

# **Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales: Expectations for Education and Childcare**

## **Ministerial Foreword**

In March this year, faced with an unprecedented set of circumstances, education and childcare settings across Wales made significant changes to the way in which they operated. Restrictions on the numbers of staff, children, young people and learners who could be on site at any time had a huge impact on the way these settings run, and the services they provided.

The response of the education, childcare youthwork and playwork workforces was astonishing. Overnight we saw remote learning provision put in to place at a pace and scale inconceivable just weeks before. The care and support provided to our more vulnerable children, and the children of our critical workers who needed to attend school hubs and childcare, has been exceptional. And while not everything worked perfectly from day one, the arrangements evolved to ensure support and learning was available for all of our children, young people and learners.

We were able to increase the operations of our education and childcare settings towards the end of the summer term, and are now at a point where most are open and offering services to all of their children, young people and learners. It is, however, clear that while our education and childcare settings are striving to provide the best experiences possible under the current circumstances, things will not be the same as they have been previously.

All of our education and childcare settings have made adjustments to ensure they are operating safely for staff, children, young people and learners, and that means some services will look and feel different. Some of these may be temporary changes; some may be in place for longer. We will also need to make further adjustments to continue to manage the virus.

The challenges the education system faces in adapting to covid-19 cannot be underestimated. For the time being, managing COVID-19 must be seen as part of the operation of education settings. We are already seeing cases in some settings, and local lockdowns in a number of areas of Wales. This only serves to emphasise how rapidly things can change, and how important it is for our educational leaders, practitioners and learners themselves to be ready to respond and adapt. Continued close working between different parts of the education system in Wales will help identify where support is needed, including opportunities to address pressures

In going forwards we must learn from the experiences of the last few months and ensure that any steps we take are proportionate to the circumstances we face. We must take full account of the impact on our children, young people and learners and ensure they can continue to access education and childcare and continue to learn.

## Introduction

In May we published our *decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare*. Our decision framework set out the key principles for the next phase for both education<sup>1</sup> and childcare<sup>2</sup>. These principles remain central to our planning for education and childcare settings across Wales, and underpin our guidance on covid-secure operations.

Critical to those operations is undertaking risk assessments, and implementing appropriate control measures. This is something all education and childcare settings will need to do, proportionately to their services and the sites they operate from, and ensuring they remain safe places for their staff, and the children, young people and learners they support. Consultation with key partners, and specifically with staff, children, young people and learners, will be central to taking and implementing appropriate decisions.

This Plan sets out our expectations for the operation of education and childcare settings at each of the stages in the wider *Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales*. It is intended to provide education and childcare settings with the information they need to plan for each stage of the response, and to put in place appropriate arrangements to ensure that they continue to meet their statutory duties and responsibilities.

Keeping education and childcare settings open for as long as possible is our clear, stated intention. However, while it is unlikely we would mandate the closure of all education and childcare settings in their entirety, we understand that closures at a local level will occur from time to time. We are seeing absences from settings amongst staff, children, young people and learners at all stages of our response, and the scale of absences may mean taking difficult decisions.

This plan is aimed at registered childcare and playwork providers, maintained schools (including special schools), Further Education Institutions, work-based and adult learning providers, and providers of education other than at school (EOTAS). The content is also relevant to unregistered childcare and playwork providers and independent schools.

In August we published guidance to help youth work settings in their decision making process when deciding to expand or reopen their services. That guidance relates to all youth work settings including schools, voluntary organisations, local authority settings outside of schools and private youth work providers. Where based in settings that would be covered by this guidance appropriate consideration should be given to expectations set out here. Additionally consideration should be given to the support needed for those children and young people who are at risk of disengaging working through the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.

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<sup>1</sup> The term Education refers collectively to all forms of education provision in maintained schools, special schools, Further Education Institutions, work based and adult learning providers and providers of EOTAS. Where a reference is to a specific type of setting, such as a school, only that term will be used.

<sup>2</sup> The term Childcare refers collectively to all forms of registered childcare and playwork provision in maintained and non-maintained settings and includes Flying Start childcare provision. Where a reference is to a specific type of setting, such as a day care provider, only that term will be used. While not aimed at non-registered provision the plan is equally relevant to their considerations.

## **The evidence: what we know**

Our understanding of COVID-19 continues to evolve. The more we learn about the virus, the better our approaches to containing and managing transmission within the population. Since March a significant amount of work has been done to understand the impacts and risks in relation to children, young people and learners and staff.

On 7 July our Technical Advisory Group published advice on the return to school. That advice, which was also relevant to childcare settings, stated that while children under the age of 18 make up 22-25% of the population, they consistently account for less than 2% of all covid cases in all countries. Children and young people can, and do, catch COVID-19 but the infection generally takes a milder course, most children having mild symptoms and a very low rate of hospital admission. There is also very little evidence of transmission of virus within the school context from children to staff.

The evidence also suggests that child to child transmission is low, with most children who contract COVID-19 doing so from adults within their own household where there is prolonged exposure. Transmissibility in children under 12 appears to be particularly low. Consequently, where wider measures are taken to control and manage transmission (such as the use of limited contact groups and increased hygiene) education and childcare settings can help to provide a COVID-secure environment for children, young people and learners.

The position with regards to older learners and those in the 18-25 age range is different. While transmission rates remain lower than for other adult age groups, the risks of catching or passing on the virus are higher than they are for children. It is also likely that many people in this age range will be asymptomatic, making it harder for them to know whether or not they are ill. Their activities outside their education settings, including social and family gatherings, cannot be controlled by their institutions. Consequently for this age range there is an increased level of importance in following the wider infection control advice regarding distancing, increase hygiene measures and wearing face coverings in public places.

It is, however, important to remember that while risks can be managed and minimised by hygiene, distancing and reducing face to face contacts, they cannot be entirely eliminated. These risks should all be taken into account in the risk assessments undertaken by education and childcare settings. Those risk assessments should be regularly updated to reflect evolving evidence and changes in local transmission and infection rates. Education and childcare settings will need to put in place plans to respond to new cases, clusters, incidents and outbreaks related to COVID-19 on their sites and in their local areas, and discuss them with staff, parents, children, young people and learners.

We will keep the evidence around the virus under review, and amend our expectations and guidance as new information emerges.

