

Acoustics for Covid-Secure Classrooms Part 2



We take another quick (and hopefully final) look at the latest DfE operational [guidance for Covid Secure Classrooms](#) following the latest announcements – what’s changed and what is the impact on acoustics and listening conditions in the classroom?

Facemasks

When schools returned from the Christmas Break, all secondary school aged students and staff were obliged to wear facemasks unless exempt, when moving around the premises and, as a temporary measure, in classrooms from January. The news that this has been lifted is welcome, as the detrimental effect of wearing masks on listening in the classroom is significant ([See our guidance and recommendations here](#)). It has been reported this week that many schools are [still choosing to maintain mask wearing in the classroom despite the rule change](#), which will continue to have an impact on those with special needs. Fortunately this issue is recognised in the DfE

guidance, with exemptions for people speaking to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate, which may include people with hearing impairment, English as an additional language, and Speech, Language and Communication needs. See our [advice for choosing a facemask for speech communication](#).

Bubbles

Keeping children in consistent groups ('bubbles') is no longer needed, which means schools no longer need to make alternative arrangements to avoid mixing at lunch. This change will benefit listening conditions in classrooms, as many schools have had to operate staggered breaktimes resulting in high levels of playground noise ingress via open windows during lesson times.

Ventilation

Schools must continue to keep occupied spaces well ventilated, with mechanical ventilation adjusted to increase the ventilation rate wherever possible, and opening external windows, internal doors, and external doors to improve natural ventilation. Be aware that these adjustments are likely to increase noise in the classroom (either via increased system noise for mechanically ventilated systems or via increased external noise ingress via the building envelope and via interconnected spaces for naturally ventilated spaces). [See our top tips for keeping noise in check](#)

Social Distancing

We [previously reported on the impact of social distancing within classrooms on access to reliable listening conditions](#), with younger children and those with special listening needs particularly affected. Social distancing is no longer mentioned in the DfE guidance (although it was a recommendation in the [NEU's Guidance](#)). However, the impact of longer communication distances may still become a factor where schools have been advised to combine classes to deal with staff shortages due to Covid infection. It is clear that schools may continue to be impacted by absences now that restrictions have been lifted and should be mindful that children with additional listening needs are not placed at a disadvantage in this scenario.

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