



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Dr Patrick Roach
Hillscourt Education Centre
Rose Hill, Rednal
Birmingham
B45 8RS

12th August 2020

I am writing further to your letter of 21 July about the use of face coverings in schools and colleges.

The current advice from PHE remains that face coverings, including masks and visors, are not recommended in education settings – this has been confirmed to the Department since the policy on face coverings in shops was changed. They are not required in schools and colleges as pupils and staff are mixing in consistent groups, and because misuse may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission. There may also be negative effects on communication and, therefore, on education.

It is not feasible to expect younger children to wear face coverings and the risks of improper use outweigh any perceived benefit, and among older children there are risks that this will increase face touching, as well as the possibility that they will feel a false sense of security and so will be less likely to comply with other important rules, such as on hand cleaning and respiratory hygiene, which are crucial in reducing the risk of transmission.

While face coverings are recommended in shops and on public transport, where there are multiple potential contacts between unknown adults, education settings are very different. A school or college community is a far more controlled environment than a public space, with clearly defined rules and behavioural expectations, as well as consistent and limited contacts. For these reasons, PHE believes that the implementation of the system of controls based on a thorough risk assessment, as set out in the guidance for schools on a full return of pupils in the autumn term, is a sufficient and appropriate way to reduce risk in schools and other education and childcare settings.

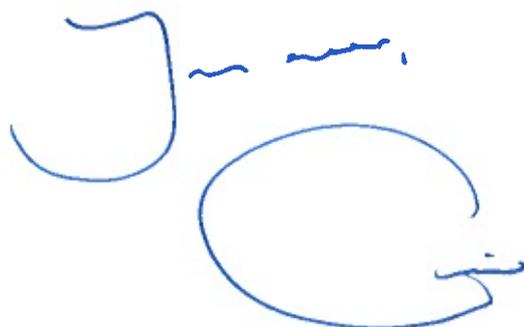
As part of this, consideration does need to be given to interactions between adult staff. It is important that protective measures are in place and followed in these circumstances, for example in the staff room. SAGE has previously provided advice on redesigning shared spaces and activities to minimise interaction between people from different networks in the workplace.

Therefore, based on current evidence, PHE does not recommend the use of face coverings, including masks and visors, in schools. However, they will continue to keep that evidence under review.

staff wish to wear a face visor, we recommend school leaders discuss the individual's concerns with them and explain that there is no evidence that face shields/visors prevent transmission and in a school environment are unlikely to provide any protection for the wearer. As set out in our guidance on safe working in education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>)

eye protection, such as a visor or goggles, need only be worn if a distance of two metres cannot be maintained from someone with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of fluids entering the eye, for example, from coughing, spitting or vomiting.

I hope this helps to address some of your concerns.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education