



Department for Children, Adults and Health

September re-opening of schools

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) for parents and/carers

This guidance aims to support parents and/carers to understand how the return of all pupils to all **maintained** schools from the start of the Autumn Term will work. This is based on both government and local guidance that has been shared with school leaders in Primary, Special and Secondary schools.

The government recognises that the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased since schools and colleges restricted their opening to most pupils in March. The NHS Test and Trace system is up and running and we all understand more about the measures that need to be in place to create safer environments in schools. As a result, the government has asked schools and colleges to plan for all children and young people to return from the start of the new academic year and we support this as a Council.

What is the expectation on pupils returning to school from the start of the Autumn Term?

We are expecting all pupils to return from the start of the Autumn Term to all our schools, so that they can access the curriculum, catch up on any lost learning and importantly, socialise and mix safely with their peers. For children of Reception age, we support a phased approach (part time initially to full time and where schools may wish to do this), but we are expecting all pupils to be in full time by the start of the fifth week of the Autumn Term.

What is the latest government guidance for parents/carers?

We recommend that all parents/carers read the latest guidance for parents that covers the September reopening and full return of our children and young people: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-in-the-autumn-term>

I feel anxious about my child returning to school from September, what should I do?

Some schools in South Gloucestershire will be phasing pupils return during the first week of the Autumn Term and we are very supportive of this. We are expecting all our pupils to be back in school from the Monday of the second week of the Autumn Term. There may be some very limited exceptions for pupils with very complex health and education needs, where schools will liaise directly with parents/carers on creating the safest and most manageable return.

How will schools organise the day and the timetable to make it as safe as possible?

Schools are planning to place all their pupils in bubbles so that they know who has had contact with whom and when. The bubble is put in place where social distancing of 2 metres cannot always be maintained. The bubble approach is a simple and effective way of keeping pupils in groups that enable the school to operate effectively in their delivery of the curriculum. The bubbles may vary in size. Bubbles will tend to be larger in larger primary and secondary schools but maybe smaller in one form entry primary schools (210 children) and small schools. Schools may have some staggering at the start and the end of the day to help prevent contact of bubbles and bubbles will be kept separate during the school day also.

How safe is it for our Children and Young People to return?

Schools in South Gloucestershire remained open during the lockdown for key workers and then extended their offer for both Primary and Secondary age pupils from the 1st and 15th June. We have had some of the highest return rates nationally for these pupils and the return has been a success. All schools are required to update their risk assessment and provide assurances to us that they are ready and have plans in place for opening to all pupils.

What support will my child receive on their return to school?

School leaders and teachers from across South Gloucestershire know that the September return this year will be different than in other years. While some pupils will be very confident about going back to school and may have excelled during lockdown, others may have struggled and potentially fallen behind in their learning. Teachers will be assessing pupils to understand, early on, where they are in their learning but also their experiences in the period they may not have been in school. Teachers will tailor their approaches to meet the needs of the pupils and are already adept at doing this as part of their regular practice.

What will the curriculum look like? What will my child be taught?

The government has set out clear expectations of what schools are expected to teach when pupils return in September. We expect that schools will continue to provide a broad and balanced curriculum in all subjects.

Changes to some subjects may be necessary- such as PE and music - to ensure they can be delivered as safely as possible.

What happens if there is a confirmed case of COVID of a pupil in my child's school?

Confirmed cases can occur only after testing has taken place. Schools will work with us and Public Health England South West in the event that there is any confirmed case of a pupil. In this case, school leaders will close the bubble that the pupil is in and any teachers or non-teaching staff that have worked with the pupil in the 48 hours where the pupil displayed symptoms, will also need to self-isolate for 14 days (stay at home). The school will provide parents and/carers with clear advice that will follow the latest Public Health England South West guidance. Any staff or pupils displaying symptoms will need to get tested. All other bubbles can remain open and teachers and non-teaching staff that have not worked with the child can continue to work as normal.

What happens if there is a confirmed case of COVID of a staff member in my child's school?

