



Bolton Parent Carers & Bolton Information Advisory Service

Working together for Bolton's SEND families

Joint Bulletin 18 - 3rd January 2021

COVID-19 and Bolton SEND- what's going on?

Well, let's start with the formalities! We really hope that you've had a lovely Christmas break, if you've been able to do so, and we want to wish you all a happy new year.

Unfortunately, we appear to be starting 2021 in a similar way to when we first started doing these bulletins back in March - which is why we wanted to touch base again.

We are sure you've not been living under a rock since last Wednesday, but as a recap the following has been announced:

- Bolton, along with the rest of Greater Manchester, have been put into Tier 4
- There have been changes to the planned return to school for Year 7's and above.

Back on December 17th, the Department for Education announced that when secondary schools returned on January 4th, the first week of term would consist of online learning for pupils, whilst at the same time school staff would set themselves up as covid testing centres for all their pupils, to start testing on 11th January.

Understandably schools were pretty stunned to receive this news on what was for many the last day of term. The comprehensive guidance came afterwards and is very detailed about how the testing should take place, how it should be set up, how volunteers should be recruited and more.

The theory was that the start of term was prime time to test and then be able to isolate asymptomatic pupils (those showing no symptoms) and help curb the spread of covid.

However, a couple of days later, we also had news of the new covid variant and the South East was placed into the new Tier 4, with us following shortly after.

At the same time it appears that the DfE also realised that asking schools to set up testing at the same time as co-ordinating online learning was a big ask—therefore a new announcement was made on December 30th, with guidelines rolling in throughout the day.

Over the last couple of days we have watched the same cycle of events happen that we have watched over the last 9 months - a government announcement about schools, media stories, education unions get involved, more media stories, social media uncertainty etc etc!

So now we have all the guidance - around 12 new updates. We will explain what all this means for us in Bolton now. As always, it is a changing picture.

So what does this mean for schools returning in Bolton?

We are not one of the Tier 4 areas that have the most serious infection rates, which means **all primary schools are unaffected and will return to school as normal.**

Nurseries and pre- schools will also return as normal.

Year 7 and above will be having a 'staggered return.'

We explain below when your child or young person is expected back and what education will look like for them.

We would advise to ensure you are keeping up to date with your child or young person's educational setting as to specific announcements from individual settings—check your emails and texts, and check in on their social media feeds.

Mainstream Secondary schools

- From first day of term or 4th January- full time, face to face provision will be provided to *vulnerable children and children of key workers only*. They will need to be kept in a bubble. For the most recent list of keyworkers and criteria of 'vulnerable pupils click this link www.gov.uk
- From first day of term or 4th January, Remote/online education **to be prioritised** for those pupils in Year 11 and 13. (Potentially other year groups *may* be included, this depends on individual settings—so please check all communications from your child's school.)
- *School settings will be using this week to set up onsite testing facilities.*
- From 11th January, **all other year groups** to commence remote/ online education for one week. Provision for vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers still to be provided on site.
- On-site testing should commence on January 11th whilst pupils are learning remotely. The aim is to have face to face teaching from January 18th once pupils and staff have been tested.
- **Pupils will be encouraged to have a test but should not be required to have had one as a condition of being allowed to return to school on 18 January.**
- This testing will involve **2** lateral flow device (LFD) tests ideally spaced 3 to 5 days apart
- Face to face teaching to resume from January 18th.
- Ongoing - staff will be tested on a weekly basis There will be also be an option for pupils who have been in close contact with a positive case to be tested **every day** for 7 days instead of isolating. Isolation will remain an alternative to this.



Colleges and Further Education

- Support and on-site teaching and attendance should begin on 4 January for priority groups. Those groups being vulnerable pupils, children of keyworkers *and* those with external exams during January.
- Remote education should be available from January 4th until the 18th whilst settings set up their on-site testing facilities and commence testing students. Remote learning for exam groups should be prioritised and best endeavours made to provide remote learning for other groups from January 4th, this depends on individual settings—so please check all communications from your child's setting—remember to check their emails and texts too!
- From week commencing 18 January, all students should return to on-site education

Secondary Special schools and Alternative Providers

- The guidance for special provisions and AP's is a bit more flexible - the guidance states all secondary age children and young people in special schools, specialist colleges and Alternative Provisions who want to attend their education setting should be allowed to attend from the first day of term (on or after Monday 4 January 2021), whether or not they have had a test. So, settings have been told to plan for face-to-face education from the start of term.
- However, special schools and colleges can be flexible on children return to school dates in the first week, as they may need longer planning time for testing. This means your child's special school/ college, may not start having children back until 11th January.
- There is a separate piece of guidance regarding testing of pupils in specialist provisions as there is an understanding that the swabbing test brings increased difficulties for children with SEND.
- Again, testing is voluntary, but those who are eligible for tests are strongly encouraged to participate to reduce the risk of transmission within schools and colleges.

