
Overview and Scrutiny

Briefing subject	Wider Opening of Schools from 8th March
Date	3 rd March 2021
Purpose	To outline plans for schools re-emerging from lockdown on 8 th March
Author /Tel No.	Julia Coleman School & Provider Standards 0-19 Quality & Commissioning julia.coleman@bcpcouncil.gov.uk 07796094198
Consulted	All schools and post 16 in BCP and office of the Regional Schools Commissioner South West (Hannah Woodhouse) Joanne Wilson Public Health Dorset

Background

1. Since January 4th and January 5th (primary phase) has returned to lockdown. Just as a year ago, all schools and on this occasion Bournemouth and Poole College, remained open on their sites for both Critical Worker (CW) and vulnerable group (VG) pupils/students.
2. Since then primary schools have been open with a much increased roll compared to the lockdown in March-May 2020, with 22-40% of those on roll in attendance. Secondary phase education has had 6% of pupils attending.

3. Schools are now half-way through their 2 week preparation window for a return to all educational phases from March 8th.
4. The Government's case for the wider opening of schools from March 8th
 - a) It is healthier for pupils and young people to be in school; they have educational and emotional deficits that outweigh the risks to them getting Covid
 - b) The R rate has reduced and this was the reason why schools were closed, except for those pupils who need help most and the children of critical workers
 - c) Chris Whitty has said schools/FE have good systems of control and new ones are to be added with the increased use of face masks in secondary phase and Covid-19 testing of wider education staff and secondary-aged pupils. Chris Whitty also shared his [evidence statement](#) on the risks and harms of missing education.
 - d) Evidence from the Public Health England-led Schools Infection Study continues to show that infection rates in schools mirror infection rates in the wider community, suggesting schools are not the main driver of infections. For example, the [Schools Infection Study \(SIS\)](#) has showed that COVID-19 infection rates in schools among staff and pupils mirrored infection rates in the wider community
5. The difference between this return compared to that of the summer of 2020 or January 2021
 - a) The **return is universal** across all schools', phases, Early Years, SEND and clubs/wrap around care or activities
 - b) The **guidance** has come out simultaneously across all settings (see links below)¹
 - c) Rates of the disease in the communities around schools in BCP are reducing. They have been high but are now close to [national averages](#).
 - d) **HE and FE** (Higher and Further Education) are asked to prioritise applied learners who need face to face aspects to complete course validation so there will not be an aggregated return to education with travel and other practical implications. Most HE and FE students will remain with remote learning.
 - e) Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (clinically defined) pupils and staff will "stay away" until vaccination is more widespread.
 - f) Face masks in secondary phase are mandated where Safe Distancing is not possible including in classrooms-transparent masks can be used and may be encouraged in SEND settings
 - g) CEV school staff and some people who work in schools will have been vaccinated and in BCP some SEND staff will have been vaccinated
 - h) Unlike in previous "relaxations" no other loosening will happen until the end of March so other than pupils, most people will still have to stay at home until 29th March

¹ The SEND school/setting guidance came out substantially after that for secondary phase in January

- i) Testing of staff and pupils will be amended as follows over March 2021;
 - i) **Private nursery workforce** Twice weekly from 22nd March
 - ii) **Primary schools**-pupils **no** testing; staff to continue bi-weekly home testing
 - iii) **Secondary FE**/staff twice weekly home testing to be introduced (this was previously allowed on site only)
 - iv) **Secondary pupils**; 4 tests on return-3x assisted testing opportunities in school and then 1 at home; schools are asked to retain a small on site testing facility for pupils who want a test but struggle to do it/need help
 - v) **FE**. Twice weekly home testing for older students in Colleges and testing by demand for independent and adult providers

6. The issues and challenges that schools and settings are working through in preparation for the 8th March?

- a) In secondary phase the key challenges will be re-setting up their test centres and being able to get pupils into schools through this safely, without too much close contact. They are allowed to phase that return and many will start testing some pupils later this week to avoid bottle necks.
- b) Home testing (which will dovetail with BCP community testing) is allowed from the 15th March and this may take a substantial reduction in the need for close contact tracing in the future.
- c) Pupils will be able to return after they have had a negative test.
- d) In primary phase pupils will not be tested but there will be more testing in families later in the term.
- e) The key barrier to a return is parental nervousness following the high numbers of cases in BCP schools in January. There were more cases in 3 weeks than in the previous 2 months. Schools and the Council are doing much to reassure parents and we are also giving them guidance about how they can help support a safer return for their own children and the schools.
- f) As BCP schools have jointly risk assessed with each other and Council departments, they are accomplished at escalating and addressing issues and have good systems in place.

5) Supporting schools in their preparation for the wider return and what will be done

- a) The DSC has written to parents reassuring them of the safety precautions in place and of the importance of a return to schools for Vulnerable Group pupils in particular.
- b) Schools have asked for further support from volunteers to help with testing as they did in January 2021.
- c) Transport requests are to be forwarded by Wednesday 3rd March and transport officers will be asked to arrange “drop by” visits to support re-opening, as they did in June and September last year.
- d) HT meetings this week will identify any other needs that are required.

- e) Guidance is now available for the examination sessions in summer 2021 and an agreed BCP approach will be agreed this week.
- f) All schools are expected to open from the 8th March and BCP officers will continue to monitor for cases as in January.

6) Links to the operational guidance on the full opening of schools;

- [early years and childcare providers](#)
- [Schools Covid-19 operational guidance](#)
- [Further education Covid-19 operational guidance](#)
- [Additional operational guidance for special schools, special post-16 institutions and alternative provision](#)
- [Contingency framework: education and childcare settings](#)
- [There is also a very useful summary of the key changes on SchoolsWeek](#)