Schools will work with the Local Authority and Public Health England South West with any confirmed case of a staff member in a school. School leaders will close the bubbles that the staff member has worked with (in the 48 hours prior to the onset of the symptoms) and pupils in the bubble will need to self-isolate for 14 days and get tested if they develop any symptoms. If the staff member has had contact with other members of the school staffing team, they too will need to self-isolate for 14 days and get tested if they develop symptoms. All other bubbles can remain open and teachers and non-teaching staff that have not worked with the member of staff can continue to work as normal.

What happens if my child needs a test?

Anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can get a free test to check if they have the virus. Some people without symptoms can have the test too. Please visit the NHS website for further details: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-an-antigen-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>

My child has been shielding, will they have to go back to school in September?

This is a very anxious time for adults and children who have been shielding. Children and young people should continue to shield until 31 July when shielding is paused for everyone in England. Specialists and GPs will be asked to contact children and families to discuss the new evidence over the summer. Children who remain on the shielded patients list are advised they should not return to school or nursery before the 31 July. A small group of children who receive specialist care in hospitals may need to carry on shielding following a consultation with their doctor. This includes those receiving cancer care or those at risk of severe infection due to an immunodeficiency. Most other children who were initially identified as being clinically extremely vulnerable will no longer be considered at highest risk. In particular, children and young people who are cared for just by their GP are very unlikely to need to continue to shield in the long term. This includes children with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy and kidney disease.

Will there be testing in schools?

An outbreak in a school, that is when 2 or more confirmed cases happen in the same setting, may require a local testing unit to be set up in a school. The system to do this is part of the local outbreak management plan. The Director of Public Health in South Gloucestershire would make that decision. A school would be advised if this was going to happen and the school would be provided with the resources to let parents know about any testing that would happen on the school site.

What happens if I were to refuse to send my child to school?

We encourage all parents and carers to discuss any concerns they may have in relation to a September return with your school/head teacher/teacher; they are best placed to work through this with you. However, local authorities and schools do have a range of legal powers to enforce attendance if a child or young person misses school without a valid reason.

My child uses school transport or public transport, how does this affect them?

Where possible, children and young people are encouraged to avoid public transport, particularly at peak times, and to walk or cycle to school or college.

Where your child relies on public transport to get to school or college, and cannot walk or cycle, the safer travel guidance for passengers will apply. It is not expected for children under 11 to wear a face covering on public transport.

Where your child uses dedicated school or college transport (that is transport that does not cater for the general public but for school pupils only), the guidance for public transport will not apply. Your child may be asked to use a regular seating plan on this transport (to reflect where possible the bubbles that are used within school), and measures will be put in place to ensure vehicles are cleaned regularly and boarding is managed.

All parents/carers with children who are eligible for free assistance with the costs of travel will receive a letter of confirmation from the Council of their transport arrangements before the start of the academic year.

What will happen about GCSES, A Level's, technical qualifications and Primary School assessments?

We recognise that children and young people will have missed a critical period of their learning due to lockdown in the 2019 to 2020 academic year. The government is therefore planning on the basis that statutory primary assessments (for those going into year 6 in September; those pupils currently in year 5) will take place in summer 2021.

Following the cancellation of summer 2020 exams (GCSEs, A levels and technical qualifications), the exam boards will be providing students who were due to sit exams this year with calculated grades which will be released in August. In most cases, students will use the grades they receive in the summer to move onto their next step. The government has also announced that there will be an opportunity for students to sit exams in the autumn if they are unhappy with their grades.

For those pupils going into year 11 and year 13 from September, the government is planning on the basis that GCSEs and A levels will take place in summer 2021, with some adaptations, including to help pupils catch up.

During COVID, I think I may have become eligible for Free School Meals? How do I go about applying for this in South Gloucestershire?

You are able to apply for Free School Meals via the following link to our Council website, the page also includes all the eligibility criteria:

<https://find-information-for-adults-children-families.southglos.gov.uk/kb5/southglos/directory/advice.page?id=96T2gCAk10A>