## **Stay Safe – Stay Learning**

In April we published our Stay Safe. Stay Learning: Continuity of learning policy statement, setting out our commitment to ongoing learning, utilising a variety of new ways of working. This commitment remains steadfast and we will prioritise keeping education and childcare settings open for onsite provision. However, if the time comes where it is necessary to restrict onsite services, or move to blended or remote learning, it is critical that education settings ensure continuity of learning for all children, young people and learners with the provision of appropriate learning materials and remote teaching methodologies.

The Minister for Education has issued a notice which modifies the requirements to provide the national curriculum to a reasonable endeavours basis for the first month of the school year within all maintained schools and funded non-maintained nursery settings. In line with the Coronavirus Act requirements, the Minister will decide on a monthly basis whether to extend this. Our learning guidance for schools emphasises the importance of blended learning as a pedagogical approach, and particularly in the case where schools are unable to provide space for all learners. The learning guidance also emphasises the importance of schools providing an ambitious and broad offer to learners, supporting their wellbeing, and ensuring they communicate effectively with parents and carers about learning provision.

The Welsh Government continues to prioritise the need for learning, and to maximise engagement in learning whilst recognising levels of disruption in schools. The Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards offer is key to this, specifically prioritising the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners and the exam cohorts in all scenarios. Our aspiration is that learning can be as full as possible through the 2020/21 academic year, particularly through the use of blended learning techniques where there is disruption.

The WJEC has published proposed adaptations to course content for 2020/21 to enable learners to prepare as effectively as possible for examinations in 2021. The Minister for Education has also commissioned an independent review of the 2020 examination series, an interim report is due in October 2020. Further announcements on 2021 qualifications will be made in due course.

Guidance to support blended learning in the post-16 sector has also been provided. It will be important that we ensure broad and challenging learning experiences continue to be provided to learners, and that they can experience the broad scope of their courses. We know that many post-16 providers have developed a high-quality digital learning offer, but do not underestimate the challenges of keeping learners of all levels engaged and motivated, particularly at the early stages of the academic year.

Specific consideration will need to be given to the support of our more vulnerable learners, including those with special educational needs and those who are digitally excluded or digitally disadvantaged. The impacts on children, young people and learners will need to be assessed, considered and addressed, with specific consideration of impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Vulnerable learners and particularly those with safeguarding, medical or health concerns will also require

additional consideration to ensure their needs are met. Access to teaching staff, youth workers and other relevant support services should be maintained on a safe basis.

## Escalation Approach

Our national approach to containing coronavirus as set out in the *Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales* is based on the principles of **caution**, **proportionality** and **subsidiarity**.

The hierarchy of escalation set out within that plan is:



Working within a national framework, decisions will be taken at the most appropriate level relative to the scale of the action required, so that they can respond to issues as and when they arise. In all cases education and childcare settings, and local authorities, should ensure they understand the regulatory framework they operate within and that they are able to meet their full statutory obligations in the way they deliver their services.

## Prevention



The most effective way to control coronavirus is to prevent it from spreading in the first place. Key to operating education and childcare settings in a way which prevents spread of the virus is following the health and safety hierarchy of controls. A copy of the hierarchy is at Annex A.

### What should education and childcare services look like at the **Prevention** stage?

At this stage childcare and education settings in Wales should remain open, providing for a wide range of children, young people and learners:

- Childcare and playwork settings, including Flying Start settings, can operate in line with their Care Inspectorate Wales registration and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for childcare<sup>3</sup>, taking account of the guidance on Protective Measures for Childcare;

<sup>3</sup> The National Minimum Standards have been temporarily relaxed to support childcare and playwork settings in responding to Covid19. These relaxations are in place until December 2020. Unregistered childcare and playwork settings should be taking account of the NMS and the guidance on Protective Measures for childcare.

- All maintained schools, including special schools and EOTAS, will be operating on the basis of a full return from 14 September, when school attendance will be compulsory for all learners, taking account of the guidance on the operation of schools. Where necessary EOTAS learners should be able to attend their multiple education settings;
- Further Education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning providers will be operating on the basis of a full return from 1 September, in line with the Welsh Government's safe operation guidance;

It is likely that even at the **Prevention** stage there will be some staff, children, young people and learners who are not in attendance at their usual education or childcare setting. This may be because of concerns about health impacts or their safety in returning to provision. Some staff, children, young people and learners may also be absent for periods of up to 14 days due to the need to isolate. It will be essential to ensure that these children and young people are safe, seen and heard during this time to ensure no safeguarding issues emerge.

Childcare settings should manage absences as they would normally being mindful of potential safeguarding issues. Education settings should refer to the section on **Blended and Remote Learning**.

### New Cases and Clusters



The virus has not gone away and even with prevention measures in place we will continue to see new cases as more of society opens up and we enter the autumn and winter.

### What should education and childcare services look like at the **New Cases and Clusters** stage?

At this stage childcare and education settings in Wales should remain open, providing for a wide range of children, young people and learners as at the **Prevention** stage:

- Childcare and playwork settings, including Flying Start settings, can operate in line with their Care Inspectorate Wales registration and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for childcare, taking account of the guidance on Protective Measures for Childcare;
- All maintained schools including special schools and EOTAS will be operating on the basis of a full return from 14 September, when school attendance will be compulsory for all learners, taking account of the guidance on the operation of schools;

- Further Education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning providers can operate blended learning models, with combinations of face-to-face and remote learning and appropriate controls in place for different learner groups and subjects, in line with the Welsh Government's safe operation guidance;

This stage of the response to the virus is likely to see an increased number of staff, children, young people and learners isolating. The same approach should be taken here as at the **Prevention** stage. Education settings should refer to the section on **Blended or Remote Learning**.

### Incidents and Outbreaks



Where an incident or outbreak is declared, an Incident Management Team or Outbreak Control Team is likely to be established in line with the Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales. Whether it is an IMT or OCT will depend on the scale of the incident or outbreak with decisions taken by the relevant leads within the local authority, the Local Health Board and Public Health Wales. Leadership of the response will sit with the Chair of the IMT or OCT- and they will determine what actions are necessary.

In the majority of cases an incident or outbreak will be managed and contained at a local level without the need for further escalation and more general measures or restrictions. However, there may be some cases where the OCT requires premises to close and that could potentially include education and childcare settings in certain circumstances.

