

Opening schools more widely: a decision-making framework to be used by the Active Learning Trust Board of Trustees

The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) is the national organisation and sector body for academy and multi-academy trusts. They believe that strong and resilient governance and decision-making are essential to help schools and trusts deal with the current challenging circumstances. They have therefore created this framework to support the decision-making for our Board of Trustees.

The framework, developed by CST, outlines a series of strategic actions for trust boards to take before decisions can be made about opening a school or schools more widely in the safest possible way. It does not include all possible actions that could or should be taken in the specific context of the trust or our group of schools. It is intended to be a strategic framework to guide good and informed decision-making.

The sections in the framework will be used to assist the Board in reviewing risk assessments. In each case, risks and actions to mitigate risks should be identified and recorded formally by the trust board. This is because the trust board is the responsible body, legal entity and employer.

Some of the actions identified in this framework will be delegated to school-level and our scheme of delegation has been amended for a specified period to give delegations or withdraw delegations, depending on risk assessments and risk tolerances.

The DfE has published guidance which sets out a series of steps that primary headteachers can take to support a decision to open schools more widely. These checks need to be considered in your planning and agreed with the Trust board, before a school can be opened more widely.

CST is seeking clarification on a number of points in this [guidance](#) on actions to prepare for wider opening, published recently by the DfE. In particular, we are seeking clarity on proposed volumes in relation to primary schools and the scientific guidance on social distancing - why this is different in a school. We will keep this framework up to date as the DfE publishes additional guidance.

Decisions and actions to take before opening the schools in your trust more widely

<p>Health and safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out statutory site checks, if required (DfE guidance here) • Assess net capacity assessments/ audits for all sites to determine a safe level of occupation • Commission deep cleaning of all sites • Ensure classrooms and corridors are marked out and signage and safety barriers are put in place (DfE guidance on social distancing here) • Assess what PPE is required and purchase thereof (guidance on PPE is included in this guidance) • Agree and commission enhanced cleaning arrangements for each site – likely to include but not limited to toilets to be cleaned after each break and lunchtime, door handles, common equipment and vertical surfaces commonly touched cleaned more frequently, hand sanitiser at school entrance, lidded bins in every classroom double bagged and emptied frequently (guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings here and here) • On a site by site basis, ensure a plan is in place for toilet use (one pupil at a time) and other common spaces e.g. lunch arrangements and outside space/break times • Agree a policy and procedures should a child or adult fall ill on site, fall ill having recently been on site and/or if a number of people fall ill related to a particular site (DfE guidance on prevention and control here, NHS guidance on what to do if you or someone you live with has coronavirus here, guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection here and guidance on testing here) • Ensure there is a critical path decision making process in case of the need for further closures, or scaling back operations, to address local infections • Agree a policy related to shared items (e.g. books, toys, practical equipment) and approach to cleaning these • Assess transport-related health and safety risks and how these can be mitigated
<p>Pupils and parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess parental confidence and reach evidence-informed assumptions of potential number of pupils returning to each school – assume the maximum number of eligible pupils to ensure your schools can cope even if you believe there will be fewer pupils • Assess number of pupils with EHC plans returning and ensure arrangements are in place to keep them and the adults with whom they will be working, safe (DfE guidance on children with SEND here and guidance on risk assessments here)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the number of vulnerable pupils and ensure appropriate support is in place for them (DfE guidance on supporting vulnerable pupils here) • Audit wider family services supporting mental health, bereavement, domestic violence etc in order to be able to signpost/refer families where required (Public Health England has published guidance on supporting children and young people’s mental health, Every Mind Matters and advice for groups with specific mental health needs)
Workforce and HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit staff to determine workforce that can physically return to school i.e. those not shielding, self-isolating, pregnant, clinically vulnerable, showing symptoms or living with any of the above (government guidance on self-isolation, household isolation, social distancing and shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable) • Decide on approach to staff with childcare commitments who are otherwise fit to return to school • Assess staffing requirements to open each school safely, in addition to teaching and support staff, at least one head/ deputy, at least one person with first aid training, at least one person with up to date DSL training, cleaning staff and at least one office staff member <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If a particular school is unsafe to open, then put in place alternative arrangements e.g. redeploy staff, retain or create a hub with a geographically proximate school if it is safe to do so (DfE guidance on cluster and hub provision here) • Agree deployment and responsibilities of staff not physically returning to school • Agree the in-principle policy for keeping staff who are returning to school safe e.g. rota, limiting contact with groups, provision of safety equipment like hand sanitisers, limiting moving around the school • Determine whether those staff returning to school sites require training and schedule training days • Consider what arrangements might be put in place for staff wellbeing – both those staff returning to school sites and those working from home • Consider any amendment to the procedure for staff absence reporting
Curriculum and timetabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the curriculum plan for pupils returning to school and those continuing to learn at home • Plan how key workers’ children and vulnerable children provision will run alongside returning year groups (online learning resources here, Oak National Academy here, technology support here, guidance for parents on supporting home learning here, guidance for parents of children with SEND to support home learning here and EEF best evidence in remote learning can be found here - there is also a summary of findings and a toolkit to support home learning. DfE

