

20 April 2020

Dear All,

I know that the COVID-19 outbreak is placing unprecedented pressures on you and your staff. We are immensely grateful for your continued support and commitment to enabling our education system to continue functioning in these very testing circumstances.

I wanted to write to all responsible bodies (RBs) to set out the approach we are taking to capital projects for schools. For the purposes of this letter, we are also treating Roman Catholic and Church of England dioceses as responsible bodies for their schools, given their increased oversight and allocation functions as VA schools move to our standard capital allocation schemes.

DfE capital projects

For RBs with projects being delivered centrally by DfE, we are keen to continue progressing into contract and continue building works where possible, but COVID-19 will inevitably have an impact on timescales. We will work with you and aim to keep you fully updated throughout this. DfE Capital takes its responsibilities as a client seriously and we have written to all DfE suppliers about managing contracts in light of COVID-19. We expect all contractors to apply the Public Health England (PHE) guidance and take whatever steps may be necessary to ensure that their employees are able to follow this guidance.

For RBs managing their own projects, we understand that the current situation is causing significant pressures and may lead to project delays. We encourage you to keep in close contact with your named DfE lead about any potential delays, so that we can review these on a case by case basis. Where appropriate, we are considering the need for re-profiling payment schedules.

Capital funding allocations and bid-based programmes

We have now published School Condition Allocations (SCA) and Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) allocations¹ and written to local authorities (LAs), SCA eligible multi-academy trusts, and voluntary aided schools. Responsible bodies will be able to take 2020-21 allocations into account when making decisions about planned works or any works in train.

LAs have already been informed of their Basic Need Allocations for places needed in September 2020 and September 2021; payments have already been issued for 2020 and LAs will also have already received a substantial portion of their 2021 allocation. On 15 April, we published Basic Need Allocations to provide places needed by September 2022, alongside SCA and DFC for the 2020-21 financial year.²

In relation to Condition Improvement Funding (CIF), we aim to inform applicants of the outcome of the current bidding round in early May.

In relation to the T Levels capital fund, we understand the difficulties posed by the current 30 April deadline for applications for funding to support 2021 T Level providers and have therefore decided to extend the deadline date to 26 June.

Managing contracts

We encourage all responsible bodies to act as responsible clients and assure themselves that contractors are adhering to PHE guidance. It is contractors' responsibility to ensure sites are safe, and they should be making decisions about whether work can continue safely in line with PHE advice.

The Cabinet Office published Procurement Policy Note (PPN) guidance on 20 March.³ This sets out information and guidance for public bodies on payment of suppliers, contractual relief, and contingent workers and includes specific guidance on how the PPN should be applied to construction contracts.

RBs must ensure they are taking specific advice in relation to any construction contract, in particular where there are potential claims and/or reliance on the PPN proposed by contractors. You must also give careful consideration to any instruction you might give to contractors as any such instruction may carry unintended financial risks for you under the contract terms.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-capital-funding>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/basic-need-allocations>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procurement-policy-note-0220-supplier-relief-due-to-COVID-19>

Questions about terminations, force majeure clauses, 'no fault' provisions, early warning notices, and whether or not to enter into new contracts will vary from contract to contract and as such you will need to consult your own legal advisors on this.

Construction sites

The government's current position is that construction should continue where safely possible within PHE guidelines. The guidance recognises that certain jobs, including construction, cannot be undertaken at home and require people to travel to their place of work, provided they are well and neither they nor their household are self-isolating. Employers, including contractors, should ensure that all employees in offices or onsite are able to follow PHE guidelines.

Sufficiency

We wrote to all LAs on 3 April outlining our approach for managing the impact of COVID-19 on national primary offer day, admissions appeals, and the ability of LAs to ensure sufficient pupil places in September 2020.

Health and safety

RBs and schools should note that it remains their responsibility to ensure that school buildings remain safe, healthy and well-maintained environments for staff and pupils during this period. Further guidance on this is appended to this letter.

If you have any questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 on your project or organisation please contact your named DfE contact or, if you do not have a named contact, email COVID-19.capitalcomms@education.gov.uk or call the DfE Coronavirus Helpline at 0800 046 687.

Thank you once again for your continued support with managing this unprecedented situation.

Yours faithfully,



Rory Kennedy
Director of Capital
Department for Education

Guidance for managing school premises, which are partially open, during COVID-19.

During partial or full closure, educational settings continue to be responsible for a range of health and safety measures and statutory compliance.

