

Arrangements for the phased reopening of schools in January 2021 – supplementary guidance (updated 6 January 2021)

Purpose of this guidance

1. This guidance has been issued in response to the First Minister's announcement of 19 December 2020 and updated following her statement to Parliament on 4 January 2021. It is intended to provide clarity on arrangements for school education at the start of term in January 2021. The arrangements set out in this guidance are currently expected to be in place until at least 1 February, subject to a further review in mid-January.
2. This guidance, therefore, supplements the [existing Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools guidance](#) specifically to support schools and local authorities over the period from 21 December 2020 until 1 February 2021. All aspects of the existing guidance and accompanying mitigations continue to apply while schools are open.

Background

3. These exceptional arrangements are being put in place as a precautionary measure in light of the latest developments in the path of the virus. A range of previously published evidence has made clear that schools are not high risk environments when the appropriate mitigations and safety measures outlined in the *Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools* guidance are implemented, and this remains our judgement – there is to date no evidence that in-school transmission is a significant driver of increasing infection levels.
4. However, the emergence of a new variant of COVID-19 means that reopening schools at this time would not be consistent with a safety-first approach for children, young people and school staff. This is because:
 - the overall level of community transmission is currently very high. Controlling levels of community transmission plays an important role in ensuring that our schools can stay safe, open and welcoming – this approach is reflected in the [Scottish Government's COVID-19 strategic framework protection levels](#); and
 - evidence about any impact of the new variant on transmission amongst children and young people is still being assessed.

These exceptional arrangements are therefore intended to ensure sufficient time to reduce community transmission and to assess the implications of the new strain of the virus.

5. It is the Scottish Government's intention that schools (and nurseries) should be the first places to reopen as we emerge from lockdown, when it is safe to do so.

Arrangements for school opening in January - timeline

6. Local authorities and schools should put in place the following exceptional arrangements for a phased return to schools in January. An educational continuity

direction has been issued to provide the legal basis for this approach, and will be updated in due course:

- After the festive break, schools should reopen in line with their previously agreed term dates (starting from Tuesday 5 January 2021). However, during this first week of opening (**5 January to 8 January**), attendance in schools should be restricted to:
 - Vulnerable children and children of key workers only. Definitions are provided later in this supplementary guidance; and
 - Staff who, in the judgement of the local authority and schools, are required to attend in person to give effect to these revised school reopening arrangements.

This may, for example, include: staff needed to ensure the safe opening and operation of the school, including senior leadership teams, facilities management staff, cleaners, etc.; teaching and support staff required to attend in order to plan for remote learning from week commencing 11 January; and teaching and support staff required to attend to deliver in-person support to vulnerable children and children of key workers. In light of the strict lockdown conditions in place at the current exceptional time, local authorities and schools should ensure that only those staff who are required to support these essential activities are requested to attend in person, and ensure that updated guidance on individuals on the shielding list is followed.

- Our expectation is that provision during this first week of operation may be limited to in-school childcare and wellbeing support for vulnerable children and key worker children. This may create additional time for some teachers to prepare for learning and teaching which will begin on 11 January.
- Local authorities and schools may wish to draw on lessons learnt from running childcare hubs earlier in the pandemic when putting in place the local arrangements in schools to meet the needs of vulnerable children and the children of key workers.
- The role of certain in-class roles (e.g. pupil support staff) and the part they may play in supporting remote learning should be discussed locally with staff and unions.
- Appropriate provision of school transport for children and young people attending school should continue. Advice on [safe school travel](#) remains in place.
- The school holiday period has effectively been extended for all other children (i.e. those not meeting the definitions of vulnerable children, or children of key workers) until **Monday 11 January**.
- For the period from **Monday 11 January to Friday 29 January**, vulnerable children and the children of key workers will continue to attend school in-person. Schools will switch from offering childcare and wellbeing support to learning and teaching on 11 January for these groups (attendance in schools should be restricted to all necessary staff, vulnerable children and children of key workers).