	<p>has also published case studies using various methods to adapt the curriculum for remote education to best meet the needs of pupils and adapt teaching practice for remote education and keep pupils engaged</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that there is a staffing plan and timetable for each school, including any special arrangements e.g. staggered starting and ending times of the school day, drop off and collection and/or break and lunch arrangements
Policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review at least the following policies and procedures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health and safety - Child protection and safeguarding – check that you have COVID-19 addendum to your child protection policy (general guidance here, guidance for children’s social care services here, safeguarding and remote education here) - Attendance (guidance on attendance during COVID-19 here) - Behaviour - Exclusions - Pastoral/Welfare • Consider whether enhanced safeguarding and welfare provision needs to be put in place – plan for the potential increase in disclosures and welfare needs including mental health • Amend procedures for fire drills • Assess whether any other trust and/or school-based policies and procedures need to be reviewed and amended • Consider whether any delegations in your scheme of delegation need to be amended for a specified period or on-going
Supply chains and contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactivate and amend catering and/or cleaning contracts, including bringing staff out of furlough where necessary • Reactivate supply chains • Agree free school meals provision and work with your catering supplier to determine how and when food will be arranged and served (DfE guidance on FSM here) • Check suppliers know and understand appropriate social distancing and hygiene arrangements • Agree approach to any scheduled or ongoing building works in relation to safety
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and agree communications to staff, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrangements for keeping staff and pupils safe - Staff deployment and attendance expectations - Curriculum and timetabling

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workload and wellbeing - Training • Agree systems in place for regular briefings for all staff (those returning to school and those continuing to work from home) • Plan and agree communications to parents/carers, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeping your child safe - Attendance expectations - Uniform expectations - The curriculum - Transport/dropping off and picking up - Parents visiting only when strictly necessary, by appointment • Agree the frequency of communications with parents or delegate to school-level
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Decisions and actions to manage the financial and educational impacts and regulatory and accountability environments

Financial impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure additional cost pressures due to COVID-19 have been identified and an end-of-year forecast which factors them in has been produced for the board • Assess whether schools in the trust are eligible for financial support (DFE has published guidance on the financial support schools and trusts will receive to reimburse them for exceptional costs incurred during COVID-19. These relate to increased premises-related costs; support for free school meals for eligible children who are not attending school and where those costs are not covered by the FSM national voucher scheme and additional cleaning costs) • Assess impact on reserves and review reserves policy • Assess impact on three-year financial strategy • Explore additional sources of income • Review policy and procedures related to fraud (see Fraud Control in Emergency Management: COVID-19 UK government guide)
Educational impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep educational impacts under review – ensure a trust-wide plan is in place to assess educational impacts, specifically gaps in learning, and that the plans address these in the short and medium term

Regulatory environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the implications of Eileen Milner’s letter to Accounting Officers which advises on the requirements for financial returns, and the AFH requirements, during the COVID-19 crisis • Agree a plan for internal scrutiny – ESFA has confirmed that it is at boards’ discretion whether remote checks are feasible and helpful in managing risk during COVID-19 • Agree the arrangements for external audit and associated returns - ESFA has confirmed that the current timetable should remain • Keep under review the statutory timescales for returns that have been paused or deferred - ESFA published guidance on reducing burdens which includes a full list of returns that have been cancelled, paused or deferred
Accountability environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutinise the executive’s arrangements for teacher assessments and the submission of grades for public examinations (FAQs on the decision around public examinations here. Ofqual has also published information about how GCSEs, AS and A levels will be awarded this summer, an update on summer 2020 GCSEs, AS and A level grades for students in year 10 and below and for private candidates and guidance for teachers, students, parents and carers • Review the arrangements for school and trust accountability and the performance management policy in the light of DfE guidance on how school and trust external accountability will be handled this year. (Schools and trusts will not be held to account based on exams and assessment data from summer 2020 and data will not be used by others, such as Ofsted and local authorities, to hold schools and trusts to account)