

## INTRODUCTION

Since March 2020, teachers around the UK have had to adapt quickly to a variety of changes in education; from the closure of schools and remote learning, to teaching while following social distancing guidelines.

Measuring (e.g. making sure your plan has been implemented and assessing how well the risks are being controlled) and Reviewing Performance (e.g. monitoring before events and investigating after events, acting on lessons learnt, etc.) are two key components of any good health and management system.

By using the information gained from (i) feedback from Inspectors of the Health & Safety Executive who have been conducting inspections in our schools, (ii) the contact tracing information / case analysis undertaken of COVID outbreaks by our TTP Teams, and (iii) the school risk assessment review process, we have managed to get an insight into the ways that schools have been adapting, the problems that have been encountered, and the lessons they have learnt that they believe should be held onto in the future.

## WHAT LESSONS HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THE LAST 9 MONTHS?

The key recommendations/ lessons learnt from the above monitoring and review processes are summarised in the three sub-sections below. Head teachers are advised to pay close attention to these when schools reopen in the New Year and any areas identified where there may be scope for improvement should be actioned immediately.

### 1. FEEDBACK FROM THE HEALTH & SAFETY EXECUTIVE

#### MAXIMISING THE LEVELS OF VENTILATION

In November 2020 Public Health Wales updated its guidance to note the possibility of airborne transmission particularly in poorly ventilated indoor spaces. The Centers for Disease Control in the US recognise that transmission appears to have occurred when there is inadequate ventilation"....."Evidence continues to suggest that in poorly ventilated indoor spaces airborne aerosols are a possible transmission route and the precautionary advice remains valid. Maintaining good levels of ventilation remains the key focus even in colder weather conditions, whilst minimising occupant discomfort due to draughts and lower indoor temperatures."

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** - Undertake a review of your arrangements for providing ventilation to internal areas of the school, referring to the guidance sent under cover of the corporate email communication sent out jointly by Corporate Health and Safety / Property Maintenance dated 19.11.2020.

## FIRE DRILLS

According to NWF&RS, the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order (RRFSO) 2005, under which schools are expected to carry out fire evacuation drills, is still in force and enforceable despite Covid-19. Fire drills are an important part of any successful emergency evacuation procedure and can assist in a safe evacuation in event of fire, it is imperative everyone understands what to do in event of fire.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** - You need to assess the current situation considering the familiarity of your occupants and the last fire drill. If required and depending on your premises, you can familiarise new occupants with the premises and may be able to carry this out via a desktop drill, this is important when staff have been working at a different site previously. It is also extremely important to take into consideration the need for Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) and how these will be managed and supported as part of your overall Emergency Evacuation Procedures and fire risk assessment.

In conclusion, the NWF&RS has confirmed that despite Covid-19 it is a legal requirement that evacuation drills must be fulfilled. Documentary evidence in the fire safety register will be required.

## FIRE RISKS OF ALCOHOL BASED SANITISERS

When stored properly and used as directed, the likelihood of experiencing a fire associated with hand sanitiser is minimal. However, as with any flammable liquid, it is necessary to exercise caution. ... To avoid a fire hazard, never use alcohol-based sanitiser near a heat source or open flame.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** – Ensure that relevant employees (especially those working next to naked flames or in any other environments that pose static-charge risk e.g. Kitchens, Science laboratories, Home economics, D&T workshops, etc.) never use alcohol-based sanitiser near a heat source or open flame. Whenever an employee applies alcoholic sanitiser, they must wait until the liquid has fully evaporated on their skin (i.e. their hands are completely dry) before they begin or resume work.

## BUILDINGS/ PREMISES INSPECTIONS, SAFETY TOURS

Monitoring performance is an essential part of effective health and safety management. It involves checking that arrangements and systems are working as they should, for example

- physical controls are in place and working;
- staff have done what they are supposed to do;
- procedures are working and regularly reviewed.

Governing bodies, whether they are the employer or not, must satisfy themselves that monitoring arrangements are in place for COVID, and that the results are reported back to them. One of the ways of doing this is for the governor taking the lead on health and safety to get actively involved in conducting periodic safety inspections of the school premises.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** – Encourage Governors to get actively involved in conducting periodic inspections of the school buildings and premises. Please be reminded that a checklist has been developed to help schools monitor health and safety standards in their establishment and identify areas to address. A copy of this checklist can be downloaded from the health and safety section of the HWB website. It is recommended that the checklist is completed annually, but it can be divided into smaller sections and completed over several weeks/months. We recommend that schools evidence that formal recorded inspections are carried out on at least a termly basis.