See DfE Good Estate Management for Schools Health and Safety page -

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools/health-and-safety>

Introduction

It is important that arrangements remain in place to ensure that children and staff are in safe buildings during reduced occupancy arrangements. Educational settings should review their arrangements for all building related systems but in particular the following:

- Hot and cold water systems
- Gas safety
- Fire safety
- Kitchen equipment
- Security including access control and intruder alarm systems
- Ventilation

Staff should be familiar with [“Guidance for schools about temporarily closing”](#) on gov.uk and work with their responsible bodies to ensure that statutory health and safety arrangements are in place.

There are increased risks related to safety concerns around water hygiene, building and occupancy safety and building hygiene due to reduced occupancy. Follow the guidance below to manage these risks.

Contact your contractors and suppliers to check on any special interim arrangements in place due to COVID-19.

In all educational settings, a member of staff should be identified with responsibility for managing premises. In cases of staff illness, cover arrangements should be put in place as soon as possible. The key areas for attention are listed below.

Cold water systems - including tanks, sinks/basins/showers and drinking water outlets (taps and water fountains)

- Do not drain down systems.
- Increase frequency of outlet flushing and temperature monitoring to maintain water quality within the entire system. If required, consider additional water quality testing at water outlets (closest and further from the main water source) and drinking water outlets that remain in use.

Domestic hot water services – including calorifiers/direct fired water heaters/ sinks/ basins/ showers

- Do not drain down systems, hot water generation servicing to continue in line with manufacturers' criteria.
- Water temperatures must be kept within limits recommended for the control of legionella bacteria in water systems. For reference, use the Approved Code of Practice & HSG 274.
- Regularly check hot water generation for functionality and if required, temperature recording.
- If the hot water system has been left operational the hot water should be circulating as normal and regular checks, in line with guidance, should be carried out.

Gas safety

- Do not isolate gas supplies to boilers and hot water generation
- To avoid the risk of leaks and dangerous build-up of gases, isolate gas supplies where not in use, e.g. science labs and prep rooms, design and food technology classrooms, and school kitchens. Otherwise, gas services should remain in normal operation
- Continue planned gas safety checks including gas detection/interlocking

Fire safety

You must review and if necessary, update your fire management plans and ensure any changes to fire escape routes are clearly identified and communicated. During the reduced occupancy period you must:

- Carry out weekly checks of alarms systems, call points, and emergency lighting;
- Carry out regular hazard spotting to identify escape route obstructions;
- Check that all fire doors are operational.

Fire drills should continue to be held as normal.

Kitchen equipment

Equipment that holds water, for example dishwashers and combination ovens, should be run through at least a full cleaning cycle per week, to remove scale build up and standing water build up, to pre-empt possible bacteria growth.

Security

All areas of the school should be kept secure. Access to certain closed areas should only be possible by relevant staff – for example science laboratories, chemical stores and IT rooms. Check that access control and lockdown systems are operational.

Ventilation

- All systems to remain energised in normal operating mode.
- Where mechanical ventilation is present, recirculatory systems should be adjusted to full fresh air. If mechanical ventilation systems cannot be adjusted to full fresh air these should be switched off.
- Where possible, occupied room windows should be open.
- Ventilation to chemical stores should remain operational.

Other points to consider

- Core building-related electrical systems, including internal and external lighting, small power, CCTV, access control and alarm systems (fire, intruder, panic and accessible toilets) to remain in use/energised in normal operating mode.
- For drainage systems, check traps have not dried out and ensure water seals are in place to prevent smells within the building e.g. hygiene rooms, sports hall showers etc.
- Update your keyholder information. Intruder alarm / lift/ fire alarm companies often have remote monitoring stations (response centres) – follow advice from these providers.
- Continue with all regular cleaning, enhanced disinfection appropriate for COVID-19, maintenance, testing and statutory compliance activities.
- Continue carrying out thorough examination and testing of lifting and pressure equipment during the coronavirus outbreak following updated HSE guidance: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/work-equipment-coronavirus.htm>

Re-opening after a lengthy closure

Before resuming normal operation, commission a water treatment specialist to chlorinate and flush the complete system for all hot and cold-water systems (including drinking water) and certify the water system is safe before the buildings are reoccupied. Allow sufficient time for this activity; approx. 1 week before opening if possible.

Recommission all systems before re-opening, as would normally be done after a long holiday period. This includes gas, heating, water supply, mechanical and electrical systems, and catering equipment.

To ensure fire safety, check:

- All fire doors are operational;
- Fire alarm system and emergency lights operational.

Clean and disinfect all areas and surfaces prior to reopening and if necessary, utilise pest control for insect infestations, particularly in kitchen/food preparation areas. Deep clean the kitchen prior to reopening before food preparation resumes.

Further information

More detailed information on maintenance arrangements can be found in Good Estate Management for Schools, in the section on [maintenance checks and testing](#).

Further guidance is available on [Site Security](#) .