### What should education and childcare services look like at **Incident and Outbreak** stage?

At this stage childcare and education settings in Wales can open, providing for a wide range of children and young people as at the **Prevention** and **New Cases and Clusters** stages:

- Childcare and playwork settings, including Flying Start settings, can operate in line with their Care Inspectorate Wales registration and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for childcare for childcare, taking account of the guidance on Protective Measures for Childcare;
- All maintained schools including special schools and pupil referral units will be operating on the basis of a full return from 14 September, when school attendance will be compulsory for all learners, taking account of the guidance on the operation of schools;
- Further Education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning providers can operate blended learning models, with combinations of face-to-face and

remote learning and appropriate controls in place for different learner groups and subjects, in line with the Welsh Government's safe operation guidance;

At this stage we are likely to see even greater numbers of staff, children, young people and learners being required to isolate. The same approach should be taken here as at the **Prevention** stage. Education settings should refer to the section on **Blended or Remote Learning**.

Where a EOTAS learner is attending more than one educational setting on a part-time basis, for example because they are dual registered at a mainstream school and a pupil referral unit (PRU), or other education otherwise that at school (EOTAS), setting or special school, and there is a local outbreak in one setting, learners and parents should consult both educational providers to decide if any change to the learners' educational provision is necessary, for instance only attending the educational setting outside of the outbreak area. Where any decision is taken it is the responsibility of the educational settings and the Local Authorities to ensure disruption to learners' education is minimised, and that they continue, where reasonably practicable and safe to do so, to study a broad and balanced curriculum.

Some staff members may be anxious about attending work or undertaking their usual roles in the event of an incident or outbreak; particularly those who have or live with people who have complex health needs. Discussions about this should have taken place as part of an individual's risk assessment on their return to work. All education and childcare settings should consider what arrangements could be made to accommodate alternative working patterns including reducing the numbers of people staff come into contact with at the setting, or potentially working from home where this is feasible in relation to their role.

Where they are not already doing so secondary schools and post-16 providers should **introduce the use of face coverings** for adults and learners in year 7 and above in communal areas, such as corridors where the physical layout means that contact groups cannot remain separated to the same degree and where it is difficult to adhere to other control measures or areas where social distancing is not possible and on transport. Face coverings are not recommended for use in the classroom. It will be a local decision for the school or setting depending on their assessment of the risk and in context of their local circumstances.

### Local or Regional Enhanced Health Protection Measures



Local or regional measures to protect public health will be introduced by the Welsh Ministers where actions to manage an incident or outbreak are not thought to be sufficient. Measures will be specific to the area concerned and the nature of any

outbreak, as we have seen in South Wales<sup>4</sup>. This could take the form of advice on travelling and seeing others, or regulations requiring businesses to close.

What should education and childcare services look like at the **Local or Regional Measures** stage?

The impacts education and childcare settings will depend on the nature of the measures taken. All education and childcare settings, and particularly those working with older children and learners, may need to restrict their onsite services. This could include restrictions on who can attend, the numbers of people that can be on site at any time, the hours of operation or the amount of face to face learning that can be provided.

Variations in service could include:

- The majority of childcare and playwork settings, including Flying Start settings, continue to operate in line with their Care Inspectorate Wales registration and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for childcare. Out of school childcare settings may face some restrictions depending on the local measures needed;
- Primary schools, special schools and EOTAS continue operating on the basis of a full return from 14 September, when school attendance will be compulsory for all learners, but begin preparations for a more comprehensive class-based move to blended learning to enable as much learning as possible where the local measures taken suggest this may be necessary;
- Secondary schools in affected areas are more likely to need to move towards more comprehensive whole-class-based blended learning approach to enable full learning as much as possible, though this is not inevitable. Depending on the control measures introduced, secondary schools could see restrictions in the numbers of learners on site at any time, balancing a mix of face to face learning with remote learning for more pupils.
- Further Education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning would continue to operate, but may adjust their blended learning models to help manage the numbers on site, which could include a full move to remote learning for a period of time where this can be done without an adverse impact on learners' progress;

Where they are not already doing so secondary schools and post-16 providers should **introduce the use of face coverings** for adults and learners in year 7 and above in line with the guidance at the **Incident and Outbreak Stage**.

We do not envisage childcare settings closing. Nor do we envisage the majority of day care settings or childminders being asked to restrict their services. However,

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing local measures were in place in Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Llanelli, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Swansea. Travel within and across these areas is permitted for attendance at education or childcare.

depending on the nature of the local controls, it may be necessary to ask people to restrict their social contacts; for children that may mean restricting the number of education and childcare settings they can attend. If such measures are introduced, attendance at wrap-around and out of school childcare (e.g. after school clubs) may need to be limited to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. Where this is the case clear information and guidance would be provided by the Welsh Government.

Such restrictions might also affect the delivery of early education, especially where this is delivered in a separate setting to any wider childcare provision. Schools and funded non-maintained settings will need to consider how to support our youngest learners in the event of them only being able to attend one setting. It should however be noted that as early education is provided before statutory school age and blended or remote learning provision is not mandatory.

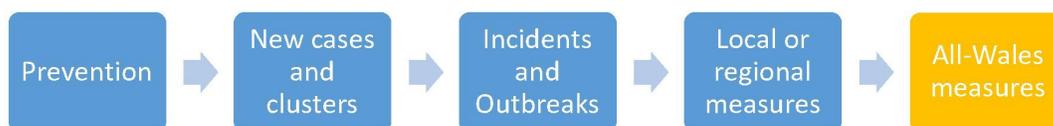
We do not envisage education settings closing in their entirety at this stage. Any actions are likely to be localised, however, preparations for a move to a blended learning approach may be needed for older learners.

EOTAS providers will need to start considering restrictions to their services such as who can attend, the number of learners on site at any time, the hours of operation, or the amount of face to face learning that can be provided. It is expected that EOTAS settings for younger children will continue to operate as normal given the reduced risk, preparations for a move to a blended learning approach may be needed for older learners. Where a learner is attending more than one educational setting on a part-time basis, educational providers should consult parents/carers to ensure the impacts of any changes in the provision can be mitigated. Where a learner is attending one provider within an area where restrictions are imposed and one outside the restriction area, it may be necessary for the learner to increase their time spent at one or the other, providing this does not significantly affect the learners' wellbeing, or ability of providers to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum.

Where both education providers are within an area subject to restrictions, both EOTAS providers should discuss with the learners' parents/guardians about the impact on learning provision, and providers should put measures in place to minimise disruption, in particular to vulnerable learners. Local Authorities should have overall oversight of these discussions (regardless of whether education is being provided by the Local Authority or an external delivery partner) as part of their responsibility to ensure the learner is receiving a broad and balanced curriculum.

