

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

Staff working in special schools and colleges face different issues to staff working in mainstream schools. The complex needs of the pupil cohort means that different approaches may be necessary. The latest government guidance on this can be found at the end of this document.

As a matter of priority, specialist schools and colleges must 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.

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.
- If you are clinically extremely vulnerable and were previously advised to shield then our published advice can be found at the following link:
<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/03/Joint-union-advice-on-medically-vulnerable-and-higher-risk-groups-MARCH-1-1.docx>

Advice:

UNISON advice is that members should agree to support vulnerable pupils 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

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 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.
- 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.

In addition:

- It is important to remember that participating in covid testing is voluntary and must not be carried out on any child without parental consent.
- If the pupil is to take part in testing but there are barriers then the school/college must work with the parent and the child to work out a plan for how the individual might be able to take part. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Remember, helping pupils with **administering a lateral flow test is voluntary** if your contract of employment explicitly states 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.

Face coverings:

There will be pupils in specialist settings who are **exempt** from wearing a face covering. The risk assessment for the school should **identify suitable PPE and other mitigations** in these circumstances.

If you work in a school or college where children have communication needs you will need to be provided with a face covering that allows you to feel protected and allows pupils who need to lip read or see facial expressions to see you. These should be **specialist clear face coverings** rather than visors since visors do not provide adequate protection from airborne transmission of the virus.

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 than 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>