



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM
SCHOOL

Response to parent/carer survey
Preparing for the covid-secure full opening of the School as of 1st September 2020
Frequently asked questions (FAQs)
As at: August 2020

From September 2020 schools and educational settings are expected to fully open with different or adjusted control measures in place. It is recognised and understood that education and personal development at school is important. Through careful consideration of a balance of risk, and with a proportionate system of controls in place, University of Birmingham School promotes a safe working and learning environment where well-being is a priority – whilst simultaneously providing an amended curriculum which is as broad and ambitious as possible.

England’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty has stated that children are more likely to be harmed by not returning to school in September than if they catch coronavirus. “The chances of children dying from Covid-19 are incredibly small – but missing lessons damages children in the long run. There is also very clear evidence from the UK and around the world that children much less commonly get a severe illness if they get symptomatic Covid. There are no risk-free options and it is important for parents to understand both the risks and benefits as schools reopen.” (August 23rd 2020)

The plans that have been put in place by leaders at University of Birmingham School have been risk assessed and reviewed by Governors. The Principal and leadership team commit to the risk assessment being dynamic, and reviewed on a weekly basis so that the effectiveness of plans and arrangements can be closely monitored, and adjusted where necessary.

Pupils in year 10 and year 11 will take different subjects. How does that work with the year group ‘bubbles’? Are all those in one bubble taking the same pathway and subjects?

Will year 11 pupils still be able to do all of their GCSE subjects within the restricted timetable?

All those in one ‘bubble’ are not going to take the same pathway in KS4. We remain committed to our differentiated offer, and whilst in year 10 and year 11 we shall limit the mixing of pupils between classes wherever possible, the ‘bubble’ is the year-group cohort in its entirety and pupils will still be taught separate option-subjects. Alongside a safe environment we recognise the importance of offering a curriculum which is as broad and ambitious as possible.

Will year 11 pupils and year 13 students receive extra learning/revision opportunities as they have missed out on a lot of learning and it's their GCSE and A'level year in 2020/21?

We shall keep this carefully under review as the year unfolds, responding proportionately and appropriately to assessment and learning needs. A one-size-fits all approach is unlikely to meet pupils' and students' needs in the best way and we shall use assessment evidence as recovery gets underway and over time to personalise plans. This may include additional tuition and tutorials, but we must also consider the overall workload and demands on pupils and students, and staff. Examination Boards are already reviewing specifications and announcing reductions to the required content and coverage that will be examined.

I have a child in year 7 and a child in year 11. Dropping and collecting them at different times will not be possible. What arrangements will be made so they can wait at the start or end of the day?

To keep the integrity of our year group 'bubbles' intact to the greatest possible extent, where sibling children in different year groups can arrive at school at their prescribed time we would ask that this is arranged. We do recognise that this is not possible for all families and we shall have a designated waiting zone outside of the building where pupils/students entering or leaving the school at different times in line with our timetable model, can wait.

I need to let my employer know about school opening times as I drop my child to school by car. Are these changes going to be until December or is it short term/ long term? I will need to change my working times and need to let my employer know in advance.

Whilst this point is fully understood and appreciated, it is difficult to give a definitive answer at this time. The adjustments we are putting in place necessarily compromise to a degree our educational provision and the learning experience for the children. Our hope would be that circumstances nationally allow the relaxation of control measures as soon as possible. Realistically, we anticipate currently that the model we are implementing including the changes to timings will be in place at least for the autumn term, September to December 2020.

How will missed lessons and learning be recovered?

Staff recognise fully that learning and development will have varied considerably for individuals since March 2020. Teachers will be mindful of the importance of effective classroom assessment and differentiation as pupils and students are reintroduced to classroom learning. We shall (in the first instance through to December 2020) adopt an amended timetable model with reduced enrichment time (not least due to restrictions on trips and outside speakers) with time re-directed for academic catch-up. Learning recovery will also benefit from our engagement with the National Tutoring Programme. Plans for this will develop from September and in line with further details nationally as these become known.