Education settings should refer to the section on **Blended or Remote Learning**.

### All Wales Measures or Restrictions



The introduction of **All Wales Measures** would be a last resort, taken only where local or regional measures have failed to manage levels of transmission. Interventions are likely to be targeted, and could include tightening some of the restrictions we have recently eased, or introducing new measures as needed.

The nature of the restrictions will depend on the nature and scale of any outbreak and the actions most likely to control and reduce infection rates. It is unlikely this would include the mandated closure of all childcare and education settings in their entirety, but may lead to some restrictions on their operations.

### What should education and childcare services look like at the **All Wales Measures** stage?

At this stage childcare and education settings in Wales are more likely to experience some restrictions to their services, depending on the scale of the measures:

- Childcare and playwork settings (including Flying Start settings) are unlikely to be required to close in their entirety. Instead they may be asked to limit the number of children on site, to restrict children to smaller contact groups and to prioritise the care of the children of critical workers and vulnerable children;
- Schools, including special schools and EOTAS, are unlikely to be required to close in their entirety. Instead they may be asked to limit the number of children on site, to restrict children to smaller contact groups and to prioritise the attendance of the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. All schools will need to introduce more comprehensive whole-class blended learning, balancing a mix of face to face lessons with remote learning, to support broad and balanced continuation of studies.
- Further Education institutions, work-based and adult learning providers are unlikely to be asked to close in their entirety, but may be asked to limit the numbers of staff and learners on site, prioritising vulnerable learners, those with additional learning needs, those who cannot learn remotely and those who need to complete practical activities in order to complete qualifications. Activities should be planned to minimise time on-site and all learners should be offered remote learning.

We do not envisage mandating the closure of all education or childcare settings in their entirety, though the Welsh Ministers do have the powers to do that if required.

In extreme circumstances it may be necessary to restrict attendance at all education and childcare settings, or to require some to close entirely to onsite provision. All childcare and education settings should include arrangements for such restrictions in their operational plans. For childcare settings and schools this should include:

- Limiting the numbers of people on site and restricting younger children to smaller contact groups of up to 12 depending on the environment of the setting;
- Introducing distancing where appropriate - while distancing is harder for younger children, it may be that some form of 2m distancing is required for older children and learners and particularly those of secondary school age or older;

- Increasing the cleaning and hygiene measures in place across the setting;
- Limiting the numbers of adults on-site and ensuring all adults observe social distancing and hygiene measures.

Where a childcare and/or Flying Start setting is located on a school site the expectation is that it will remain accessible for the childcare provider and children using the facility. The provider and school will need to work together to manage the numbers of people on site at any time. Where health care professionals are based on a school site, or require access to a site to support learners health needs, the expectation is that they will remain able to do so.

All schools should remain open for their own learners wherever possible, though it is understood that it will be more challenging for some than others. Where remote learning is available parents or carers may not want to send children to school even where they are able to. Older learners may also prefer to access remote learning from Further Education Institutions. Staff absences may also make it more challenging to keep some settings open. In these instances all settings should work with their local authorities to ensure provision is made for children, young people and learners and their continuity of learning.

Arrangements for EOTAS learners must be clearly communicated with parents with plans which can be easily understood and which provide reassurance around actions and options critical in supporting learners and their learning. In the event of national restrictions being imposed, where learners are attending more than one educational setting on a part-time basis, parents/carers should consult with both educational providers to establish a plan for their continued learning provision. Both education providers must ensure a learner is receiving a broad and balanced curriculum. Where learning is online based, both providers should be clear who has responsibility for providing each curriculum area within the online learning.

Further Education Institutions should operate in-line with their Outbreak Management Plans, restricting the numbers on site where appropriate.

### **Blended or Remote Learning**

This section of the plan is aimed primarily at education settings, though will be of relevance to funded non-maintained childcare settings that deliver early education.

It is important to remember that at all stages of our response there are likely to be absences from the setting amongst staff, children, young people and learners. While short absences occur in normal times, the rules in relation to TTP and in particular the need to isolate if you have Covid19 or are a close contact of someone with Covid19, could see some staff, children, young people and learners facing repeated absences of up to 14 days.

Cumulatively this could have a significant impact on continuity of learning. However, it is also feasible that a number of absences at the same time would impact on the operation of a setting, requiring a move to blended or remote learning, or a temporary closure. This is particularly likely where the absences are amongst staff

## Short Term Absences

Where the absence is of a child, childcare settings should follow their usual practices in all instances. Where learners are absent, education settings will need to work with the learner and, where appropriate, their parents or carers to ensure continuity of learning is maintained, taking account of any individual needs or concerns and ensuring that safeguarding procedures are in place.

Schools and Further Education Institutions should have plans in place to ensure continuity of learning for learners who have authorised absences. These may need to be adapted to suit individual circumstances. For example, it may not be appropriate to switch to remote learning on the first day of absence, but when it becomes clear the learner will be absent for 14 days or more then access to remote learning materials should be arranged. This is particularly relevant where a learner has had one or more absences already.

While for post-16 providers this is likely to include a reliance on self-study given the age of their learners, the important point is to ensure that plans are in place to enable learners to stay engaged and to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable learners in particular.

Where the absence is of a staff member, then where they are not sick, for example where they are quarantining, and are able to continue working it may be possible for them to undertake alternative duties from home. This should be discussed with the individual to agree what is feasible. Examples could include setting work remotely, or supporting learners who are accessing remote learning materials.

## Blended or Remote Learning

A widespread move towards blended learning would not generally be expected unless an education setting were in an area where there were **Local or Regional Measures** in place, or **All Wales Measures** have been introduced.

Under **Local or Regional Measures**, it is unlikely schools will close in their entirety, or return to the school hub model that was in place for the period from March to June; schools should remain open for their own learners insofar as possible. In post-16 settings, where blended learning will already be in operation for many learners, providers should consider adjusting their balance of face-to-face and online activities to help restrict numbers and minimise contacts.

As a general rule we would expect access to areas with local measures in place to be maintained for the purposes of attending education or work, where it is not possible to do so remotely. However, education settings should be mindful of disruptions to public transport which may make it more difficult for staff, children, young people or learners to attend and make allowances to support remote learning and working where possible. This applies both to those who would normally attend a setting in an area experiencing local measures, and those who live in an area where local measures are in place but attend settings outside of them.