- All other pupils should be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning during the period from **Monday 11 January to Friday 29 January**.
- A review of these arrangements will be undertaken on **Monday 18 January**, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels. Arrangements for the period from Monday 1 February onwards will be communicated at the earliest opportunity following this review.
- All of the above is subject to updated guidance on attendance for clinically vulnerable staff and pupils, including the enhanced protections at Levels 3 and 4.
- Local authorities and schools should ensure that local risk assessments and individual risk assessments for clinically vulnerable individuals are up to date, to ensure the safe running of schools and school transport under these arrangements. Consideration may, for example, be given to any additional mitigations that could be put in place due to fewer numbers of people being in school buildings. Local decisions should be made about whether specific staff may work from home where their attendance is not required to give effect to these arrangements – for example, when delivering remote learning – and how this can be facilitated.
- Local authorities should ensure that children eligible for free school meals continue to receive them (or benefit from alternative arrangements) during the period of operation of these arrangements (see below for further information on this).

Support for vulnerable children and young people

7. Some children and young people rely upon the care and protection provided by schools and other agencies in relation to a range of specific circumstances.
8. Local authorities (including through joint working between Chief Social Work Officers and Directors of Education) should ensure and prioritise continued care and support for these pupils during the period of 5 January to 29 January. In doing so, they should consider how best to apply the definitions below whilst balancing the overarching policy aims of reducing the number of children, young people and staff who need to attend school in person as far as possible.

Vulnerable children and young people – definition

9. Children and young people may be vulnerable because of factors related to their personal development, features of their family life, or because of wider influences that impact on them within their community.
10. Those children who were considered to be vulnerable prior to the pandemic should have been known to services, and are likely to have had a child's plan. The pandemic has brought others into this category, for example through loss of family income.

11. Where a child requires co-ordinated support from more than one agency, this is likely to suggest greater vulnerability, and the plan would be co-ordinated by a lead professional. This would include a range of children and young people, such as those:

- at risk of significant harm, with a child protection plan
- looked after at home, or away from home
- 'on the edge of care', where families would benefit from additional support
- with additional support needs, where there are one or more factors which require significant or co-ordinated support
- affected by disability
- where they and/or their parents are experiencing poor physical or mental health
- experiencing adversities including domestic abuse and bereavement
- requiring support when they are involved in making transitions at critical stages in their lives.

12. Children and families may also experience adversity because of the impact of poverty and disadvantage (including entitlement to free school meals), and many will be facing this because of the necessary measures to respond to the pandemic. This will include families with loss of income, experiencing social isolation, or otherwise struggling because of the lockdown.

Decision making for this group

13. Local authorities and health boards, working with partners including third sector organisations, will either know or be able to identify the children and families within their areas who are potentially at risk and therefore need additional support. The need for additional support can be identified prior to birth, so this should include help for pregnant women.

14. Crucially, vulnerability is not an exclusive concept, but should take account of all of these factors and others, that means that a child and family may need additional support. The judgement of the children's sector professionals – critically those working most closely with the family – will be paramount in assessing vulnerability.

15. Those who work directly with children and young people are best placed to identify children and young people who will require support in order to ensure their wellbeing, as a result of these exceptional phased opening arrangements.

16. As noted above, when determining which vulnerable children should attend school in person, local authorities and schools should have regard to the overarching policy aim of these exceptional school closures, which is to reduce the number of children, young people and adults from different households interacting in- person within communities (including schools) as far as possible, in order to prevent COVID-related harms. If it is possible for children to be cared for safely and have their learning supported sufficiently well at home, that approach should be preferred.

Named Person (key point of contact) service

17. Named persons as key points of contact are a very important first response for vulnerable children (as defined above).
18. Local authorities will consider how best to continue to provide key points of contact during the period from 5 January to 29 January.

Support for children of keyworkers

19. The definitions of key workers agreed with local authorities previously during the pandemic will continue to apply. The need for local flexibility to suit local circumstances is acknowledged. The definition of key workers sets out that:
 - There should be a particular focus on key workers in posts which ensure that essential services can be delivered and cover tasks within the local community which support the vulnerable and aid community resilience. This may be slightly different in each community to allow the country to address local priorities. Whilst decisions will be taken at the local level, we would expect this to include consideration of:
 - Category 1 – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning for other category 1 staff.
 - Category 2 – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.
 - Category 3 – All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to COVID-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).
20. For the avoidance of doubt, during these exceptional arrangements we would expect that all school staff and staff providing daycare of children's services, including early learning and childcare, who are required to attend their work in person, or who cannot otherwise provide essential support for remote learning while working from home, would qualify as category 1 or 2 key workers. Wider groups of healthcare and other workers who have been brought in to support vaccination rollout and Test and Protect would also be expected to qualify under category 1.
21. While there are differences between the current situation and the previous strict lockdown (from March 2020), the gravity of the situation and the overarching aims of the exceptional school closures are judged to be sufficiently similar to support a similar approach as previously to the application of the definition of key workers and the provision of in-person childcare (in w/c 5 January) and schooling (from w/c 11 January).

