

TRANSITION OF LEARNERS BACK INTO SCHOOLS

Working Together to Plan Well

This is the first draft of a document which aims to support school leaders, local authorities and the consortium in working together at a time of unprecedented challenge and complexity.

The Minister has made it clear that any decision on the re-opening of schools in Wales will be guided by the very latest scientific advice and will be based on the determined five key principles being met:

1. The safety and mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of students and staff.
2. Continuing contribution to the national effort and strategy to fight the spread of COVID-19.
3. Having the confidence of parents, staff and students – based on evidence and information – so that they can plan ahead.
4. Ability to prioritise learners at key points, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
5. Consistency with the Welsh Government’s framework for decision making, to have guidance in place to support measures such as distancing, managing attendance and wider protective actions.

Welsh Government has also indicated a phased approach to reopening and promised schools a (three week) lead in period. This paper considers some of the key issues that need to be addressed for the re-opening of schools for more learners.

Key responsibilities

Some of the key responsibilities for guiding the re-opening of schools for more learners are outlined in the table below:

Table 1: Key responsibilities for guiding the re-opening of schools for more learners

Tier	Responsibility
Welsh Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a clear purpose and rationale for re-opening • Set out a Framework and guidance that define the roles of LAs and schools to re-open schools
Local Authorities in partnership with GwE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement national purpose and rationale for opening • Adopt National Framework and guidance • Produce a suite of policies to underpin the safe re-opening of schools • Identify the logistics and infrastructure around key areas such as transport and capacity to deliver safe re-opening • Undertake a risk assessment for each sector to mitigate and manage safe re-opening
Schools in partnership with LAs and GwE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement national purpose and rationale for opening • Adopt National Framework and guidance • Adopt Local authority policies • Create own risk assessments • Create scenarios and plans to implement national purpose and rationale for opening • Inform parents and pupils

Key areas to be addressed to inform the re-opening of schools for more learners

There are key areas that need to be considered and defined to inform models for the re-opening of schools for more learners.

If we begin with what is the purpose of re-opening schools:

Is it to offer one or a combination from the list identified below?

- Childcare to key workers and some vulnerable groups;
- child-care to parents who can support the re-opening of the economy;
- education to vulnerable learners to close the attainment gap;
- a more positive dialogue and engagement around maintaining distance learning strategies over an extended period of time (possibly until January 2021); or
- full time education to all learners?

Once we have clarity around the purpose we then need to assess the possible options for re-opening having considered the following:

- Capacity – of building to accommodate learning, to cater at lunch times and to transport to and from schools. This is school level detail that is needed to plan - which options are schools able to implement?
- Economic impact – which options allow for most families to return to work?
- Impact on children – which options have the most beneficial impact on learning and well-being?
- Impact on staffing – how to support all staff with safety and wellbeing? What is the staff profile of the school available to support learners in school and through continued distance learning?
- Practicalities – How practical is the option? Is the infrastructure in place to support it?
- School specific – should any phases or schools be dealt with differently?

Having considered all of the above, some of the possible options for reintegrating learners back to school include:

- Disadvantaged learners - Schools could be open full time to the most disadvantaged learners. This will vary from school to school depending on agreed definition of vulnerable. Special schools and PRUs sectors most affected. These sectors would probably have to create a rota or a prioritisation list.
- Transition year groups - Schools could be open to focus on specific year groups who are about to make a key transition in learning. This would include nursery to school, Years 6, 10 and 12, but could also include Years 2 or 9.
- Transition year groups – Schools may consider that transition does not take place under the current circumstances.

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- All learners at a reduced time – Defining continuity and communication around Distance learning strategies. Schools would be open for all learners who would attend for a limited time, depending on maximum safe capacity: for example, a week a month, fortnightly pattern or one day a week. Staff would similarly rotate.
- Earlier years - schools could open for earlier year groups first.
- Children of parents who need to leave home to work – this would prioritise children whose parents need to leave home to work.
- Should children in the same families attend at the same time?

In addressing the above, schools will also have to consider that some parents will not think it is safe to let their children attend school and will have to adapt their plans accordingly. Communication with parents will be crucial to explain the rationale behind the chosen option.

Schools working with their Local Authority will then have to consider adopting different models to best accommodate their learners:

Welsh Government will state the purpose of re-opening schools. A one size fits all approach will not work as the variables are numerous and very pertinent to each individual school context. Decisions will have to be made at Local Authority level within a National Framework or/and by individual schools to best accommodate the preferred option.

- Preferred option – schools would adopt one of the options and then roll out to add or remove other options as capacity allows.
- Options targeting different school groups according to need over an extended period - would adopt different options over time at different points, to support different groups of learners at key points. This would then expand/contract to combine options at any given point as capacity allows.
- Combination of options at reduced times – schools would combine different options above but at reduced time for each. The time given to each option would then expand/contract as capacity allows.
- Consider extending the school day to include more capacity – 4 hour morning and afternoon blocks with an hour turnover

Factors and risks that will need to be considered in assessing options and models:

- Schools pattern and behaviour do not lend themselves to social distancing.
- Making a call too early and increasing spreading the virus.
- Is the present health data re Covid 19 supporting opening to larger groups?
- How long will furlough remain?
- Will the 2 meter social distancing guidance remain?
- Parental anxiety about the scientific evidence to decide on opening schools.
- Workforce health, anxiety and stress.
- Getting to and from school.
- Composition of families.
- Quality of school buildings and capacity.

