

Managing blended approaches



As schools begin to open more widely for more pupils, teachers will be engaged in both face-to-face teaching and continuing to support remote learning.

This will require considered approaches to ensure that face-to-face teaching provides the right support for pupils, and that the

blended approach does not make teacher workload unmanageable.

All of this is dependent on health and safety risks being properly managed.



Principles: Teaching and learning in this new context must be:

1 Safe:

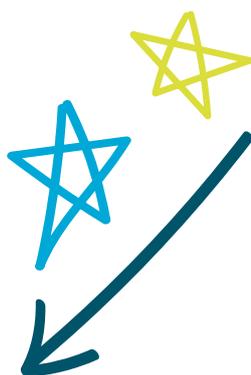
Once staff have agreed that risks can be properly managed, teaching must be planned so that it is as safe as possible for both pupils and staff. This might mean a greater proportion of outdoor learning, particularly for younger children, which will also serve to provide physical challenges, play and social development. It could mean balancing outdoor, indoor and digital learning, which will also provide activity for remote learning. For secondary pupils returning, schools might consider big blocks of learning rather than many different subject lessons, lessening the amount of classroom or teacher changes. This might be an opportunity for problem-based learning which is cross-curricular.

A focus on safety also includes consideration of pupils' mental health and wellbeing. The school environment will look very different for pupils, they may be engaging with unfamiliar resources and different adults, and may not be attending at the same time as friends. Schools should be aware of the impact this may have on pupils' wellbeing and develop support for pupils to identify and manage their emotions.

Schools will also be considering the impact of wider opening on the local community. This will include both the safety of children and parents at the start and end of the day, but also the impact of staggered start times on the local area, the possible increase in traffic as parents drive children to school, and the different ways in which older pupils will make their way to school. Schools will be considering how to manage the safety of older pupils to ensure that they are not absent when they should be attending, while not putting pressure on families to return too soon.

For staff, a safe return must mean that only those staff who are working with pupils are in school, that staff meetings and training continue to be carried out remotely.

Where the blended approach uses online lessons as part of the offer, digital safety and safeguarding must continue to be a priority.



2 Fair:

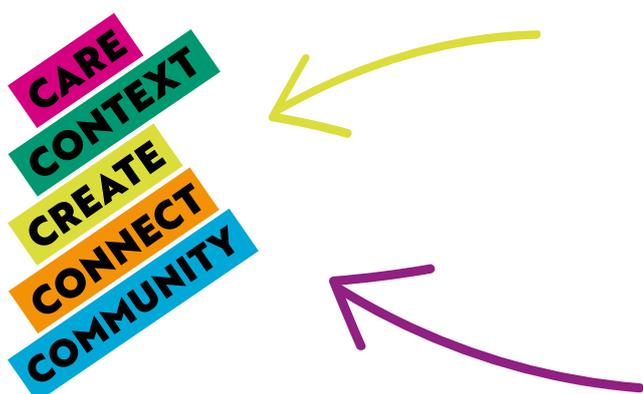
Not all year groups are returning to school, and within those year groups not all pupils will return, because of health issues or safety worries. Schools will continue to be open to children of key workers, and vulnerable pupils, in all year groups. Schools must however provide education opportunities for all pupils whether they are in school or not. This means that remote learning will continue to be necessary, both for those year groups not in school, and for those pupils not in school. NEU has advice on distance learning for [primary pupils](#) and for [secondary pupils](#).

Evidence suggests that disadvantaged families are less likely to send their children back to school at this time, and many Black families may also feel that it is less safe for their children to attend due to the health inequalities that have been identified. Schools will need to consider how to provide more support to these pupils.

Fairness may also mean prioritising provision for particular groups of pupils, for example those with Special Needs who may need additional support for remote learning. For pupils in schools, it may mean prioritising individual support for pupils who have been less able to access learning during lockdown. Schools will need to manage parental expectations as teachers will not be able to provide the same level of support for all pupils.

Those children who are not returning to school may feel more isolated once peers are in school. Schools will want to continue to support them to feel included within the school community.

Not all staff will be able to return to school either. Those staff who remain at home must be treated fairly, and cannot be expected simply to take on work of those who are face-to-face teaching. Those staff who are in school should not be expected to carry out tasks that are not part of their contracts such as cleaning classrooms or toilets, and support staff should not be expected to teach.



