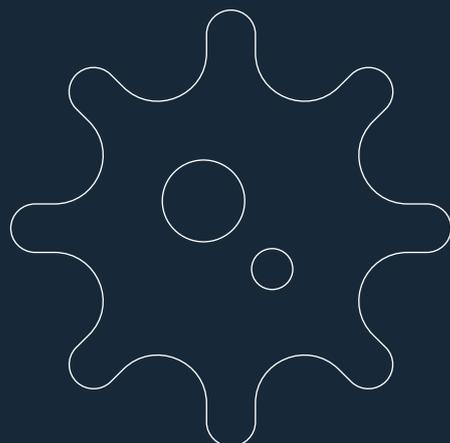


Coronavirus
guidance



Rota systems in secondary schools and colleges



Moving to rota systems in secondary schools and colleges



With coronavirus infection rates rising across the country – particularly among teenagers – the National Education Union (NEU) is looking at how adopting rota systems in secondary schools and colleges could provide continuous education while helping to suppress the virus among students, staff and in the community.

Modelling for the [SAGE](#) Schools subgroup suggests that alternating week-on, week-off rota system halving class sizes would have an equivalent impact on transmission rates to the closure of bars, pubs, cafés and restaurants, which is beyond Tier 3 restrictions on hospitality.

Rising infection rates in secondary-age pupils

- Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Infection survey shows that, while infection rates in older teenagers and young adults now appear to be levelling off, the highest rates continue to be seen in this group.
- There was a 50-fold increase in Covid-19 cases amongst secondary pupils from 1 September to 23 October.
- During the week of the half-term closure, cases amongst secondary-age pupils fell back – from 50x the rate to 38x that rate – confirming the role of schools in the transmission of the virus.

Government approach to rotas

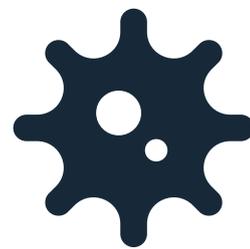
The Government's approach is contradictory and confusing. In August guidelines to schools set out four tiers of "national restriction for education and childcare", with the second highest tier seeing secondary schools moving to a rota system, combining on-site provision with remote education.

Confusingly, the subsequently announced three-tiered system of local Covid Alert Levels in England stipulated that schools and universities remain open even in the third tier where infections are at a "a very high level".

Since then, the Government missed the opportunity to have a circuit break over the October half-term when schools would have been closed anyway. As has been demonstrated in Wales, this would have helped bring down the infection rate. It would also have given time for schools to prepare and plan to open with rota-based systems where necessary. The Government has also refused to include schools in the new national lockdown and has not recommended rota systems or any other significant change to school operation to help bring down infection rates.

With current guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) staff to work at home, and with no additional funding available for supply cover for other staff who are self-isolating, many schools are struggling to find enough teachers for face-





to-face lessons. While we would anticipate that most online lessons will be facilitated from school, properly planned rotas would also enable staff who are isolating but well to continue to work from home where possible.

There is increasing support for a move to rota systems. Steve Chalke, founder of the OASIS academy chain, has **called for** support from Government and an additional break before Christmas to allow schools to move to rota systems. There is increasing recognition that the current situation – with many pupils absent from school due to virus infection and the lack of a good test, track and isolate system – is not sustainable.

How rota systems are already working

A number of sixth form colleges in which NEU members work have already successfully implemented rota systems. These have been introduced to ensure staff and pupils are as safe as possible while maximising continuity of education. Different models are being used which both involve students attending college for one week and having remote learning for the next.

A common model being adopted is for Year 12 student to attend one week, year 13 in the next. Lessons for the year group attending college are taught as normal. Lessons for the year group that is not in college take place as timetabled and from the college premises but are taught remotely.

A teacher's experience

“ We have been operating this model since the start of term and have seen consistently high attendance in both physical and remote lessons. Travelling in by public transport is stressful and hard due to reduced capacity and this arrangement has helped students with that, especially for those coming from further away. There are fewer students in at any one time, so we can use the larger teaching spaces more efficiently and cleaning can be undertaken without disrupting classes.

Adapting has been a challenge: the demands on teaching staff are very high and moving between the two types of teaching is difficult. Being given professional autonomy is important to managing this. A supportive and well-resourced IT department has been vital: all teachers have been provided with a laptop. The college has been able to loan laptops to some pupil premium students although students' lack of access to equipment and technology is the biggest difficulty.

Overall, this seems like the best option both in terms of safety and supporting students under these difficult circumstances.”





Adoption of rota systems

The Government has failed to take action in the face of soaring infection rates in schools. We need an effective plan to keep as many children in education as safely as possible and bring down the infection rate.

There are clear advantages from the point of view of staff and pupil safety to adopting rota systems in secondary schools and colleges, but schools need time and support. Adopting a rota system would mean significantly reducing the student population: lessening crowding on school transport and in school buildings. There is also less pressure on the school site and more opportunity for effective cleaning.

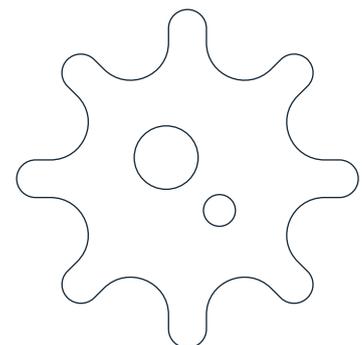
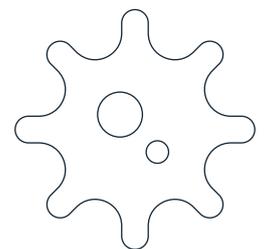
Rotas have worked at sixth form level but are more complex for younger secondary pupils and with more year groups. Schools would need to consider whether all year groups are put on a rota. As all pupils and staff are expected to stay on their normal timetable, school leaders, department heads and staff will need to consider how best to operate a rota system in their school.

Student access to equipment and the internet is a key issue that needs funding and action from the Government: a mobile phone on its own is not enough to be able to follow lessons and complete work. Unfortunately, Government wrote to schools just before half term to cut their allocation of laptops. We also know that internet access can be enormously expensive for families that use pay-as-you-go or are on low incomes.

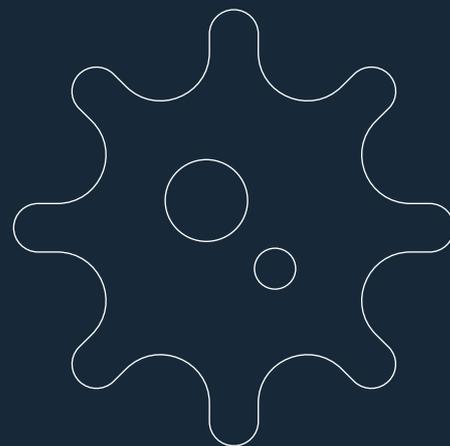
Students studying from home who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) remain eligible, but challenges remain in supporting families to access this scheme – especially in areas where children must travel long distances to school. Some schools have been able to continue FSM provision in the way they have been for students who are self-isolating or are in quarantine periods. This can involve making it clear where FSM can be collected from, or using local volunteer schemes to ensure that school meals can be delivered where there's no alternative.

Colleges have shown that rota systems are already operating well and can be adopted with effective support from school leadership, IT departments and a focus on student welfare and access to technology.

However, the challenges are obvious. We are seeking your feedback on whether it is possible to meet them, and what support would be necessary for rotas to work effectively for pupils' learning and staff wellbeing.



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