If there is another virus wave, will the online learning be in the same format or will there be live lessons delivered virtually?

With the benefit of experience in supporting home-learning from March to July 2020, we are in a position to reintroduce remote provision should circumstances necessitate. We would draw further on resources which continue to develop and be available through the Oak National Academy. Yes, we would further review and develop our own use of streamed or live sessions to support interactive learning in the event of new periods of lockdown – given greater confidence at this stage that relevant and effective safeguards can be put in place for both pupils and staff.

How does the school plan to deliver lessons which require a particular setting outside of the normal classroom, such as science, music, PE, and DT?

Implementing provision which is as ambitious as possible balanced with controlling risks will inevitably lead to some compromises. Staying true to the control measure where we limit the mixing of people by basing pupils and students in 'bubbles' will mean that specialist rooms are not accessed by most. Leaders, teachers, and staff will plan where appropriate and possible for resources to be brought to classrooms and teachers will plan creatively to build in practical activities or demonstrations. For older pupils and students preparing for public examinations, the Awarding Bodies have temporarily waived many requirements for practical or field work learning to recognise present constraints. Physical education will be reduced at this time and will occur using outside spaces only. Contact activities will be avoided. Some priority examination groups will continue to use our specialist rooms such as the science laboratories.

It seems like teaching hours have been reduced. If so is this permanent?

Whilst there are changes to the timings of the school day under our revised plans, actual lesson and learning time overall has been maintained and in some cases increased. Time has been reduced for some of our provision such as assemblies given that collective gathering in very large groups is to be avoided. We shall use on-screen delivery in classrooms and 'bubbles' for tutor-group and pastoral messages. Our hope is that the model we are implementing at this time will be in place for a limited period, and we shall respond to the changing national picture.

Will teachers use their knowledge of which children have satisfactorily accessed the work set and to what extent as you move forward? We are a little concerned some pupils may become despondent or disengaged if they spend next half term repeating work they worked hard to complete whilst at home.

Subject leaders and teachers will have information about the levels of engagement with remote learning over the lockdown period. They also recognise that this will have varied for a range of reasons for different children. Using this information and other assessment as the new term unfolds, staff will be mindful to plan for both recovery where needed and progression.

As the children are in a year-group bubble, are the allocated teachers distinct to that bubble?

No. Staff numbers do not allow that we restrict the allocation of the same staff to a year group 'bubble' whilst also providing lessons that are delivered by a subject specialist. Ordinarily pupils and students would travel around the building from lesson to lesson. In our revised model teachers will instead travel to class bases so that we minimise the number of people mixing. Teachers will maintain at least a 2m distance at the front of classrooms.

Will children be able to socialise with friends who are in their year-group at lunchtime?

Yes. We believe that a compelling reason for returning physically to school, in addition to learning, are opportunities to socialise and re-connect face to face with friends. After pupils and students have had time to eat they will be able to do this but should maintain social distancing where this is possible.

I would like to know how many children will be placed in my child's class. How many children will they be around during a regular day?

Our class sizes will be no larger than they ordinarily would be – and on average around 25 pupils or students per group. There will be some variation to the number of people encountered in any given day for some of our older pupils and students. This is where different grouping is necessary within the year-group 'bubble' and their zone of the building for the delivery of option-subjects.

Will the Sixth Form students be able to go to local shops during lunch-time?

No – not at this time. Whilst we ordinarily do allow this, at this time this unnecessarily increases the risk from outside contact and mixing. We will seek to relax this at a time where from a health perspective it may be prudent to do so.

I cannot understand how social distancing will work in school. Can you explain that to me?

The main control measure in relation to social distancing is restriction to the number of people that any individual will come into contact with during any given day. We have introduced three lunch spaces instead of one space (our atrium) so that year group 'bubbles' can make their way to lunch, and have lunch, without mixing or 'crossing over with' other pupils and students as they ordinarily would. Distancing is important where this is possible, and still remains one of the control actions within the overall system of controls, alongside other actions such as hand hygiene and our regular cleaning of the school site.