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- Guidance for schools and staff.
- Qualifications Wales deciding on how qualifications will be assessed in 2021.

Aspects for consideration when reopening schools

These aspects for consideration when reopening schools aim to provide a practical framework to help schools to plan the specific actions and decisions they will need to take in the period before reopening and to provide the basis for schools to open further as required. To make it more manageable these are divided into six areas: safety; site and facilities; staffing; teaching and learning; pupil support and other key management tasks.

Individual schools can use the framework to build their own more detailed, bespoke plans to reflect school phase, type and local context.

This agreed key actions and decisions will help to clarify the role of local authorities and GwE in supporting schools to reopen.

A common basic framework will also enable schools to collaborate in sharing ideas and documentation.

This initial document was drafted by a GwE working group consisting of representatives from all phases of education and types of school. The next step will be to consult widely with school leaders and local authorities to further improve the quality and usefulness of the final agreed checklist

This is done in the belief that the surest way to win the confidence of parents, pupils and colleagues is to work together to plan well.

Table 2: Considerations when reopening schools

ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION WHEN REOPENING SCHOOLS		
SAFETY	LA / GwE	School
Update Safeguarding Policy and procedures eg distance learning		
Update Health and Safety Policy		
Complete Covid 19 and other risk assessments eg high risk vulnerable pupils and staff		
Clear plan for managing Covid 19 cases on premises		
PPE – identify needs/early order/procedures for distribution, collection and disposal/guidance on use		
Travel – impact of social distancing/supervision of arrival and exit/parent drop off and collection		

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Review school day timings – start and finish times/break and lunch/lesson times		
Preparation of teaching spaces		
Visitors – who and how		
Management of routine school maintenance eg equipment testing, grass cutting		
SITE and FACILITIES	LA / GwE	School
Social distancing protocols – measure site and spaces to calculate capacity/match to class sizes and subject requirements/use of larger and outside spaces/entry and exit/break and lunch/movement around school/levels of staff supervision/signage		
Hygiene protocols – handwashing/wiping surfaces/use of PPE/safe food preparation/early order materials eg hand sanitisers		
Review cleaning – staff capacity and availability/extra hours/early order and storage cleaning products/reorganise cleaning procedures for social areas, classrooms ,toilets		
Site adaptations eg to ensure safe entry and exit		
Lettings and shared use of site		
TEACHING and LEARNING	LA / GwE	School
Decide reasonable adapted in school curriculum offer – subject by subject review/staff availability/facilities/exam requirements/blending with distance learning		
Develop models of how distance learning could be approached taking into consideration the different options of contact with groups of learners		
Updated guidance on distance learning to support all staff and to continue to develop digital skills where needed		

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Consider evidence based and international best practice to ensure local approaches are well informed		
Review timetable and provide individual daily timetables		
Assess and address gaps in skills and knowledge particularly vulnerable pupils		
Assess and address impact on learning of issues linked to pupil wellbeing		
Alterations to the whole school approach to teaching eg TA support, group work, sharing resources		
Pupil transition between schools and key stages and within school from class to class		
Extra-curricular and off site provision		
STAFFING		
	LA / GwE	School
Consult on and provide guidance to staff on all aspects of returning to school eg update staff handbook		
Establish current staff availability eg health related absences		
Clear support for staff wellbeing including absent staff		
Calculate in school staffing requirements and provide daily rotas – safeguarding/SEN support/supervision/subject expertise/include continued provision for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers/staff workload eg balance of on site and distance learning commitments		
Review staff roles to support new arrangements eg key pastoral staff, redeployment of some support staff		
How will staff absence be covered and managed		
Staff training – how		
Other staffing recruitment/performance management/additional NQT support		
PUPIL SUPPORT		
	LA / GwE	School
How will pupils be supported in preparing and returning to in-school learning – clear guidance and expectations/evaluation of their		

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readiness/wellbeing support/pupil voice/siblings		
How will pupil attendance be managed		
Pupil transition (see teaching and learning)		
Communication with parents – inform, guide and reassure/management of parent concerns/use of social media		
OTHER KEY MANAGEMENT TASKS	LA / GwE	School
Support required from LA and GwE		
How can schools collaborate eg template letters, shared risk assessments		
Governance – role in planning, monitoring and decision making/policy changes/meetings		
Revisit School Improvement Plan priorities and timescales		
School budget – recalculate projections to include additional costs and savings on day to day expenditure		
Review existing calendar of events eg parents evenings		

Alongside these aspects for consideration, each school will need to conduct their own risk assessment against the guidance to inform Local Authority decision making.

See Appendix 1 for Risk Assessment Example