While the presumption is that primary schools, special schools and EOTAS would continue to operate as normal given the reduced risk to younger children, preparations for a move to a blended learning approach may be needed for older learners. Where there is a move towards blended learning, the support needs of those children, young people and learners who have additional needs or are digitally excluded or disadvantaged must be carefully considered.

In extreme circumstances it may be necessary to restrict attendance at all education settings, or to require some settings to close in their entirety. Education settings should consider steps needed to support such a move including:

- Limiting the numbers of learners on site. To accommodate distancing at 2m it may be that only one third of learners could be on site at any time;
- Establishing plans which rotate the learners in attendance on at least a weekly basis to ensure a mix of face to face learning and remote learning is provided;
- Providing appropriate resources to learners to enable them to continue studies for the duration of any closure;
- Ensuring appropriate safeguarding, wellbeing and support arrangements are in place for vulnerable learners and/or those with additional needs.

Where restrictions on who can attend onsite provision are in place, priority will need to be given to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers (see Annex B). Education setting will require additional support from local authorities and regional consortia to make and implement these arrangements. It will be necessary for the whole education system to work together to maintain provision. When considering how to balance onsite attendance with remote learning the operational plan should also consider:

- The commitment to a learning offer for all students to enable them to continue their studies, though the use of blended learning techniques and approaches;
- The support needs of children and learners with special educational needs or those who are most vulnerable– it may be necessary to proactively prioritise their attendance and for them to attend full time, regardless of any rota system. These decisions should be agreed with Children’s Social Services and/or Health in relation to the needs of individual children and learners;
- The support needs of learners with complex health needs or who were previously shielding who may opt to move entirely to remote learning;
- The safeguarding of vulnerable learners and the notification of concerns to other agencies.
- Access to learning materials for those who are digitally excluded (including through the Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards offer (RRRS)) – where appropriate devices and connectivity cannot be provided it may be necessary for those learners to continue attendance full time, regardless of any rota system;
- Appropriate support for learners attending schools where the home language is different from normal teaching language, and in particular for Welsh medium settings whose home language is English – additional resources or support may be needed to ensure their continuity of learning or to help parents support them;
- The support needs of staff with complex health needs or who were previously shielding who may need to work from home or move to alternative duties.

Given the variation in the types of EOTAS provision, EOTAS providers should consider how any restrictions will affect how they operate and act in a way that, within the restrictions, allows them to provide as full an education for their learners as possible, consulting their local authority where necessary. Where a blended learning model is necessary, EOTAS providers should consider individual learners' circumstances to ensure they can still access a broad curriculum.

It is important to ensure that in considering how to support either remote or blended learning, plans are in place to ensure learners will be taught the full curriculum and can access appropriate learning materials to do so.

Education settings should set out what they will do with regards to online lessons, both taught in real time and recorded for learners to access as time allows. Where specific software packages are to be used this should be established in advance to enable training and preparation time for staff and to ensure learners and their parents are familiar with them. Education settings should also set out their arrangements for teacher contact time with pupils and particularly those in key exam years or with additional support needs particularly in the context of the RRRS plan.

The Welsh Government has published guidance on blended learning for post-16 providers, which can be used to help plan any increase in blended or remote activity.

Discussions with the parents or carers of vulnerable learners or those requiring additional support should take place as early as possible to ensure they can be factored into plans. Wherever possible this should include the child or learner. Schools may also need to inform other agencies, such as children's services, health or family support services, to ensure any concerns are managed.

Local or regional measures to manage outbreaks may see some disruption or restrictions to the operation of public transport which may also impact school and college transport. This may be particularly relevant if restrictions are placed on the distance a person can travel and should be factored into considerations on how to support staff and learners. Wherever possible school transport should be maintained to facilitate learners' attendance, though restrictions in the numbers that can use it at any one time may need to be introduced and discussed with families.

It will be important to communicate the arrangements at the education setting to all those who access it early, and clearly. Even where local or regional measures are limited they are likely to provoke anxiety amongst the population. Clear plans which can be easily understood by staff, parents, children, young people and learners, and which provide reassurance around actions and options will be critical in supporting learners and their learning.

In the event of national restrictions it will be particularly important to ensure appropriate learning materials are available to support continuity of learning for those learners who are unable or unwilling to attend education settings physically at any point. Contact time with teachers or lecturers will be important in supporting this and arrangements should be made to ensure all learners have an opportunity to check in regularly, and that proactive offers of support are made to vulnerable learners and

those with additional needs. Particular consideration may need to be given to those attending settings for whom the teaching language is not the language of the home and who may not have access to Welsh language, or other language support outside of the school or setting.

## Operational Plans

All education and childcare settings should have an **operational plan** in place setting out how they will ensure they are covid-secure. It may have a different name, such as a risk and mitigation plan, or may form part of a wider plan detailing how the setting operates. However, this should be informed by the general risk assessment completed prior to them opening or increasing their services, along with any specific risk assessments, and take account of their Health and Safety Policy.

In particular the plan should set out how they will ensure the safety of others, including children, learners, staff and visitors. Essential measures include:

- requiring that people who are unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 stay at home
- robust hand and respiratory hygiene including ventilation
- continue increased cleaning arrangements
- active engagement with Test, Trace, Protect strategy
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise social and physical distancing between those in attendance wherever possible and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable.

Face coverings are required in all indoor public places<sup>5</sup>. Education and childcare settings are not considered to be public spaces and the wearing of face coverings is not considered to be mandatory. Our guidance to education and childcare settings includes information on the use of face coverings and when it would be sensible to use them. If staff, children, young people or learners choose to wear a face covering for personal reasons they should be permitted to do so.

All education and childcare settings should set out what actions they will take, and the clear escalation policy they will follow, in the event of individual cases or clusters showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at the setting. They should also consider steps needed in response to an incident or outbreak in the area. This should specifically consider how to manage and support:

- Children, young people, learners or staff members living in households with people who are directly impacted by the incident or outbreak;
- Children, young people, learners or staff members having attended any premises directly impacted by the incident or outbreak;
- Disruption to regular services caused by the incident or outbreak (e.g. disruption to school or public transport impacting attendance);
- Staff, children, young people, learners and where appropriate, parents and carers, who are anxious about highly vulnerable individuals within their family groups, or those with complex health needs.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public>

Children, young people, learners or staff members with complex health needs or who were previously shielding or live with someone who was shielding may have heightened concerns and distinct needs in the event of an incident or outbreak being declared locally. Parents and carers may decide to keep children home from school, which will mean needing to make alternative arrangements for them to access lessons and teaching resources. It will also mean having plans in place to ensure they are safe, seen and heard.