What are the plans for wider enrichment at this time, as we feel this remains an important part of education and a valuable feature of the School's provision?

We agree. Enrichment opportunities to provide enhanced learning and personal development was one of the founding principles of the School, not least in support of character education. There are limitations at this time with regards to off-site visits and speakers coming to school. We shall monitor when and where it is possible to make adjustments to this. We shall consider alternative plans during this period of altered provision, such as experience-days outside of the daily timetable, within each year group 'bubble'.

Could you outline the School's position on face masks or face coverings, and will you allow my child to wear one?

Guidance from the DfE (Department for Education) and PHE (Public Health England) remains that face coverings are not recommended in schools. At a national level this evidence is under review. They are not required in schools as pupils, students, and staff are mixing in consistent groups. If worn incorrectly or touched regularly there is risk of virus transmission. Face coverings also impact on verbal and non-verbal communication with associated negative effects on education.

It is the School's view that whilst face coverings will therefore be neither compulsory nor routinely encouraged, to recognise an option within the available system of controls, face coverings may be allowed or will be required in certain circumstances.

They may be worn by staff (as they are working often with various 'bubbles'); by teaching intervention assistants (who will often be supporting pupils within close proximity where distancing is less feasible); by ITE trainees (if they are supporting pupils with work within close proximity); or staff, pupils, and students with increased health related vulnerability or anxiety about returning safely to the school setting.

Moving forward, visitors to school will be asked to wear a face covering when in the building unless they are exempt as an individual from so doing. Staff dealing with a person who falls ill during the school day will be asked to wear a face mask as a part of fuller PPE.

Pupils and students travelling to and from school on public transport will be required to wear a face covering during their journeys in line with transport regulations.

If there are reasons why you would like your child to wear a face covering in school, as outlined above, please contact Ms Cosimetti via email (a.cosimetti@uobschool.org.uk) **from the 1st September** here at the school so that we may be aware of any contexts and circumstances for your request.

Face coverings where allowed in school should be plain, and worn, handled, and disposed of sensibly and safely.

Will you make work done in class also available online for accessing at home, such as through ClassCharts?

As a matter of routine, no, not now that pupils and students will be returned to onsite schooling. We shall continue to use our communication platforms, such as ClassCharts for relaying information as we ordinarily would, including homework. If we find ourselves needing to implement home-learning we shall as we did during lockdown relay daytime lesson and learning activities. School leaders have a duty to be mindful of staff workload and the overall use of their time and priorities.

Can you advise what the protocol is should a pupil, student, or teacher of the school be diagnosed with coronavirus?

The protocols for dealing with circumstances where a person falls ill are guided and supported by Public Health England (and any new national Body), including that where a person develops or exhibits coronavirus symptoms we ask that they must get a Covid-test. The protocols to be followed differ between where a person has symptoms and where a person has a positive-test. In the case of a positive-test, the Principal and other leaders will work with Birmingham's local health protection team to risk assess and action necessary steps. Whilst it will be important to respond to individual circumstances where they arise, the school's flow diagram (provided on a separate document) outlines a broad guide to the steps we would be advised to take.

Can parents opt to keep children at home as of September, without facing any penalties?

Schools are being asked by the Department for Education to work with families to secure regular school attendance from the start of term (September 2020). This will be essential to help pupils catch up on missed education, make progress, and promote their wellbeing and wider development. School attendance will therefore be mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term and the usual rules on school attendance apply, including parents' duty to secure that their child attends regularly.

Where parents and carers have anxieties about the return to school we are keen to reassure that robust steps are in place to promote hygiene and limit the risk of virus transmission. In such circumstances, we shall work with parents and carers to understand individual concerns and to listen to strategies or adjustments that might offer support. The penalties system is operational but the Principal would hope to avoid its use where families and School work in partnership.