Shielding

- Shielding advice is currently in place in tier 4 areas, and so all children still deemed **clinically extremely vulnerable** are advised not to attend school.
- Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable should still attend school or college, in all local restriction tiers.



School transport

School transport should continue as it did previously, with those children aged 11 years and older wearing face coverings (unless exempt).

Before and after school clubs

For those able to attend school (so primary age children and secondary age children who are allowed in school because they are considered vulnerable or are children of key workers, clubs may continue, if it is feasible for them to operate. For all other children, they may start attending club again from 18th January when they are allowed back in school. Home educated children may also attend club from the start of term.

Free school meals

If your child is eligible for free school meals, and your child is not in one of the groups allowed in before 18th January, you should be offered a food parcel.

What we know about testing in schools..

- Testing is voluntary, and participation is ultimately optional, but the Department for education are strongly encouraging those who are eligible to take part to help reduce the risks of transmission in schools and colleges.
- Testing, along with the other measures schools and colleges have already put in place, will help ensure pupils and students have the best chance of as much face-to-face education as possible.
- The following information is taken from 'National Testing Programme: Schools & Colleges handbook' published on December 23rd.
- Schools are being provided with detailed guidance and training to carry out the testing.
- For children 11-15, a parent or guardian will be asked to give consent for the tests.
- Young people aged 16 or over do not need parental or legal guardian consent provided that they are considered able to make the decision for themselves. (Gillick competency)
- The test is a LFD test—a lateral flow device.
- Pupils will be supervised, but ultimately have to self-swab. Guidance for special schools offers alternatives to self-swabbing should this be difficult.
- The pupil swabs the back of their throat **and** nose.
- Results are available in 30 minutes.
- Pupils will be offered two Lateral Flow Device (LFD) rapid tests spaced three to five days apart (minimum 3 days) prior to face-to-face teaching recommencing.
- If the pupil tests positive, they, and their household, will need to isolate for 10 days.

Tier 4—What does it mean for you?

All the things we couldn't do in Tier 3 remain in place, with some additions. Tier 4 is actually called '**Tier 4- stay at home**' in the guidance. The clue is in the name, but, in a nut shell, it means you need to have a reasonable excuse for leaving home, such as a medical appointment, attending school or work, essential shopping, for outdoor exercise, and for worship. The Tier 4 guidance also says;

- Outdoor exercise can be unlimited (meaning you can take the children out all day if needs be, *as long as its local, and meets the guidelines further below about meeting others.*)
- Clinically extremely vulnerable shielding advice has returned.
- Work and Volunteering: You can leave home for work purposes, where your place of work remains open and where you cannot work from home, including if your job involves working in other people's homes. You can also leave home to provide voluntary or charitable services.
- Non-essential shops and services have to close (no haircuts again!)
- You shouldn't travel out of your local area at all unless for an essential reason. You should not go abroad on holiday
- You must not meet socially indoors with family or friends *unless* they are part of your household or support bubble
- You can exercise or visit a public outdoor place by yourself, with the people you live with, with your support bubble, or, when on your own, with 1 person from another household. Children under 5 do not count when meeting with another person. Also up to 2 carers for a person with a disability who needs continuous care are not counted towards the outdoors gatherings limit
- You can still provide care for a vulnerable person
- You can still see your children (for example if they live with another parent)
- You can still volunteer
- Support groups that are formally organised and have to be delivered in person can continue with up to 15 participants
- 'Bubbles' (both support and childcare) are still okay
- Short break care for the vulnerable and disabled is still allowed
- Playgrounds, parks, outdoor sports facilities





A note on IAS

Following the 'work from home where you can' guidance, IAS staff are going to be returning to home working from the start of term, until the 18th January, at the earliest.

This will be reviewed in line with the tier reviews every fortnight. We will write to you again when this changes, and we are heading back to the office.

In the meantime, you can contact us by texting 07467943495 and we will come straight back to you. You can also email us on iasoutofhours@outlook.com, or call the office on 01204 848722 for a list of the IAS officers mobile numbers and their working days.



Well, that's us for now. It's a lot to take in, we know, so do come back to us if you've any specific questions about your child and their circumstances. Or, if you're just fed up and need a chat, drop us a line.

Please stay safe, and stay well, and lets hope 2021 is the year we all get together again at some point. We cant wait to see you all!

Cheryl and Nan

