

## **Health and Safety Advice for Teachers in Special Schools and Settings and Pupil Referral Units**

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the Government's advice on dealing with this, does not in any way remove or supersede the entitlements and rights that teachers have in normal circumstances regarding their health and welfare and workplace safety.

All teachers are entitled to a safe working environment, free from violence and disruption, regardless of the setting in which they work. It is not part of the job in any setting for teachers to be verbally or physically abused or to have their health and welfare compromised by inappropriate working practices. The Government's advice on COVID-19 is simply another layer of health and safety provision which should be applied.

The Government's guidance on COVID-19 applies in special schools and settings and pupil referral settings.

Under the COVID-19 requirements, normal education provision has been suspended.

The only pupils who should be in schools, or any specialist provision, are those identified in government guidance. These are the children of key workers (as defined by government) and children and young people who are considered to be vulnerable (as defined by government). The NASUWT website provides the information on the definition of key workers and vulnerable children and young people.

No school or specialist setting should be encouraging pupils from outside these groups to attend school and members should contact the NASUWT for advice if they believe that their school or setting has expanded the groups of pupils attending the premises.

Schools should not be used for 'respite' care, as this could put the pupils and others unnecessarily at risk of infection.

The same rules for social distancing apply to special schools and settings and PRUs as mainstream settings. Employers are required by Health and Safety legislation to 'so far as is reasonably practicable', protect the health and safety of employees by removing or reducing workplace risks. This applies to COVID-19, in the same way as it would to any other hazard. Employers should remember that the virus can and does cause fatalities in all groups of people and that should be the guiding issue on the arrangements they make.

### **Risk Assessments**

With regard to pupils in the specified categories who are attending a special schools and settings or pupil referral units, risk assessments should be carried out.

Risk assessments include:

1. **a general risk assessment** which includes ensuring that there are sufficient staff (this does not have to be just teachers) on site. There is no reason to have on site anymore staff than necessary.  
It also includes issues such as ensuring that there are sufficient supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and suitable washing facilities which allow access, as required, to hot water and soap;
2. **individual risk assessments on pupils who present a specific risk.** There will be pupils who may already have a risk assessment in place which was carried out when the school was open normally. These may not be appropriate or may need extending to take account of the new situation relating to the change in the nature of the provision being made and COVID-19 guidance from Government. They must therefore all be reviewed.

There may also be pupils who have not previously been risk assessed but in the new circumstances will pose a risk. This includes pupils who need specific care which cannot be delivered whilst ensuring social distancing. In these cases, there should be sufficient appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, which may include aprons, gloves and visors/masks. Where these are already in place to control risk associated with infection from other diseases, these will need to be assessed to ensure that they are of the required standards to take into account the specific infection risks from the Coronavirus.

Additionally, risk assessments will also need to be updated on potentially violent pupils, especially those with a known risk of spitting and/or requiring physical restraint.

As required under Health and Safety Legislation, all risk assessments should be subject to consultation with staff. The NASUWT Guidance on risk assessments can be accessed on [www.nasuwt.org.uk/riskassessmentviolence](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/riskassessmentviolence).

Where the risk assessments cannot be implemented fully or where sufficient control measures cannot be put in place e.g the necessary PPE cannot be provided, the pupils concerned should not be admitted to the school, regardless of whether they are in the government identified category of pupils able to attend school.

### **Pupil indiscipline**

It should also be remembered that a change in the nature of provision does not mean that the normal standards of managing pupil behaviour do not apply.

Where pupils are aggressive, abusive and disruptive this behaviour should not be tolerated and senior staff should be supporting teachers in managing this behaviour, including where necessary excluding a pupil on a temporary or permanent basis. The NASUWT guidance on pupil indiscipline can be accessed on [www.nasuwt.org.uk/tacklingpupilindiscipline](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/tacklingpupilindiscipline).

If members are concerned about any issues relating to their health and safety, including relating to pupil behaviour, they should contact the NASUWT for advice and support.

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