



The first days back

A checklist to help senior and middle leaders prepare for the return to school.



Please note that this guide does not include safety measures, which should be guided by your own local or national authorities. All advice must be taken in the light of national and regional authority regulations.

You may choose to use these questions to help you to plan the first days back in school so staff and students feel supported.

Helping students prepare

- What can you do in advance to support students who might find the return to school especially hard? Perhaps you could offer a phone or video call, or even a socially distanced visit to school before it opens to the rest of the year group.
- You will know your students best. However, students who need particular support might include those who:
 - are especially anxious about returning or have been school-phobic in the past
 - have faced loss or bereavement
 - have struggled to get work done during lockdown because of difficult home circumstances or lack of resources
 - have particular needs (for instance, some students with autistic spectrum disorders will need more time to adjust to new routines)
 - have had poor attendance in the past.

- Do all students need to return at once? If you are able, set up some time for one-to-one or small group meetings with students who need them.
- What information can you give parents and students about what they are coming back to? What will their classroom look like? How many of their friends can they meet with? Which topics will they be learning about in class?
- What information can you get from families that will help you, and students, prepare for the first days and weeks back? Surveys can be helpful for this. Ask guidance counsellors to contact families who need support.

Planning for return – social and emotional issues

- If safety measures mean students are only able to mix in small groups, how will you select the groups?
- Do guidance counsellors have enough time allocated to talk to students who will want to talk to them?
- Some students may not be able to return with their peer group. How will you support them so they do not lose contact with their classmates?
- Do you have a plan about how to deal with students suffering trauma? If students become upset in a lesson, is there somewhere they can go for support?



The first days back continued

- Are teachers planning Assessment for Learning (AfL) exercises to see what students have learnt during lockdown? If so, how will you support and reassure students who found studying at home challenging?

Planning for return – teaching time

- How will you coordinate the practicalities of the first days back?
 - Consider starting with a tutorial session – with centrally designed resources for the whole year group to cover in their small groups. This allows for consistency and takes some pressure off the teachers running the first session.
 - It is important to avoid students repeating the same activity in their first lesson with every teacher. Could you map activities, or ask departmental leaders to coordinate within their teams and with each other?
 - Have you factored in extra time for any additional cleaning or social distancing measures? Will you need to shorten the school day, or stagger start times?
- How will you balance revision and starting new content?
 - Have teachers scheduled enough time to cover the rest of the course, as well as help students revise? Recent evidence suggests that the most important thing is for teachers to find out what the student does not know, and prioritise that.*
 - Can you organise catch-up or revision sessions outside of class for students who need or want them, to take the pressure off class time? How much testing will take place?
 - How will you limit the number of tests that teachers give students in their first few weeks back at school?
 - If you are planning to undertake back-to-school testing across all subjects, how can you prepare students for this before they come back? For example, could you issue a list of topics you will be testing, so students can prioritise these?
- How will you support students who need to isolate at home?
- Which subjects need the most support? Is it more difficult for students to study independently in some subjects? Have students lost their enthusiasm for some subjects? (John Hattie suggests maths can be a particular problem here).*



Planning for the future

- Are you planning for further school closures? Are there some individual students who might have to isolate at home? What can you do to create resilience, and to prepare students for further home study?

Supporting your teams

- Inexperienced teachers especially may struggle with building the confidence to get their students through the rest of the course. How will you support them?
- What will you put in place to help teachers manage their workload, and to ensure their well-being?

Conclusion

Finally, have confidence in yourself and what you can achieve:

- You and your staff know your students and families. You know what they need.
- You have skilled teachers, and plenty of help from outside sources (including our advice on teaching and learning when school returns advice).
- Evidence suggests that teachers and students are able to catch up after a few weeks or months, as long as learning is tailored to student needs.*

* <https://corwin-connect.com/2020/04/visible-learning-effect-sizes-when-schools-are-closed-what-matters-and-what-does-not>