## PROVISION OF INSTRUCTION, INFORMATION AND TRAINING IN THE SAFE USE OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Whilst it is important to remember that social/physical; distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene remain strongly evidenced to be the most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus, it is recognized that there are also potential benefits of wearing PPE (including face coverings) in certain situations within educational settings.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** – Schools and settings should reinforce to everyone the rules around the circumstances / activities when PPE should be worn in the school. All staff and learners should be reminded how to put on or remove PPE in the right order, the importance of washing PPE (if reusable), disposing of waste, and use of correct hand hygiene steps to reduce the risk of onward transmission of infection. It is particularly important that items of PPE (e.g. Emergency PPE Packs) are stored separately from each other (e.g. in sealed bags or containers) to reduce the risk of them becoming contaminated before use.

## 2. FEEDBACK FROM THE TTP PROCESS

### COMMUNICATION TO PARENTS/CARERS

OVER the past few months a number of Flintshire schools have been affected by pupils who have been forced to self-isolate, due to positive cases in their school 'bubbles'.

The vast majority of families have complied with the requirements set out by Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government.

However, with children and staff returning to schools after the extended Christmas break at a time when a new variant of the COVID-19 virus is known to be in circulation, it is really important to remind ourselves of why we still need to adhere to these rules.

Over recent weeks there has been a steady increase in the numbers of people testing positive to COVID-19 in the county and, during this time, our colleagues in schools and the TTP Team have picked up on some 'concerning trends and misconceptions', which goes against the current health protection guidance.

Some of the main areas of concern are listed below:

- Lack of adherence to self-isolation rules, when confirmed as a positive case or awaiting test results
- Adults with symptoms and whilst waiting for their test result to come through taking and picking up their children from school
- Childcare being provided by adults who are contacts of positive cases and should be self-isolating.
- Particularly for older pupils, not understanding how a bubble and the need to self-isolate works. For instance, carrying on with part time jobs, socialising with the bubble contacts.
- Children mixing outside school time – sleepovers, birthday parties, play dates, park mixing, family parties. School bubbles only relates to the school – not outside. Also:
- Shared childcare out of school time – unregistered childminders taking children back with their children from school, also grandparents, aunties and uncles.
- Lift sharing (both school staff and parents taking other people’s children to school) – this has caught several schools out.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION** - Ensure a reminder goes out to all parents, carers and pupils to adhere to national guidance and local school rules. Reinforce the message that we all need to work together to keep Flintshire safe and avoid meeting people from outside our household, wear face coverings and follow the rules that are in place to keep us all safe.

### 3. FEEDBACK FROM THE RISK ASSESSMENT REVIEW PROCESS

A review of the forms submitted as part of the school risk assessment review process has revealed that there is no ‘one size fits all’ off-the-shelf suite of control measures to suit every school or circumstance. The control measures adopted by our schools are based upon the principles of,

- Avoiding contact with those who have symptoms.
- Frequent hand cleaning & good respiratory hygiene practices.
- Regular cleaning of settings.
- Minimising contact & mixing (with a strong focus on group/class separation).
- Communication with all stakeholders and awareness and understanding of guidance, risks and control measures.

All of our schools have demonstrated they recognise that even where these principles cannot be adopted in full, even a partial adoption of them will be beneficial in reducing the risk and more than one of the principles can be adopted simultaneously.

We asked Head teachers if they had any outstanding safety concerns or if there were any lessons to be learnt from their own experiences gained during the COVID pandemic. Some examples (not an exhaustive list) of the typical responses we received are given below:

## Primary Schools:

*“We have had one case of COVID 19 with a member of staff. We feel it is very important to have the 2m distance at the front of the class between pupils and staff where possible. This gives extra safety reduces anxiety of staff”.*

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*“No official cases. However, one parent has shown symptoms, tested negative on a number of occasions, was hospitalized and was very poorly. Doctors were convinced that she had Covid despite testing negative on a number of occasions. Both children remained at home as a precaution and received blended learning.*

