

Introduction

The DfE has released guidance as of 2nd July for the full opening of schools from the beginning of the autumn term.

The guidance is intended to support schools, both mainstream and alternative provision, in reopening to all pupils, in all year groups, full-time. It applies to primary, secondary (including sixth forms), infant, junior, middle, upper, school-based nurseries and boarding schools, with independent schools to follow the control measures set out in this document in the same way as state-funded schools.

The guidance also covers expectations for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), including those with education, health and care plans, in mainstream schools.

It demonstrates a system of controls and principles for schools to follow; covering areas such as school operations, curriculum, behaviour, pastoral support and contingency planning - in the case of a local outbreak. This in turn will then effectively minimise the risks.

Dedicated transport provision for schools as well as public transport is picked up in the guidance and is now summarised below.

Guidance Summary

With social distancing significantly reducing available transport capacity, the guidance sets out a new framework for supporting transport to and from schools, from the autumn term onwards.

The guidance makes a clear distinction between:

- Dedicated school transport (for pupils being transported to school only); and
- Wider public transport (used by the general public).

Dedicated school transport/ SEND provision

Pupils on dedicated school services do not mix with the general public on these journeys and they

tend to be consistent. This means that the advice for passengers on public transport - to adopt a social distance of two metres from people outside their household or support bubble, or a 'one metre plus' approach where this is not possible **will not** apply from the autumn term on dedicated transport. However, consideration should still be paid to the following:

- how pupils are grouped together on transport, which should (wherever possible) reflect the bubbles that are adopted within school
- use of hand sanitiser upon boarding and/or disembarking and additional cleaning of vehicles
- adopt organised queuing and boarding where possible
- distancing within vehicles wherever possible
- the use of face coverings for children over the age of 11, where appropriate (though exemptions will be applied for those with health conditions/disabilities) or where they are likely to come into very close contact with people outside of their group.

Dedicated school services can take different forms. Some may involve coaches, others may involve use of a minibus whilst other services may be used by different pupils on different days, or by pupils with SEND. The precise approach taken will need to reflect the range of measures that are reasonable in the different circumstances.

It will also require a partnership approach between local authorities, schools, trusts, dioceses and others. In particular, it is imperative that schools work closely with local authorities that have statutory responsibility for 'home to school transport' for many children, as well as a vital role in working with local transport providers to ensure sufficient bus service provision. DfE will shortly publish new guidance to local authorities on providing dedicated school transport, based on the framework outlined here.

Wider public transport

In many areas, pupils make extensive use of the wider public transport system, particularly buses.

The government expects that public transport capacity will continue to be constrained in the autumn term, and its use by pupils, particularly in peak times, should be kept to an absolute minimum.

To facilitate the return of all pupils to school, it will be necessary to take steps to both decrease the demand for public transport and to increase capacity within the system. Both will require action at a national and local level.

Schools should also work with partners to consider staggered start times to enable more journeys to take place outside of peak hours. We recognise that this option will be more feasible in some circumstances than others.

Schools should encourage parents, staff and pupils to walk or cycle to school if possible. Schools may want to consider using 'walking buses' (a supervised group of children being walked to, or from, school), or working with their local authority to promote safe cycling routes. The government has announced a £2 billion package to promote cycling and walking, including to support pop-up bicycle lanes and widened pavements. For some families, driving children to school will also be an option.

However, these options will not be suitable for all. The Department for Transport is asking local authorities to:

- urgently work with schools to survey parents on their typical routes to school and potential alternatives
- consider a range of options for shifting demand for public transport onto other modes
- consider using traffic demand management approaches in order to ensure that children are able to attend school from the start of the autumn term

Travel patterns, the availability of vehicles, the length of journeys undertaken, and other local pressures on public transport vary significantly.

The government recognises the challenge but is confident that if all available options are considered by all parties it will be possible to reduce demand and ensure transport is available for those who need it most. Experience during the 2012 London Olympics showed that it is possible to make a very real difference to travel patterns where there is a concerted effort to do so and where the general public understand the imperative for doing so.

Families using public transport should refer to the [safer travel guidance for passengers](#).

School Travel Plan Data

In the Metropolitan region, there are 537,880 school pupils aged 5-18 attending school. Whilst a significant percentage walk (46%), are driven to school (37%) or cycle (3%), 6% are taken to school by a dedicated home to school transport bus/taxi and 8% use public transport.¹

Public transport usage can be far higher for secondary school pupils and will vary from 8% to 80%, depending on the school and its catchment area.

The average distance a young person lives from their secondary school is 1.1 miles. For primary school pupils however, this is much shorter at only 0.3 miles.