The following key principles should be applied by local authorities and schools, and communicated clearly to school communities and local employers:

- There should be clarity on the way in which key workers or their employers can apply for places in schools.
- The number of children taking up these places in schools during the strict lockdown period should be kept to the absolute minimum necessary.
- Only key workers who are physically attending their workplace or who cannot fulfil their critical functions when they are working remotely from home may qualify for places.
- Where alternative options are available – e.g. where childcare/remote learning can be provided or supported by one non-key-worker parent or carer who is able to work from home – these should be used instead of children attending school in person. Consideration should be given to ensuring application of this approach does not limit the ability of health and care staff (in category 1) to support the Covid-19 response during this period of acute pressure.
- If it is possible for children to be at home during this exceptional period, until schools reopen to them, then they should be. Whole workforces or entire groups of staff should not be designated as key workers. Doing so would undermine the collective effort we must all make to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives during this period of strict lockdown.

Advice for employees

22. The following advice is for employees who are considering requesting a space in school for their child during this exceptional period on the basis that they are key workers.
23. During this period of strict lockdown, employees should first talk to their employer if they are an employee and they believe:
- they are a key worker
 - it is absolutely necessary for them to attend their place of work to fulfil their critical functions; and
 - they have no access to appropriate alternative childcare/remote learning arrangements. Alternative childcare arrangements may include informal childcare or accessing a childminding service (which remain open to all children at present). See [Your guide to childcare | Parent Club for further information.](#)
24. Together with your employer, you can then make appropriate decisions about whether and how to apply for a place, drawing on local authority guidance.
25. Employees may also seek advice and support from their trade unions in these matters.

Advice for employers

26. The following advice is for employers who believe their employees may be key workers and are considering supporting them to request a space in school for their child during this exceptional period on that basis.
27. During this period of strict lockdown, employers should:

- only contact the relevant local authority to make the case for key worker designation for employees if it is a measure of last resort.
- please contact your local authority for information about the arrangements they have in place. Further information: [contact details for your local authority](#).
- think critically about what staff they consider to be key workers, to ruthlessly prioritise those providing absolutely essential services to the public in these emergency times.
- revisit work with unions and workers to identify only the absolute minimum number of staff performing essential roles to deliver the Covid-19 response and provide basic, safe services.
- reduce in-person staffing levels to the lowest possible number required to maintain the production of essential goods.
- have discussions with staff to identify if they can access any appropriate alternative childcare or remote learning arrangements. This may include another parent/carer who is not a key worker and is able to provide such support effectively from home. Alternative childcare arrangements may also include informal childcare or accessing a childminding service (which remain open to all children at present).

28. You can then support your employee to make appropriate decisions about whether and how to apply for a place, drawing on local authority guidance.

29. Please contact your local authority for information about the arrangements they have in place. Further information: [contact details for your local authority](#).

Complex queries and issues regarding key worker access to in-person learning

30. The main port of call to resolve any issues or challenges over key worker status should always be the local authority concerned. Consideration is being given with partners to any further requirement for support and co-ordination regarding complex queries and issues relating to key worker status.

Implementation of reducing risks guidance (including approach to groupings)

31. All staff (including student teachers from 11 January) and pupils attending schools during the period 5 January to 29 January should continue to implement and strictly observe the mitigations set out at Level 4 in the ***Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools*** guidance, including with regard to face coverings and existing requirements on distancing between secondary pupils (and any additional mitigations that may be identified within updated risk assessments; for example, additional mitigations that are appropriate as a result of fewer people being in schools). The small number of local authority areas in Level 3 should implement Level 3 restrictions, although they will also be subject to the timeline for the reopening of schools set out in this guidance.

32. It has been agreed with clinicians that schools may, if absolutely necessary during the phased start to the term, re-group vulnerable pupils and children of key workers (i.e. move them into different groups to those they were in prior to the festive break). This should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure effective, safe learning and teaching arrangements are in place. It should be done in a way which meets children's needs and enables them to engage in learning and teaching which is age and stage

appropriate. Upon a full return to school, children and young people may return to their original groupings.