*Governors are very concerned about the use of Teams sessions with pupils. They are concerned about the potential for images of pupils to be captured during these sessions from the homes of other children as they do not know who is present.*

*Governors were happy for just the teacher’s voice to be used. They were happy for the setting where just the teacher can be seen, without the pupils seeing any other pupils.”*

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*“The Flintshire agreed protocol for schools worked well and was very useful in providing a checklist of necessary actions.*

*Communication with Food Safety/Environmental Health Team was very good and timely.*

*Staff and pupils in the bubble that were self-were expecting to be contacted by TTP as a matter of routine but were not probably as a result of the amount of pupils/staff involved. We have amended our advice to staff to reflect this.*

*There were some issues with our SchoolsComm parent notification for pupils with siblings which have been subsequently amended”.*

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*“One breakfast club staff member, no pupils.*

*Due to the fact that the staff member had consistently kept her distance from the pupils and worn a face mask, gloves and apron at all times the children in breakfast club did not need to self-isolate. Advice was taken from the EH team.*

*We have asked that siblings arrive at the same time, the younger siblings go into breakfast club; however, we were not recording those pupils on the breakfast club register. This had the potential of making it more difficult to identify contacts. Therefore, all younger siblings who now go into breakfast club are recorded on a separate register.*

*A staff member car shared with the staff member who had a positive test. This resulted in that staff member having to self-isolate also. This impacted on the staffing in the school. Staff were reminded not to car share and the importance of keeping their distance from one another.*

*HSE inspection highlighted the need to open blinds [to maximise ventilation], this has been acted upon.*

*One way system introduced on the school yard to avoid people meeting at entrances.”*

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*“As we were the first school to have a positive case, we reflected on practice early on in September. As a result and in order to reduce the number of contacts, we separated and coned off areas of the school playground.”*

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## **Secondary Schools:**

*“Only with one member of staff testing positive. The staff member had been following the RA & operational guidance for social distancing, wearing masks/face coverings & the use of sanitisers (as well as enforcing these requirements with her classes). TTP were happy with their conversation with the staff member that no additional isolations would be required. This incident re-enforces the positive impact of following the school’s RA requirements on virus transmission “*

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*“Bad weather and a lack of covered outside areas means more students are having to remain indoors during dinnertimes, where there is also a lack of meeting areas large enough to accommodate the larger contact groups. Social distancing for supervising staff becomes more challenging due to numbers of students. Students also lack the opportunity of fresh air, having to remain inside where Covid restrictions are more stringent; and behaviour can be more challenging”*

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*“Ensuring staff maintain the required social distance between each other  
Ensuring that communication between school and home is effective and that information is shared quickly  
Importance of remote access to IT systems.”*

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*“Despite identifying bubbles as tutor groups in Years 7, 8 and 9, Environmental Health has required us to isolate whole year groups when a case has been identified (7 separate bubbles). Understanding that the aim is to keep bubbles intact wherever possible has been an important approach. Other control measures have been introduced to reduce contact during unstructured times.”*

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*“Details of which children have travelled on which buses when a case was picked up in year 11. She was not clear which bus she had travelled on. Need to try and keep an up to date list of who travels in daily”*

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## **Special Schools:**

*“Transport need to fully involved and where a positive case occurs on transport such as a driver or escort, then transport need to provide details to EH/TTP as the school does not have these details. Transport also need to be on call as per schools do at evenings and weekends. Escorts should also be keeping a daily register of pupils on their bus (we are only talking small numbers) as school does not have details of who attends via transport each day and who has come in with a parent etc.  
Specific special school guidance would have been useful.”*

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## **Pupil Referral Units:**

*“Social distancing was a concern. This has now been addressed to ensure staff remain vigilant all of the time”*

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# Corporate Health and Safety

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**RECOMMENDED ACTION** – FCC schools and educational settings should ensure that its COVID risk assessment is reviewed regularly to ensure that the risk of staff and learners being harmed by the virus has not changed and that no further control measures are needed. The risk assessment is a working document and, as your school/setting experiences change, this information needs to be recorded and updated. During these unusual times of a COVID-19 pandemic and as a guide to what would generally be considered as good practice as to when to review your COVID-19 risk assessment, please refer to FCC Corporate Health and Safety document [Schools COVID 19 RA Review Sheet Oct 2020 v1](#)

**END OF REPORT**

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