



COVID-19 Contingency Plan 2023/2024

COVID-19 continues to be a virus that we learn to live with, and our priority remains to reduce disruption to children's education and wellbeing through delivery of face-to-face, high-quality education and care.

Following revised guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA), this Contingency Plan outlines our operational plans should we experience an outbreak of pandemic proportions in current times.

Colourbox Montessori School are responsible for and must consider:

- safeguarding – local agencies, services and settings working together to actively look for signs of harm given the greater risk of harm that some children may have been exposed to through COVID-19.
- supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing following the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework.
- supporting vulnerable children.
- supporting and assessing the risks for children whose education, health and care (EHC) plans they maintain, ensure children with EHC plans are safely cared for whether in a setting or at home

Local outbreaks

As a setting, we need to be prepared for how we would operate if we needed to take 'extra measures in exceptional circumstances', such as during a COVID-19 outbreak. Given the impact that restrictions on education can have on children, any measures taken will only be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of settings or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

It is a legal requirement under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework to report any changes that may affect the quality of childcare, for example if a setting is closed for a significant amount of time, i.e. for three days or more. The Director will report any such changes to Ofsted within 14 days of this occurring.

Should any decisions be made regarding an outbreak, Parents/Carer's will be informed as quickly as professionally possible.

Vaccination

We recommend all staff consider the offer of a vaccine where applicable. More information is available in coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccines.



Control measures

Colourbox has active arrangements in place to monitor whether infection controls are effective and working as planned in line with health and safety responsibilities and duties. Parents are notified of any infectious illnesses, either via sign outside your child's classroom, or via Blossom Educational. The setting:

1. Ensures good hygiene for everyone. All staff are trained in Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene which is renewed every 3 years. Strict hand-washing procedures are in place for staff and children maintaining the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach for dealing with coughs and colds. Staff are required to use appropriate PPE when working with children who are being changed, cleaned, and/or when supporting a sick child while awaiting collection by their parents/carers.
2. Maintains appropriate cleaning regimes and schedules, using standard products such as detergents. Cleaning and sanitising routines happen standardly every evening, and classroom staff clean intermittently throughout the day, more so when there are known infectious illnesses about.
3. Keeps occupied spaces well ventilated and encourages daily outdoor learning.
4. Has open policies in place to outline exclusion periods for various infections and illnesses to minimise and potentially eradicate outbreaks.
5. Follows public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19. Children, staff, and other adults should follow guidance on if they have COVID-19 symptoms and should not attend the setting given the potential risk to others. The Operations Manager can take the decision to refuse a child or staff member if, in reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other children and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Children and staff should return to the setting as soon as they can, in line with guidance.

Staff deployment

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework sets the standards that schools and childcare settings must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. Government considers COVID-19 to be an '*exceptional circumstance*' in which the staff-to-child ratios set out in the EYFS can temporarily be changed, if necessary, for example to respond to COVID-related workforce absences.

Colourbox Contingency plans for staff deployment may include (but are not limited to):

- mixing age groups of children who would otherwise be educated or cared for separately.
- Separating / Isolating classrooms, limiting contact between them to avoid cross-contamination. Each classroom is designed with its own free flow garden and access for this purpose as previously demonstrated through the last COVID-19 pandemic.

- For the purposes of meeting EYFS ratio and qualification requirements, all staff educating or caring for a mixed age group of children will be considered 'available to work directly with' all of the children who have been grouped together.

The quality of care, safety and security of the children in each setting / classroom will be maintained through each decision made and parents will be informed of the decision rationale in these cases.

Staff shortages due to sickness or self-isolation

Settings that are experiencing pandemic proportion staff shortages should:

- Work with the Operations Manager to decide on a case-by-case / room-by-room basis on how to manage this without further implicating / creating cross-contamination between sites/rooms.
- Where necessary, pool staff with another Colourbox setting or take on qualified staff from within our Administrative and/or Management teams to support ratios.
- Where necessary work with their local authority to identify how appropriate provision can be put in place while keeping staffing arrangements as consistent as possible.

If high levels of workforce absence means a setting needs to restrict attendance (for example, where a setting is oversubscribed, or unable to operate at full capacity), the Operations Manager should consider giving priority to:

- children of critical workers, and vulnerable children.
- then 3- and 4-year-olds, in particular those who will be transitioning to Reception
- followed by younger age groups

In the event that a full closure is unavoidable, this decision will be communicated as quickly as possible to parents along with the time frame for its closure and re-opening. If a room is completely closed, an internal cleaning team will be dispatched to deep clean and isolate any possible risk of further contamination.

Reducing the risks for staff

Staff are expected to follow the same guidance as set out by the government and NHS to self-isolate if positive with COVID-19. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published guidance on protecting vulnerable workers, including advice for employers and employees on how to talk about reducing risks in the workplace.

Staff previously identified as vulnerable or with a weakened immune system are advised to continue to follow guidance for people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19.

Colourbox will follow specific guidance for pregnant employees, according to their Risk Assessment plans.

Parents who test positive are implored to understand the risks they create for room closures should they send in their child who they suspect may have the virus or be highly likely to spread the virus. Not only does this risk infecting other children, but if multiple staff test positive the result may call for a total room closure affecting working parents, vulnerable children, staff and business operations. Honesty is always the best policy in working together as a community to keep those in our care safe.

Staying in touch with parents or carers whose child is at home

All children should be able to attend as normal, with the exception of those children who may still have to self-isolate due to vulnerability, choose to self-isolate during outbreaks, or those who must stay away as per government guidelines when positive for/or displaying symptoms of COVID-19.

In this event,

- Named key persons will maintain contact through handover emails to the parents to support with wellbeing or advice for education and learning.
- Parents can use the Parent Inbox on Blossom Education to highlight any learning and development at home.
- Parents and Carers will be supported to provide a positive learning environment at home through the Colourbox YouTube or Facebook page, educational links, books etc.

Colourbox will work with local authorities to monitor the welfare of:

- Vulnerable children who are not attending provision by notifying their social worker and agreeing upon the best way to maintain contact and offer support.
- Other children they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes.

Charging parents and carers if their child is unable to take up their place

Colourbox continues to be fair and balanced in dealings with parents or carers and will continue to avoid unfair charging practices.

Each case needs to take account of individual contracts considered from the perspective of both parties and the application of the law and guidance to both providers as businesses and parents as consumers.

The general principle is that providers should not charge parents or carers for services that cannot be provided. If there is a barrier to accessing childcare, based on government guidance or the law, the provider should not charge the parents or carers for this period. Therefore, if Colourbox invokes their Contingency Plan and makes the decision to shut a classroom / setting / group for a period of time, parents will not be charged or offered a full refund during this period.

This Policy will be reviewed in September 2024