In the event of a cluster of cases linked to a specific setting it may be necessary to close in full or in part for a short period. The operational plan should detail what would happen where that is required to:

- enable disinfection or decontamination to take place;
- support the isolation of staff, children, young people or learners within a specific contact group.

Whether or not this is required would depend on the nature and scale of any cluster and would be done in accordance with advice from the local authority and Local Health Board, working with Public Health Wales. The closure of an entire setting would be highly unlikely in the context of larger schools or further education institutions. However, in the case of childcare settings or smaller schools where the isolation of a significant proportion of staff or children may impact viability, this may occur in certain circumstances. Larger institutions may need to temporarily close individual centres or campuses in response to an outbreak.

While any closure is likely to be short, and in the case of those required for isolation no more than 14 days, the possibility should be set out in the operational plan along with any measures needed to:

- Communicate details of the closure and reasons to those affected;
- Provide appropriate resources and support to learners to ensure they continue studies for the duration of any closure;
- Ensure appropriate safeguarding, health, wellbeing and support arrangements are in place for all children but especially vulnerable learners and/or those with additional needs.

## EOTAS

Like other educational settings, EOTAS settings will be operating on the basis of a full return from 14 September. As per the guidance, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) must have an operational plan in place which sets out how they will operate. Our expectation is that other EOTAS provision should also put operational plans in place. While home-tuition may not require a full operational plan, the local authority or provider should complete a risk assessment when home tutors are expected to provide tuition in the learner's home setting or another venue, such as a library or a community centre.

Where a learner is regularly attending more than one educational setting on a part-time basis, for example because they are dual registered at a mainstream school

and a pupil referral unit (PRU), EOTAS setting or special school, and the learner has been advised not to attend one of those educational settings due to close contact with a positive COVID-19 case; the learner must not attend the other educational setting. The other educational setting must be advised of this and the two educational settings, the learner and their parents/guardian and local authority representatives must collaborate to ensure the learner continues to receive a broad and balanced curriculum via remote means for the period that they are unable to attend those educational settings.

### Test Trace Protect

Test Trace Protect<sup>6</sup> (TTP) is key to identifying new cases and clusters emerging at a local level. Working with Local Health Boards, TTP teams will investigate new cases, reporting complex cases and clusters along with mitigating actions. If there is concern about clusters in individual premises TTP teams, local Environmental Health Officers and Public Health Wales will support them to take action if someone reports symptoms.

To support TTP it may be necessary for education and childcare settings to provide contact details for staff, children, young people and learners to TTP teams, along with details for anyone else who has attended the premises. This should be made clear in the operational plan, and all those attending the setting should be informed of this possibility and their consent sought. This is important to ensure appropriate and timely contact tracing takes place and all cases of COVID-19 are identified. Self-isolation may be required by those who have come into close contact with those who have tested positive.

### Media Handling

A communications plan, and a clear communications lead, would also be advisable in the event of media queries. Settings should work with their local to coordinate any media engagement via the IMT or OCT.

## **Guidance and Support**

The Welsh Government has provided a series of guidance documents to support the operation of childcare (including Flying Start) and playwork settings, schools (including special schools and EOTAS) and further education institutions from now into the autumn term. This guidance is predicated on the current levels of transmission and infection, and scientific advice regarding the virus.

Education and childcare settings can use the COVID-19 workforce risk assessment tool. Details of the Test Trace Protect strategy have also been published, and further information on this is available from Public Health Wales. Guidance on testing and contact tracing for childcare settings and schools is also available.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect-html>

We have also provided guidance on learning in schools in the autumn term. This is specifically designed to be relevant to all scenarios, to enable learners to receive full support in progressing their studies, and that this learning can be developed in both school-based and home-based situations. This is supported by the RRRS plan, which provides funding to ensure that priority cohorts continue to receive full learning.

Decisions regarding the introduction of **Local or Regional Measures** or **All Wales Measures** will rest with the Welsh Ministers. Some decisions may require the passing of legislation. All decisions will be made in discussion with local leaders, including local authorities with details provided to those affected as soon as possible.

It will be important to follow all specific guidance and legislation issued. However, local authorities and education providers in particular will need to ensure that where changes are proposed to the operation of education services, the appropriate steps are taken in line with statutory responsibilities. The impacts of these changes on all those affected will need to be considered.

### **Additional Areas for Consideration**

In drafting operational plans education and childcare settings will need to give careful consideration to certain matters. While many of these are integral to the provision of learning and care, failure to address these could result in additional harms or differential impacts to some children and learners.

#### Complex Health Needs & Mental Health Needs

Some of the people who work at or attend education and childcare settings may have, or may live with someone who has, complex health needs. Some of these people may previously have been shielding. Others may have emotional or mental health needs which might affect their attendance. Some of these needs may be heightened by concerns regarding the coronavirus, or their experiences during the previous 'lockdown'. They may need additional reassurances about arrangements being put in place to support them or to manage the virus.

Wherever possible confidential discussions about the arrangements which may need to be put in place to support these individuals should be had in advance, and as part of the preparation of operational plans:

- For members of staff discussions should include the consideration of when and how alternative duties might be appropriate or, if feasible, when they could work from home.
- For children and learners discussions should consider the circumstances under which they may be unable to attend the setting, what measures could increase their confidence in doing so and for learners, what measures could be put in place to support continuity of learning.

It is important to ensure learners are included in discussions about them, and have an opportunity to consider what arrangements they would like put in place. These

may need to be multi-agency based and wherever possible learners should be included in discussions around their learning and support needs.

#### Special Educational Needs and / or Additional Learning Needs

In preparing for a move towards a blended learning approach education settings should consider the needs of those learners requiring additional support. The needs of individual learners will vary, and while some will manage a blended approach well others may need to be in regular or continuous attendance at the setting. Some may require additional support from teachers and teaching assistants to support their continuity of learning. The framework for this is set out in the £29m RRRS plan.

The support needs for some families may be more challenging for settings to meet in the event of local, regional or national measures which restrict attendance, or where health concerns restrict attendance. Taking account of the learner's statement of needs, early discussions should be held regarding the plans for a move to blended learning, what that would involve and what the experience for the learner would look like. These may need to be multi-agency based and wherever possible learners should be included in discussions around their learning and support needs.