Implications of the guidance on transport

Several issues may need to be considered by TfWM and local authorities in terms of transport measures, to allow the smooth re-opening of schools in the region. These being:

Bus Network Measures

- Ensure all operators and drivers of home to school transport (including taxi drivers) are regularly tested for Covid-19. This will be

¹ Based on School Travel Plan data surveys compiled by the 7 local authorities and schools. This data reflects 70% of all pupils and includes primary and secondary school data.

essential, especially as drivers are likely to take other passengers during the day in their vehicles (i.e taxis and ring and ride vehicles especially).

- For secondary school pupils, ensure the public transport network is available to serve schools. Increased frequencies and coverage may well need to be considered, especially for pupils living in more isolated or areas of deprivation, where currently public transport maybe limited or who live in a household who don't have access to a car.
- Explore pre-booking bus / train seats so operators can manage journey levels and patronage more effectively and efficiently.

Active Travel Measures

- Ensure our regions Emergency Active Travel Fund measures focus on schools, making it easier and safer for pupils to walk and cycle to school. This will be particularly important for secondary school pupils, who have to travel much further (1.1 miles on average), compared to primary school pupils (0.3 miles).
- Support schools in developing a School Travel Plan and ensure a range of measures are implemented including Bikeability and safe cycle courses, and introduction of safe cycle lockers/stands.
- Continue to develop and implement Safer Routes to School programmes to ensure pupils feel safe using active travel measures.
- Schools should work closely with the Safer Travel Police Team to help in tackle and the fear of crime.

Developing a Coordinated response programme

DfT has been working closely with DfE to understand the impacts on the transport system.

Keeping students safe at school starts with keeping them safe on public transport.

DfT have issued surveys to all local transport authorities to assess their readiness to deliver a

comprehensive programme which will review the capacity on the transport system, identify gaps and deliver a wider travel demand management programme to assist with the school restart.

The Transport Cell, which has been established as part of the LRF governance is overseeing this response. The Cell, chaired by The MD of TfWM is made up of transport officers from each of the local authorities, West Midlands Police, British Transport Police, Highways England and officers from TfWM and Transport Operators covering bus, rail and tram.

The cell has jointly been reviewing and collaborating on the easing of lock down overseeing the changes in the transport network capacity and undertaking data analysis and monitoring jointly with operators to continue to assess the capacity on the network.

In terms of the challenges for school restart, national modelling suggests that under current social distancing policies, that of those children who take a bus to school, only 1/3 would be catered for. This will leave 2/3rds needing to travel differently if capacity can't be increased on the transport system.

TfWM is undertaking detailed analysis to understand the hotspots both in terms of the transport modes and in relation to the proximity of schools. This will enable a prioritisation of interventions to support those routes which will be impacted greatest.

There are different types of transport services that need to be considered

1. SEND – LA's are responsible for these Statutory services and TfWM colleagues are supporting with discussions with providers that are contracted to the LA's in relation to increasing capacity.
2. Direct School closed services contracted to schools. TfWM are working with the operators to understand any capacity issues and collecting data in to assess

capacity and requirement for increased services.

3. General services. Many school children travel on commercial and subsidised routes which are accessible to all users. Through data analysis, TfWM is identifying the hotspots in order to assist with the development of interventions to manage demand on the network.

TfWM and bus operators are working with DfT to review social distancing requirements, the ability to draft in additional bus/coach resource and any financial considerations to cover these costs to help augment capacity for all of the services listed above in collaboration with LEA colleagues.

Travel Demand Management Measures

Whilst delivering capacity on the transport system will assist with school restart, it is anticipated that it will not be possible to provide the capacity needed. This therefore requires a set of wider interventions and the Transport Cell is coordinating the approach which will be a collective endeavour of transport and local authorities and operators.

Additional measures that are being considered are part of our existing travel demand management programme based around re-mode, re-route, reduce and re-time. This will extend not only to students returning to school or college, but also to other transport users to free up capacity for students where required.

A comprehensive programme is being pulled together which will also have close synergies with the emergency active travel fund. Measures will include :-

- Encouraging more walking and cycling for school trips
- Managing the inevitable rise in car trips through park and stride and other appropriate mechanisms
- Managing road safety impacts and supporting measures to support active travel
- Releasing capacity by re-timing, re-modelling (including walking and cycling) or reducing

none school travel during school travel times

- Staggering school starts.

TfWM and Local Authorities are working with DfT and DfE to bring together a package and release resources to help deliver a joined up comprehensive programme to assist with the return to school.

Communications

This will also need to be supported by a regional approach to communications on how we are expecting public transport services to be managed to support the return to school as well as updating any messaging at key transport infrastructure. This is alongside the communications and engagement around the travel demand management programme to help support measures to tackle capacity constraints.

Further Information

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