopted satisfactory control measures to clean hands more often than usual, please contact us. Hand sanitiser should be supplied by the school and should be COSHH regulated.

## Protective Bubbles

Keeping children and young people in 'protective bubbles' is a means of decreasing interactions between groups until further easing of measures is possible based on the public health situation. Where 'protective bubble' measures are used, social distancing between the adult staff working with such groups should be maintained as much as possible. The use of protective bubbles should cover all aspects of the school day. There are many staffing challenges regarding the bubbles and Principals and Line Managers must consider all alternative arrangements to ensure the health and safety of the staff and limit cross over of staff into different classrooms.

For example, Foundation Stage teachers who are covering KS2 classes should ensure that hygiene measures and hand washing takes place when changing classrooms. It is also essential that school leaders should record accurately when adults cross into different classrooms. Social distancing should continue. If teachers have a concern it should be raised with their Principal.

## School and Classroom Maintenance

It is clear in the return to school document that ventilation is essential, and the opening of windows should be encouraged. Where a classroom, staffroom or other location is unable to have ventilation, this should be raised as a matter of priority with your Principal or Line manager.

## Lunch Time

It is important that alternative approaches to pupil lunch timings and provision are considered, especially with regard to maintaining the bubble. However, teaching staff should have a minimum of 30 minutes for their lunch (TNC 2020 Agreement between Management and Trade Union Side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee). Please contact the UTU if this is causing concerns for you.

- Teachers in a Primary or Post Primary School are required to have a break of at least 30 minutes between the hours of 12 noon and 2.00pm.

- Teachers in Nursery Schools and in Nursery Units in Primary Schools are required to have a break of at least 30 minutes between the hours of 12 noon and 2.30pm.

## Resources

Sharing of resources amongst pupils should be avoided and must be considered in the risk assessment. Health and safety remains the priority and alternative solutions may have to be found in certain situations where the risk can't be sufficiently mitigated. Schools should also consider discouraging or prohibiting children from bringing anything from home and, at the end of each school day, limiting/preventing shared resources from being taken home. **Detailed operational advice from the Education Authority, at printing, has still not been issued to schools (New School Day Guidance - 13 August 2020, pg 10).**

## Enhanced Cleaning

The Northern Ireland New School Day Guidance issued on 13 August 2020 makes clear that all cleaning will be carried out in accordance with PHA Guidance (Section 2 pg 30). Also, routine general cleaning should take place at least daily and that regular cleaning of door handles, desk-tops etc. will take place throughout the day. We are advising members for their own safety when sitting at a desk that they should clean the work area for their own protection. Members cannot be directed to undertake general classroom or toilet cleaning.

It is also clear that in the event of an outbreak an enhanced clean will be required.

## Risk Assessments

A whole school risk assessment must be in place, should be consulted upon with the Health and Safety/Union Representative and be discussed fully with staff. Individual risk assessments for vulnerable teachers/those living with vulnerable people and pregnant teachers also need to be in place. It is the responsibility of the Principal to carry out the risk assessment with the input of the teacher and, if appropriate, medical advice. The employer has a legal duty to implement the measures identified in the risk assessment.

If a risk assessment is **not** in place, or you have any other queries in relation to risk assessments, please contact the UTU office.

## Useful links:

The Ulster Teachers' Union Website - <https://www.utu.edu/covid-19/>

Department of Education Updates - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/department-education-releases-covid-19-coronavirus>

Department of Education Restart Programme - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/education-restart>

Department of Education New School Day Guidance – 13 August 2020 - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-re-opening-school-guidance-new-school-day-revised>

Department of Education Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to Schools - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-supporting-staff-return-schools?fbclid=IwAR3LI-TjYzSB4Hm7LBdJtbsk9fcNGNipSRWQftZvYJhQWB1yynop0LMk79Y>

Department of Education Frequently Asked Questions Guidance on Supporting Staff to Return to School - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Frequently%20Asked%20Questions%20Guidance%20on%20Supporting%20Staff%20to%20Return%20to%20Schools%20-%2010%20August%202020.pdf>

Northern Ireland Direct - Coronavirus (COVID-19): regulations, guidance and what they mean for you - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-and-what-they-mean-you>

Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland - COVID-19: Advice and guidance for places of work - <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/topic/covid-19-advice-and-guidance-places-work>

Joint Statement from Management Side and NITC, 8 April 2020 – Teachers Pay and Workload - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/joint-statement-management-side-and-nitc-8-april-2020>

**Please remember you can contact the UTU Officials via email  
[office@utu.edu](mailto:office@utu.edu)**





Ulster Teachers' Union, 94 Malone Road, Belfast BT9 5HP

028 90662216 [office@utu.edu](mailto:office@utu.edu)