

Advice for UNISON members working in special schools and colleges, and alternative education settings – January 2021

Context:

With the new variant of the virus shown to being considerably more transmissible than the version prevalent in 2020 the previous risk assessment will no longer be fit for purpose.

As a matter of priority, specialist schools and colleges focus on:

- **Revisiting and improving the previous risk assessments** and building time into the beginning of term for this to take place
- Risk assessments should be updated for the premises as a whole and for individual children and young people with more complex needs
- Time must be built in for **extra training** of staff in adopting the new measures identified.
- Allowing **time for pupils** and their parents/carers to be inducted into the new processes.

The DfE has published their [definition of vulnerable children and young people](#) who should continue to attend schools and colleges, even in areas subject to the most stringent restrictions. This definition includes the vast majority of pupils in special schools and colleges and alternative education settings, however a pupil with an EHC plan would not automatically be required to attend school – some pupils may have significant health needs that would mean they would be put at risk by attending

We agree to send the same advice to staff in special schools that was sent to those in primary schools and early years settings. We accept that special schools should be open only to those children identified as particularly vulnerable in their COVID assessed EHC plan.

Leaders in special education settings must follow public health advice including:

- A revised and updated setting-based risk assessment
- Revised and updated risk assessments for individual pupils
- Revised and updated risk assessments for staff members with characteristics that result in them being more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19

Advice:

UNISON advice is that members should agree to support vulnerable pupils **on a rota basis** provided the following conditions have been met:

1. The necessary risk assessments have been consulted on with your union rep
2. The risk assessments have been reviewed and appropriate measures taken to ensure safety
3. You are clear what additional mitigations have been put in place to ensure the safety of both yourself and others
4. You have received training on the new measures
5. A system is in place to feedback on how well the new measures are working

If you have concerns regarding the health and safety procedures in your school or college, please refer to [this advice](#).

Lateral flow testing:

It is recognised that many pupils in special schools and colleges will not be able to self-administer the lateral flow tests. UNISON guidance on administering medical procedures has been negotiated with the government and remains the same:

- Any member of school staff may be asked to provide support to pupils with medical conditions, including the administering of medicines, although they cannot be required to do so.
- School staff should receive sufficient and suitable training and achieve the necessary level of competency before they take on responsibility to support children with medical conditions.

Remember, helping pupils with **administering a lateral flow test is voluntary** if your contract of employment does not explicitly state you must administer medical procedures.

If your contract does state that you have responsibility for administering medicines then you must receive full training and only take on the task once you are fully competent to do so.

Government advice:

England - The [government guidance for special schools and other specialist settings](#) states that settings work closely with staff and unions to agree best approaches for their circumstances.

Scotland – The [Covid-19 guidance on reducing risks](#) states that in special schools risk assessments should be conducted in full consultation with staff and their trade unions, aligned to the relevant protection level and reviewed on a regular basis.

Wales – The [schools coronavirus guidance](#) states that in pupil referral units (PRU), or other education otherwise that at school (EOTAS) settings or special schools, the settings should work through the system of controls collaboratively, enabling them to address any risks identified.

Northern Ireland – updates on Covid-19 with links to DfE advice <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/latest-guidance-covid-19-coronavirus>