#### Children with a care and support plan and/or where there are safeguarding concerns

In the event of local, regional or national measures which restrict attendance it will be crucial to work with Children's Social Services to inform decisions about arrangements for the prioritisation of attendance for children where there are safeguarding concerns and/or there is a care and support plan in place. School attendance will be an important protective factor for some children and their families in preventing harm and/or family or placement breakdown. Where children do not attend plans should be in place to ensure they are safe, seen and heard.

#### Digital Exclusion or Digital Disadvantage

In considering a move to blended learning it will be crucial that education settings take into account the needs of those members of staff and learners who do not have access to online resources. Not all staff or learners will have access to a digital device and/or connectivity, and some of those that do will be sharing that device with other family members potentially restricting their ability to learn. Even where staff or learners have access to a digital device they may not have access to broadband connectivity, or the skills necessary to access and use online resources.

As part of 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning' the Minister for Education has committed up to £3 million to support digitally excluded learners in maintained schools where there was no existing provision in place from their school or local authority. This funding was managed through the wider Hwb EdTech infrastructure programme. Equivalent funding was allocated to help address digital exclusion in the further education and adult learning sectors.

Education settings will need to consider how best to accommodate the needs of digitally excluded and/or disadvantaged individuals. This could include:

- the provision/loan of devices and MiFi connectivity – schools can engage with their local authority EdTech teams who will be able to support them in mobilising arrangements for digital exclusion;
- prioritising their onsite attendance;
- a mix of live and pre-recorded lessons (school guidance for live-streaming and video-conferencing);
- providing hard copies of learning materials for collection.

Wherever possible those staff and learners likely to need additional support should be identified in advance of any move to blended learning, and discussions held regarding the nature of the support available. Wherever possible learners should be included in discussions around their learning needs

### Access to Free School Meals

During the previous 'lockdown' a commitment was made to continue the provision of Free School Meals throughout. We are not envisaging wholesale closures of schools in the event of any future local, regional or national measures. In the event that schools reduce operations and offer blended learning, the duty to provide free school meals for eligible learners applies on a school day, even if those particular learners are not expected to attend school on that particular school day.

The method of provision is likely to vary between local authority areas and could include delivery of food parcels to home addresses, supermarket vouchers or BACs payments. Local authorities are best placed to determine what will work best in their areas in line with identified local need and the resources available and will also be influenced by other factors such as the availability of on-line delivery slots to families in their areas. It may be necessary for a local authority to adopt a number of different methods in order to meet the varied needs of the most vulnerable families who rely on free school meals.

### *Free breakfasts in primary schools*

Local authorities are still under the same legal duty to provide a free school breakfast (section 88 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013). Our expectation is that breakfast clubs should operate as normal, unless it would be unreasonable for them to do so. It is not possible to say what will or will not be unreasonable in any particular situation and they will need to consider a range of factors. The Welsh Government has produced guidance on the provision of free breakfasts in primary school (<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/free-breakfast-in-primary-schools-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-governing-bodies.pdf>) and this guidance lists some of the considerations. This list is not exhaustive and, in the current circumstances, another major consideration for local authorities will also be the health and safety of pupils and staff and social distancing requirements.

We would recommend that local authorities consult their legal teams if a decision is made not to reopen a breakfast club.

### School Transport

Local authorities remain under a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for all eligible learners of compulsory school age over certain distances from their education centres (2 miles primary/3 miles secondary) as specified in the learner travel Wales measure<sup>7</sup>. The expectation is that transport provision should continue unless local restrictions explicitly restrict this.

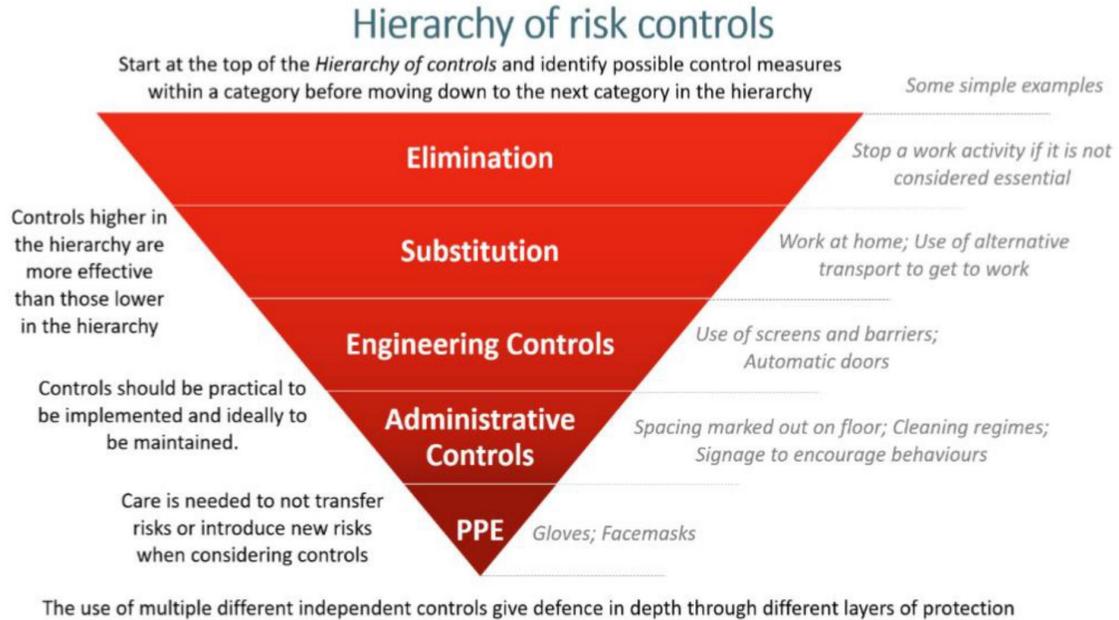
Where restrictions limit the amount of transport provision that can be put in place, or the numbers that can use it at any one time, learners who have no other means of getting to their education provision should be prioritised, as well as the most vulnerable learners, including those with SEN or additional learning needs. The process in which to prioritise these learners should be coordinated by the Local Authorities.