33. All staff, student teachers and pupils should continue to be vigilant for coronavirus symptoms. Unless staff are symptomatic or are advised to get a test by a healthcare professional, testing is not a requirement. However, if members of school staff are concerned that they have been at risk from infection, then they may request a test whether or not they have symptoms. Staff should make such requests via their local authority employer, who can book a test for them using the employer portal, or for staff in Orkney, Shetland and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, can advise school staff on the testing arrangements with their local Health Board.

Clinically vulnerable staff and pupils (including individuals on the shielding list)

34. Following consideration by clinicians of the increased risks of transmission of the new strain of coronavirus, new guidance for individuals on the shielding list has been issued for the duration of the lockdown period. This now makes clear that:
- **staff at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) should work from home, and if they cannot do so, they should not work.** A CMO notification will issue to affected individuals in week commencing 4 January 2021. This acts as a fit note for as long as these additional measures are in place – initially until the end of January, to be reviewed after two weeks. The CMO letter means that a GP fit note is not required.
 - **children and young people at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) should not attend school in person.** Arrangements for learning from home will be put in place for children and young people who cannot attend school or college in person due to shielding requirements. The local education service will provide advice on the support available for children who are being asked not to attend school, college or childcare under additional protective measures
35. This lockdown advice does not change the existing Level 4 advice, which may replace this exceptional advice following any return to school after lockdown ends.
36. The arrangements for all other clinically vulnerable school staff and pupils as set out in the reducing risks in schools guidance should be followed. This includes the [baseline advice](#) (which applies as standard throughout all levels) and the [enhanced protections at Levels 3 and 4](#). This guidance makes clear that individual risk assessments should be in place for clinically vulnerable staff. Local authorities should ensure that clinical advice is taken fully into account when updating these individual risk assessments and agreeing appropriate mitigations with employees. [Updated guidance](#) for pregnant employees is now available and should be followed (note that staff who are both pregnant and on the shielding list should follow the guidance for staff at the highest clinical risk above).
37. Information on shielding, including who would be considered within the highest risk group, is available in [COVID-19: shielding advice and support](#). Where concerns exist, [guidance for people with underlying health conditions](#) has been prepared and will continue to be updated. School staff who have underlying health conditions will wish to

be aware of this advice in order to inform discussions with their employer, trade union and/or healthcare team in line with the current guidance on reducing risks in schools.

Remote learning support

38. The guidance on reducing risks in schools includes [guidance on contingency planning](#). The advice is based on the assumption that practitioners know their learners best, and can arrange learning which is appropriate to the needs and circumstances of their learners. It should also be assumed that learners will know what they are to do when remote learning and that parents/carers are fully informed of the contingency plans in place. All schools and local authorities should therefore have well-developed plans for remote learning. These should be reviewed as early as possible to ensure they are current and appropriate for fully remote learning, and updated as required.
39. Resources to support remote learning in non-school settings have been developed within local authorities, through Education Scotland and Regional Improvement Collaboratives, including national initiatives and partnerships.
40. A variety of options may be considered. These may include, for example, written work, online tasks using Glow or Google Classroom, access to live lessons through Glow (for example, by communicating through the chat function or through live video links with learners), or access to recorded lessons. Practitioners know their learners best, and should be arranging learning which is appropriate to their needs and circumstances.
41. Education Scotland, e-Sgoil, ADES and Regional Improvement Collaboratives have worked very closely with all 32 local authorities to strengthen the overall national offer of support for e-learning through partnership working. This offer includes access to **live**, **recorded** and **supported** learning resources as part of the [National e-Learning Offer](#).
- **Live** – e-Sgoil has been widening access to a range of programmes covering ages 3 to 18 since August 2020 augmenting the work of classroom teachers across the country. The first example of this was in August 2020, when e-Sgoil announced a package of free, live, interactive online study webinars for senior phase pupils starting 7 September.
 - **Recorded** – Teachers in the West Partnership and Tayside have developed a series of over 400 recorded lessons for BGE and senior phase. The first set of videos are now available and will be added to shortly. These recorded lessons are available through Glow by local authorities signing up to ClickView, free of charge.
 - **Supported** – Teachers in their subject networks have shared and developed resources for online access and use. Nearly 14,000 supported resources are available across 14 subjects. The materials have been developed by teachers for teachers and are available through Glow.
42. As a further aspect to its national offer, Education Scotland's Scotland Learns provides additional learning at home activities.
43. The e-Sgoil provision is one part of the wider national offer of e-learning support, and can respond to requests for additional support from local authorities.

