

Religious Education, Collective Worship and the Celebration of Mass in Schools COVID-19

During this academic year, with all of its additional complexity, it is important that Catholic school leaders ensure that any modification of timetables to accommodate 'catch-up' curricula are not made at the expense of Religious Education. As the core of the core curriculum, Religious Education must continue to be given full parity with other core curriculum subjects and the requirement remains that it must constitute at least 10% of the taught curriculum from Early Years to the end of year 11, and 5% of the taught curriculum in sixth form.

It should also be clear that in such trying times finding ways to unite our school communities in prayer is more important than ever. School leaders should ensure that daily prayer and liturgy remain at the heart of the Catholic schools so that children and young people, as well as staff, can be consoled by the sure knowledge of the presence of God with them. Of course, all gatherings for shared prayer and the celebration of the Liturgy should observe social distancing, ensure that the integrity of 'bubbles' is preserved and conform to the school's risk assessment for the full return of pupils to school. Such risk assessments must also conform to whatever regulations apply in dioceses and local authorities, as summarised below.

Whilst all legal restrictions on the public celebration of religious services were lifted in July, collective acts of worship, for example the celebration of Mass, must comply with the Government's public health and social distancing guidance. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) has published guidance for the celebration of Mass and the Government has published advice on the safe use of places of worship. If, however, the celebration of Mass takes place in school, the guidance for class or year group bubbles should be followed along with the guidance below for the celebrant. In any event "If a Catholic parish school or its grounds is to be used for Mass, a separate risk assessment has to be done, the appropriate school authority (Governing Body or Trust) has to give its permission, and both the parish and school insurers should be informed before the event takes place." (CBCEW *Guidance for the Celebration of Mass 3 August 2020 Revision 10*)

In addition, any separate liturgical and/or health and safety guidance from individual dioceses should also be followed. Similarly, if the school is situated in an area that is experiencing a local COVID-19 outbreak and where local restrictions have been imposed different guidance will apply. Please consult the local restrictions guidance to see if any restrictions are in place in your area <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

As you will be aware, the wearing of face coverings is a matter for individual schools except in areas of national intervention. Nationwide, while the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary, schools will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances. In addition, the government has advised additional measures are taken in areas of national intervention as listed on <https://www.gov.uk/> The government's guidance states that in those areas face masks should be worn by adults and pupils in secondary schools when moving around the school, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

All guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation.

CBCEW

Guidance for the celebration of Mass

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/Guidance-Acts-of-Worship-Mass-V10-03082020.pdf>

England

UK Government advice on the safe use of places of worship

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

UK Government advice on face coverings in education

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>

The Royal School of Church Music Guidance

<https://www.rscm.org.uk/guidance-for-churches-choirs-singers-updated-10-july-8-30am-bst/>

Wales

Welsh Government advice on the safe use of places of worship

<https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus>

Welsh Government advice on the use of face coverings in education

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-face-coverings-schools>