

Ambitious about Autism and the Schools Trust's approach to supporting pupils and young people in our educational settings during the Coronavirus pandemic

Updated 12 May 2020 following the Government's announcement to phase the reopening of schools and colleges.

Ambitious about Autism and our Schools Trust run TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College serving nearly 300 children and young people across London and the Home Counties.

During this challenging and rapidly changing time we are following information, advice and guidance for education providers issued by the Government, Public Health England (PHE) and other key bodies. When taking account of this guidance, our first consideration is the safety and wellbeing of our staff, pupils and learners.

On 11 May 2020, the Government set out its roadmap¹ for coming out of lockdown, this included how schools and colleges might, at the very earliest from 1 June, take a phased approach to bringing some of their pupils and learners back into their settings.

Running a safe service

It is critical that any service we deliver must be a safe service. Being safe in the Covid crisis includes having the correct levels of trained staff in place to meet children and young people's needs safely, being able to socially distance, having the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) in place and being continuously mindful of online safety as we deliver learning through virtual learning environments.

The children and young people who attend our settings are some of the most vulnerable in society. They thrive in settings where there is a predictable timetable, they have developed a rapport with their staff teams, have staff trained in working with them around medication and behaviour that challenges, and understand what works/doesn't work for that child or young person. They also need staff who can communicate effectively with them as not all our children and young people communicate verbally, and their expressive skills are not as highly developed as their receptive skills. We must take all of this into consideration as we take a phased, safe approach to bringing our children and young people back into our settings.

There was clear advice published on 12 May² to special schools/specialist colleges indicating they *'should work towards welcoming back as many children and young people as can be safely catered for in their setting'*.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/actions-for-education-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>

Our schools and college have developed a set of principles to work to in order to support our decision making:

- The safety of our pupils, learners and staff is paramount
- The operation of our schools and college is dependent on our ability to keep them resourced and safe
- We have considered the maximum number of children, young people and staff we can have on site to allow for social distancing
- We are following Government guidance and keep our position under constant review
- Each child and young person has an individualised Covid-19 risk assessment, that is updated as needed
- Whilst social distancing is difficult for some of our children and young people to understand and practice, we will do all that is reasonably practicable to enable it
- We will also do what is reasonably practicable to support staff to socially distance within an education setting
- If a child or young person has a pre-existing medical condition that places them on the clinically extremely vulnerable list, they must remain at home. If a child or young person has a pre-existing medical condition that places them in the clinically vulnerable category and the local authority's risk assessment says they are safer in school or college, we will need medical evidence to confirm this
- We will work in partnership with placing local authorities and parents and carers on an ongoing basis

What has changed in relation to the new guidance?

Early in the crisis the Government was clear that the safest place for most children was at home. For those with specific underlying health conditions (for example asthma, bronchitis, diabetes, being seriously overweight) the Government advised stringent 'social distancing'³ and in some circumstances 'shielding'⁴ depending on the nature of the condition (for example serious respiratory conditions, and those with increased risk of infection). It was advised that these pupils and learners should not be at school or college.

The new guidance continues to state that children, young people and staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable and shielding should not attend. Additionally, families with a child or young person who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) should follow medical advice and staff in this category should work from home where possible. The guidance further states that children and young people who live in a household with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable and shielding should only attend if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and the child or young person is able to understand and follow those instructions. Whilst we will do everything we can to support social distancing we cannot guarantee it, given the cohort of young people we support.

Vulnerable children and children of workers

Since the start of the crisis our schools and college have remained open to vulnerable children and children of critical workers. From June we will continue to offer spaces to vulnerable children and children of critical workers - these will remain our priority groups, across our schools and college. In

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> (accessed 23/03/2020)

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19> (accessed 23/03/2020)

In addition to this each of our schools and college have than made decisions around additional prioritised children, young people and groups:

- For children and young people attending TreeHouse School the criteria set out below will be used
- For children and young people attending The Rise School aligned with government guidance and their peers nationally, Year 10 and Year 6 will be prioritised
- For young people attending Ambitious College the criteria set out below will be used

A phased, safe approach to bringing more children and young people back must take account of our different settings and the continued management of social distancing.

Criteria

To be open, fair and transparent Ambitious about Autism has established a set of criteria to support decision making in terms of which children and young people can access our settings. However, it is important to note that **even if a child or young person can attend, they might not be offered a place as this will be entirely dependent on our setting being able to operate safely.**

For those pupils and learners not accessing learning at school or college we will continue to support them to learn at home. This can be through home learning packs and/or through our virtual learning platform. As per Government guidance, we will work with local authorities to monitor the welfare of vulnerable children who are not attending school and will keep in touch with other pupils and learners for safeguarding purposes.

Children and young people to remain at home	Children and young people who may be offered a place listed in order of priority
	We will assess all children in criteria (1) against staffing teams/levels. If we still have capacity, we will move onto criteria (2) and so on. All decisions are subject to our ability to run a safe service
Children and young people with symptoms, however mild – a new and persistent cough and/or a fever (for at least 7 days)	1) Both parents/carers are critical workers, or in a household where the lone parent/carer is a critical worker (confirmation of the critical nature of the role will be needed)
Children and young people in a household where someone is exhibiting symptoms (for at least 14 days, unless they start exhibiting symptoms, when the 7-day rule then applies as above)	2) Children with a named social worker, prioritising looked after children and children placed in residential care
Children and young people who have been advised by their medical practitioner that they are clinically extremely vulnerable due to pre-existing medical conditions	3) One parent/carer is a critical worker with no other childcare arrangements (confirmation of the critical nature of the role will be needed)
Children and young people who are clinically vulnerable due to pre-existing medical conditions and wish to remain at home	4) Children and young people with EHC plans who have been risk assessed that their needs cannot be met at home - this may include households where there is more than one child with an EHC plan for special educational needs
Parent, carer or child/young person's choice to remain at home	5) For pupils at The Rise School, Year 10 and Year 6

The longer term

We recognise, particularly for our pupils and learners who are shielding, that remote learning will be essential for keeping them connected to their education and opportunities to progress. We are continuously reviewing our approach to remote learning and will ensure that we learn and adapt with our children, young people and their families to deliver excellent remote education and learning support.

We are also conscious that some of our pupils and learners are at key transition points in their education and their lives. Our staff will continue to work with families and statutory services to ensure that transition management is prioritised and takes account of the challenging and changing environment.