44. E-Sgoil programmes are in place for Early Level and for First to Third/Fourth Levels BGE. The programmes are designed to complement the curriculum and remote learning being provided by schools and local authorities across Scotland. The programmes are developed iteratively, in collaboration with schools and partners, building on what works. They will adapt and change in response to need.
45. Live lessons for secondary BGE are delivered in a rolling series of four, two-week programmes, catering directly for teachers and young people self-isolating. Programme details and timetables are available on the e-Sgoil website <http://www.e-sgoil.com/esgoilbgeoffer2020/>.
46. A refreshed Senior Phase daytime provision will be available from 11 January 2021 taking account of changed guidance and arrangements from SQA. This senior phase offer is live on the e-Sgoil website <http://www.e-sgoil.com/seniorphase20/>.
47. Study support sessions are currently running for young people in the senior phase and will continue to do so in response to demand. The following subjects are available via the e-Sgoil Senior Phase study support offer:

National 5 (4)	Higher (13)		Advanced Higher (8)
Mathematics	Physics	Music	Biology
Physics	Chemistry	Spanish	Chemistry
English	Mathematics	French	English
Computing	English	Gaelic learners	French
Science	Business	Gàidhlig	Mathematics
	Management	Religious, moral	Modern Studies
	Health and Food	and philosophical	Physics
	Technology	studies	Spanish
	History	Human Biology	

48. In addition, the [National Improvement Hub](#) provides learning resources, webinars and links to [Glow Connect](#), a resource where teachers can to get information, help and support for Glow. Regional Improvement Collaborative Partnerships of local authorities have further information and support on Curriculum and blended learning for teachers which can be accessed through Glow. [Live and recorded webinars and blogs for practitioners with advice on learning and teaching online and on making the best use of digital platforms](#) continue to be made available through digilearn.scot. Further innovative work is underway via the regional improvement collaboratives.
49. Local authorities and schools should continue the work they have been undertaking in relation to tackling digital exclusion. This includes the provision of devices and connectivity solutions to support educational continuity when children and young people are learning outside of the school environment. This local activity is supplemented by the Scottish Government's £25m investment in digital devices and connectivity solutions designed to combat digital exclusion in school-aged children and young people.

Assessments for senior pupils being affected by these decisions

50. In acknowledgement of COVID-19 related disruption to young people's education this academic year, the Deputy First Minister outlined to Parliament on 8 December that National Qualifications in 2020-2021 will be awarded on evidence of demonstrated attainment, supported by local and national quality assurance processes. The alternative certification model offers flexibility and will help to alleviate some of the impacts on learning. Work is ongoing, led by SQA in collaboration with the education system, to produce further guidance for Higher and Advanced Higher.
51. Individual schools can provide more information on the arrangements for forthcoming assessments including the support young people can receive.
52. Individual schools may have prelim exams scheduled for the period between 5 January and 29 January. Prelims are not a required part of the qualifications process and decisions with regards to this matter rest with individual schools. It should, however, be noted that the guidance issued by the National Qualifications 2021 Group in October outlined advice on gathering evidence and producing estimates for National Qualifications, in light of the exams being cancelled. This outlined that a range of candidate evidence for provisional results should be gathered to demonstrate attainment across the course, and that a range of flexible assessment approaches could be used.

School meals

53. Under the provision of section 53 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities must promote the availability of school lunches at all schools, and any other educational establishments under their management, and they must encourage all pupils in attendance to consume those school lunches. In the case of free school meals, education authorities are also required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that every pupil who is entitled to free school lunches receives them.

Free school meals provision during the period 5 January to 29 January

54. The arrangements for free school meals over the Christmas school holidays should be rolled on for the period 5 January to 29 January initially. Local authorities and schools should continue to provide free school meals or alternatives, for children and young people who are eligible for free school meals.
55. These can be provided using a range of methods in line with family preference including: cash payments to families of eligible children; supermarket vouchers; home deliveries or through attendance at school. These options are not exhaustive and there may be alternatives which would better suit local needs and circumstances.
56. Local authorities and schools will use different approaches depending on their individual circumstances and in response to local need. These approaches may also need to change due to health protection advice.
57. Information on eligibility criteria is available from <https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals/>.

