

DE COVID MANAGEMENT - GUIDANCE NOTE

USE OF FACE COVERINGS BY POST-PRIMARY PUPILS IN CLASSROOMS

The Minister of Education made a [written statement to the Assembly](#) on 11 March that from 21 March the [DE COVID Guidance to Schools and Educational Settings](#) will no longer strongly recommend the use of face coverings by post-primary pupils in classrooms. At this point their use is still recommended for use in corridors, communal areas and on public and school transport.

In making this decision, the Minister sought to balance the impact that the wearing of face coverings in classrooms has had on virus transmission with the challenges that wearing a face covering for long periods has brought to our young people and the disruption it has caused to their education.

The Minister recognised that while case numbers among pupils have been high during January and much of February, the pupil case numbers published by the Public Health Agency in its weekly Epidemiology School Bulletin have showed a sustained decline since their peak in the seven days to 30 January and are now less than 30% of the case numbers at the peak. This is also supported by pupil absences due to COVID-19 having now reduced to levels not seen since before Christmas.

The Minister has taken account of the views of the Department of Health, trade unions, school staff together with the views of the many parents and pupils who have engaged with the Minister on this issue. This decision has also taken into account a range of studies from across the UK on this issue.

While the Minister has decided that the balance of relative risks is now in favour of no longer recommending the use of face coverings in classrooms, COVID continues to circulate in our communities and in our schools. In continuing to manage the risks of COVID in our schools, schools should continue to reduce the risks of virus transmission wherever possible. It is for this reason that if any individual wishes to continue to use a face covering in class, they should be free to do so

The Department's COVID Guidance will be updated to reflect this decision.