Where restrictions mean learners are unable to travel long distances to attend EOTAS provision, local authorities should work with EOTAS providers to put in place suitable learning which delivers a broad and balanced curriculum for these learners. This could include online learning. EOTAS learners are already at a disadvantage to those in mainstream provision and lockdowns or stricter measures are likely to further disadvantage them, therefore, local authorities must take reasonable steps to ensure they are not at a further disadvantage.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-version-3-html#section-49225>

## Annex A: Approach to risk estimation and management



The hierarchy of risk controls does not replace the importance of following the HSE 5-steps to risk assessment when preparing risk assessments. However the hierarchy may help identify the most appropriate measures to adopt.

When considering contact between contact groups, we would advise settings to consider:

1. **Elimination:** Redesign the activity such that the risk is removed or eliminated.
2. **Substitution:** Replace the activity with an activity that reduces the risk. Care is required to avoid introducing new hazards from the substitution.
3. **Engineering controls:** Design measures that help control or mitigate risk.
4. **Administrative controls:** Identifying and implementing the procedures to improve safety

Having gone through this process, PPE should be used where the guidance recommends this.

## **Annex B - Vulnerable Children and the Children of Critical Workers**

Where education and childcare settings are required to restrict their services and to limit the numbers of people on site, prioritisation will need to be given to the care of vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

### Vulnerable Children

The effects of the virus, and measures put in place under the control plan, will have differential impacts on the population of children, young people, families and communities so the response will need to reflect this local variation. Schools and local agencies should work together to identify the children who would most benefit from the provision in schools and childcare settings, and this should be done with children and families, so their needs can be understood and delivered through the most appropriate support. In doing so agencies should consider the risks, and benefits, to children, young people and families taking in to account the impact of any measures on their emotional and educational development.

### Critical Workers

Children whose parents are critical workers should be prioritised for attendance at education and childcare settings (though this is of less relevance for older children and learners who may be able to continue learning at home unsupervised). Space should be made available where both parents in a two parent household are critical workers, or where the lone parent in single parent household is a critical worker. Where one parent in a two parent household is not a critical worker they would need to provide a good reason as to why they are unable to care for the child. Where a good reason is provided, space should be made available.

#### **Health and social care workers**

This includes but is not limited to:

- doctors
- nurses
- midwives
- paramedics
- social workers
- care workers
- other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers
- support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector
- those working as part of the health and social care supply chain including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment

#### **Education and childcare workers**

This includes:

- childcare and playwork staff
- teaching staff
- learning support staff
- work-based learning tutors and assessors
- social workers
- specialist education professionals who must remain active to deliver this approach
- youth workers

#### **Key public services workers**

This includes:

- those essential to the running of the justice system
- religious staff
- charities and workers delivering key frontline services
- those responsible for the management of the deceased

- journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting

### **Local and national government workers**

This only includes administrative occupations essential to the delivery of the COVID-19 response. Or those delivering essential public services such as payment of benefits. This includes in government agencies and arm's length bodies.

### **Food and other necessary goods workers**

This includes those involved in food:

- production
- processing
- distribution
- sale
- delivery

It also includes those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines).

### **Public safety and national security workers**

This includes

- police and support staff
- Ministry of Defence civilians contractor and armed forces personnel critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs
- fire and rescue service employees (including support staff)
- National Crime Agency staff
- those maintaining border security
- prison and probation staff

- other national security roles, including those overseas

### **Transport workers**

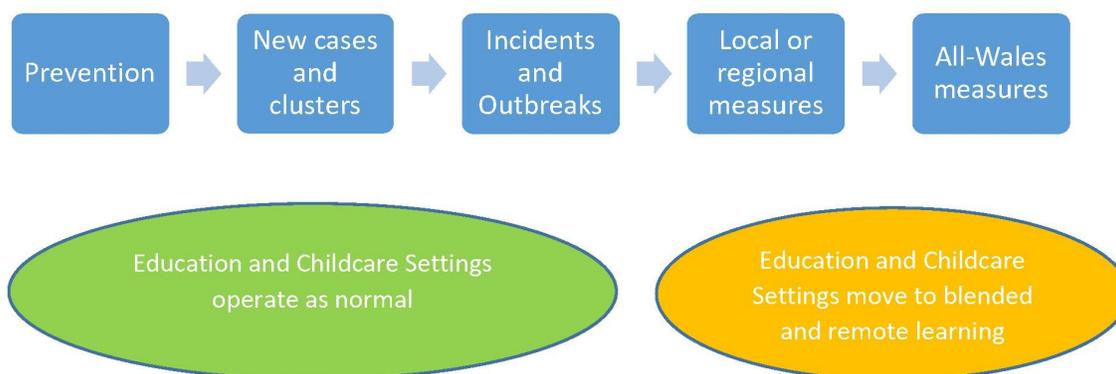
This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating. It includes those working on transport systems that supply chains pass through.

### **Utilities, communication and financial services workers**

This includes:

- staff needed for essential financial services provision. Including but not limited to workers in:
  - banks
  - building societies
  - financial market infrastructure
- the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)
- information technology and data infrastructure sector
- primary industry supplies
- key staff working in the following sectors
  - civil nuclear
  - chemicals
  - telecommunications. Including but not limited to
    - network operations
    - field engineering
    - call centre staff
    - IT and data infrastructure
    - 999 and 111 critical services
  - postal services and delivery
  - payments providers
  - waste disposal sectors

## Annex C – The Escalation Approach Flowchart



- Operate in line with relevant guidance and comply with the requirements of TTP.
  - Put arrangements for continuity of learning in place where children, young people and learners have to isolate.
  - Put arrangements in place to support staff to work from home where they have to isolate.
  - Cooperate with local authorities, Public Health Wales and others where there are new cases, clusters, incidents or outbreaks in your area.
  - Use this time to prepare and put plans in place to move to a blended or remote learning approach in the event of a requirement to close for any period.
  - Consult staff, parents, carers, children, young people and learners on plans for moving to blended or remote learning and ensure individual needs are accounted for.
- Operate in line with relevant guidance and comply with the requirements of TTP.
  - Comply with any local, regional or national measures introduced in relation to your area or across Wales.
  - Implement plans for blended or remote learning as required – this may be for some or all children, young people and learners depending on the measures taken in your area.
  - Implement plans to support those staff, children, young people and learners who have complex health needs or have been advised to avoid infection risks.
  - Implement plans to support vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, as well as those who are digitally disadvantaged or excluded.
  - Ensure any move to blended or remote learning meets statutory obligations and duties.