Provision for special diets

58. Local authorities and schools will continue to ensure that pupils with special diets or allergies are catered for. No matter which option is chosen to provide meals to pupils, care needs to be taken to check whether any pupils have allergies or special diets before food is provided.

Communicating with families

59. Local authorities and schools should ensure arrangements are put in place to communicate what the changes to the start of term in January 2021 means for individual families as soon as is practically possible, and continue to communicate regularly thereafter. Consideration should be given to matters such as the needs of separated parents (having regard to the appropriateness of both parents being provided with information), parents for whom English is an additional language and parents/carers with disabilities. The importance of complying with mitigations should also be reinforced with all members of the school community.

60. Guidance for early learning and childcare settings, schools and local authorities on [communicating with and reporting to parents during COVID-19](#) and [supporting parents and pupils with learning at home during COVID-19](#) is available on [Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub](#).

61. Information to support parents includes:

- A [Parent Club COVID-19 internet microsite](#), which contains advice on working from home whilst caring for children, advice on helping children with remote and blended learning as well as links to advice and support resources for parents of children with additional support needs.
- Education Scotland's [Parentzone Scotland](#) website includes advice for parents, families and practitioners on supporting children and young people's learning during COVID-19.
- The [National Parent Forum Nutshell guide on blended learning](#), published in August 2020. This joins further Nutshells on [Supporting Learning at Home during "lockdown"](#) and on [online safety](#).
- Education Scotland's [Scotland Learns](#) initiative provides newsletters and online resources for teachers and for parents/carers.

62. When children and young people are learning at home, schools and local authorities should ensure communication with families to maximise engagement in learning, offering any support or advice that may be needed. This may include, for example, local authorities working to ensure provision of devices and/or internet connectivity where necessary.

63. Young Scot have updated their guidance for children and young people to include information on the phased start to the term in January 2021. This can be accessed through the Young Scot website: [Going to School During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic | Young Scot](#)

Annex – Supplementary guidance for residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities

Application

1. All schools, including residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities, should have regard to the measures set out in the main school guidance and apply them as appropriate in their specific settings. This supplementary guidance is intended for school care accommodation services, provided for the purpose of pupils in attendance at a public, independent or grant-aided school, and consisting of the provision of residential accommodation. For clarity, this includes residential, special and secure accommodation. These include independent boarding school facilities and residence halls provided by local authority secondary schools.

Supplementary information

2. As set out in 'Arrangements for the phased reopening of schools in January 2021', local authority schools will effectively have the school holiday period extended for all children (not including those that meet the definitions of vulnerable children, or children of key workers) until Monday 11 January. All pupils will be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning during the week from Monday 11 January to Friday 29 January 2021.

3. It is anticipated that independent schools may wish to follow their own existing timetable of reopening, adapting this as needed to allow time to establish effective remote learning arrangements. No schools are expected to commence face-to-face teaching (other than for vulnerable children, or children of key workers) before 1 February 2021, as a precautionary measure in light of the latest developments in the path of the virus.

4. A review of these arrangements will be undertaken on **Monday 18 January**, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels. Arrangements for the period from Monday 1 February onwards will be communicated at the earliest opportunity following this review. Further guidance on the safe return to boarding/hostel accommodation will be prepared and published in advance of this date. It is acknowledged that further consideration will be required to enable boarding school pupils, parents, host families and schools to plan their return safely, including those travelling from other UK nations, or from outside the UK, and updated guidance will be provided as soon as possible.

5. This means that pupils who 'board' at their school, whether independent, grant aided or local authority provision, should **not** return to school at the start of term in January 2021. Independent schools, like those in state provision, should provide remote learning – including for boarders. Where boarders are key worker children, they should be able to access their local school or hub.

6. Where pupils are considered to be vulnerable (in line with definitions set out earlier in this guidance), particularly those attending residential special schools, schools should assess how to effectively continue to meet their needs, including, where necessary, through provision of a residential place.

7. With reference to the guidance letter issued on 26 November 2020 to independent schools, if support bubbles for returning children are required (for vulnerable children, or children of key workers) these 10 day bubbles would ideally be:

- with others from similar prevalence areas;
- as small as is practically possible;
- age-specific (given the risk of spread for different age groups);
- smaller the older the children are.

Bubbles would need to endure through all the normal communal activities, including eating, recreation, transport, exercise and learning, for that 10 day period. If a child develops symptoms, then the corresponding bubble would need to isolate as per standard guidance from symptom onset.