3 Realistic:

Social distancing and splitting classes will mean that education cannot be the same now as it was before lockdown. At least initially, there may be many classes with only a handful of pupils attending. For pupils attending school, many activities will not be able to continue as they did. Pupils are likely to spend more time on individual or whole class work rather than small group work, but teachers will still be able to balance teacher-directed activity with pupil-led work, and smaller class sizes may mean more opportunities for conversation and sustained shared thinking.

Pupils will have missed different amounts of learning, and some will have developed unhelpful learning habits, misconceptions and misunderstandings. Realistic teaching will not be able to start from where pupils 'should' be, or even where they were when lockdown began, and schools should not put pressure on pupils to 'catch-up'. It is equally difficult to press pupils into a curriculum when it is not yet clear what the expectations are for the next academic year. The NEU believes that national testing in primary schools will need to be removed in 2020/21, including baseline assessment. In secondary schools, we believe it will be impossible to carry out GCSE and A levels in 2021 in the same way as 2019, and that Government should quickly decide that content should be slimmed down and examined differently. This will enable schools to focus on pupils' needs and on deeper learning rather than on superficial approaches to pass tests.

Instead, the first priority for learning will be for teachers to understand what pupils need, and to plan lessons around that. This will mean a focus on emotional health and wellbeing and developing learning 'fitness' including behaviours for learning, as well as understanding pupils' individual learning needs. NEU guidance on summer learning provides [more information](#).

Where schools are operating a rota system, and particularly in secondary where groups of pupils will be attending on different days, schools should give consideration to how the face-to-face teaching is supplemented by remote learning. They will continue to consider how remote learning is made manageable for pupils, and how parents will be supported to help their children where they can.



4 Manageable:

Teacher workload was already high before this crisis. The removal of Ofsted and league tables for this year will have made some difference in enabling schools to focus on what's important for pupils, and they should remain suspended for the next academic year. Teachers have quickly moved to developing online lessons and finding new ways to connect with pupils, as well as providing additional support for families in need. This additional workload has been compounded by pressures for some to be on rotas in school, and for many to juggle their own childcare with work.

Wider school opening has the potential to increase workload exponentially, as teachers plan lessons for in-school and remote learning. Schools must be able to manage this blended approach without adding to staff workload. Staffing must be managed so that staff have adequate breaks during the day, and teachers must be given PPA time on a weekly basis, which can be taken at home. School leaders will know which staff will be continuing to work at home rather than in school, and should plan to ensure these staff can support pupils' home learning. This may mean an increase in time spent collaborating with colleagues, and this must be built into the school day not expected as an extra. Any additional work, such as report writing and planning for next term, must be allocated adequate time, and teachers should negotiate a reduction in other activities to make time for this work. Support staff must not be expected to be in classes or with children all day, and must be given adequate breaks including a lunch break away from the children. Members should work together to identify any increase in workload, and any particular pinch points, and negotiate to ensure that this is manageable and reasonable for all staff.

Pressures on headteachers and other SLT have been high in developing this blended approach, not helped by the lack of clarity in guidance from government, the numerous changes to the guidance, and the expectation that headteachers will make high pressured decisions about the safety of their schools when there is little consensus on the science. This is added to the pressure that many have faced by being on site almost constantly as schools have been open, and the need to provide support for families in need with food, delivering creative packs and other necessary resources for learning, and signposting to other support services. Wider opening will add to these pressures, and SLT should consider how they will manage their own workload, through sharing and delegating responsibilities where possible, and what support they can access, to make this period manageable.

Although it is vital to ensure that working hours are kept at a reasonable level, it is also important to focus on staff wellbeing, which is about more than hours worked. Members could work together to identify ways in which they can support each other, and particularly to maintain or improve the professional community when people are not working in the same place or at the same times.

5 Forward looking:

Although the pressures are high, this blended approach will need to have an eye to the future. Government is increasingly talking about all pupils being back in school in the autumn term, but it is not clear how straightforward this will be to implement. The possibilities of a second spike in the virus, or local lockdowns, mean that pupils and staff may need to self-isolate at very short notice, in many cases without actually developing the illness themselves. Schools will need to be thinking about how to continue a blended approach in the longer term. This should be more than planning online and remote lessons, but giving thought to how the face-to-face interaction will support and enhance the remote learning. Teachers must be given time to think this through in a coherent and planned way.

