

Face covering in classrooms - advice and strategies to support

The use of face coverings presents **significant challenges** to children and young people with sensory impairment. It can impact on their access to learning and affect social interactions.

Updated guidance from the DfE on the wider re-opening of settings from **8th March 2021** clearly states:

Exemptions:

Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. This applies to those who...

'speak to or provide help to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate'. The same exemptions will apply in education and childcare settings...

On Face coverings

'**Face visors or shields** should not be worn as an alternative to face coverings. They should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately'.

'**Transparent face coverings**, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate, can also be worn'. There is currently very limited evidence regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings, but they may be effective in reducing the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

[Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92422/schools-coronavirus-operational-guidance-2021.pdf)

[Further education coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92423/further-education-coronavirus-operational-guidance-2021.pdf)

It is not the role of SIS to issue public health advice around the use of facemasks.

The current use of face coverings (which obscure lip patterns and/or muffle speech) is likely to result in a need for reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act (2010).

Reasonable adjustments might include:

- Seating plans – where students with hearing loss are seated at the front of the class to maintain the minimum distance between themselves and the teacher. Hearing aids have an optimal range of 1-1.5m.
- Allow breaks where required as students may become tired due to working harder to hear and follow lessons and conversations.
- Consideration of individual or small group delivery in good acoustic conditions.
- Focus any TA support to post and pre tutoring of sessions.
- Note taking during lessons.

- Content of lessons being given to CYP prior to lessons.
- When using TEAMS, use captioning, spotlighting and consider appropriateness of the chosen background / lighting.
- Can virtual learning be used to support the student in school.
- Involve the family to check equipment and support learning.

Useful strategies may include:

- Use captions with PPT – live caption is available with the online Microsoft PPT.
- Provide key vocabulary and information prior to a lesson so students are aware of the words to be used and can look words up for clarity and understanding.
- Allow extra time for processing information – students will be working harder to hear your voice.
- Gain the students attention before speaking.
- Reducing background noise.
- Create opportunities for students to socialise at 2m distance with ventilation so that they can remove their masks and engage with their peer.
- Effective use of radio aids where provided, by the teacher and in group discussions/ work.
- Ensure access to good quality ICT advice/ provision.
- Utilise the services of SIS to advice on strategies to increase curriculum access and to support sensory impaired CYP in these challenging times
- Alert sensory impaired students individually to changes in arrangements for moving around the school, to ensure they have understood.
- It will be impossible for students to interpret facial expressions so be explicit with instructions and praise, and avoid generalised statements, such as 'over there' or 'this way'.
- Ensure all resources are modified **in advance** for VI students, as advised by the QTVI, to avoid the need for unnecessary support in class. Make sure they have their own copies of all printed resources.
- Be discreet when talking to a student about their sensory needs, to avoid embarrassment.
- Students who wear spectacles should be encouraged to wear a mask that fits tightly across the nose to avoid steaming up. It may also help to wash them with detergent and allow the glasses to dry naturally.