

Learning and teaching in Drama
Key messages from the COVID-19 sub-group advice
Updated 23 November 2020

These guidelines offer specific advice on the teaching of drama in schools, prepared by Education Scotland with input from key stakeholders. The guidelines are based on scientific advice provided by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues. The guidelines are supplementary to the most recent advice from the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG).

The most recent key advice from CERG is  [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools \(version 4.3\)](#) which was published on 30 October 2020.

External and private providers working within schools should follow this guidance. Drama teachers and all other drama partners who work in private or community contexts are also advised to follow these guidelines.

The guidelines take a precautionary approach with the aim of minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19. They take full account of the importance of drama education in developing skills and supporting health and wellbeing, and the potentially negative impact of limiting the availability of drama in schools.

Local authorities and schools should exercise their judgement when implementing this guidance, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children, young people and staff, taking into account local circumstances. Local authorities and schools will also need to adapt to local issues, such as outbreaks or local increases in cases of COVID-19, and follow any locally-determined advice and guidance.

The guidelines will be kept under review and adapted as necessary, in response to any changes to current scientific evidence

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1. Overview and purpose

There is an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 during activities such as physical education, music (particularly singing and playing wind instruments) and drama (including school debating type activities). This increased risk is due to the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants.

The risks in these activities can be mitigated in the following ways:

- learning outdoors is safer than indoors;
- activities undertaken at a quiet volume or that have lower respiratory exertion are safer than aerosol-generating activities;
- activities involving young people working individually or in small numbered groups are safer than large groups;
- activities involving no sharing of equipment are safer than those that do (or where equipment cannot be thoroughly cleaned between uses);
- activities which can be done at a distance (or virtually) are safer than those in close proximity; and
- activities of shorter duration carry lower risk than those of longer duration.

The reopening of schools has been a major and significant step. It remains important to establish routines and actions that prevent transmission of the virus. The situation will continue to be monitored by scientific experts and further advice will be offered when it becomes sufficiently safe for certain activities to resume.

Drama brings many benefits to children and young people, including for their health and wellbeing; social, physical and cognitive development; creativity, communication, team working, and discipline. Drama makes unique contributions to equity and inclusion, and can lead to progression to continuing education, training and employment. For all these reasons, it is important to find ways of undertaking drama activities where the risks are mitigated.

There is currently limited evidence about the effects of coronavirus transmission during participation in drama. However, young people should only engage in drama when robust risk assessments are completed and appropriate mitigations put in place. Alternative approaches may be required to provide lessons safely.

2. Specific mitigations for drama

Risk is reduced in environments that are well ventilated, when activities take place for a shorter periods of time, and when performers (or pupil-teacher) are orientated in order that they are not face-to-face.

The following table demonstrates mitigations which reduce the probability of viral transmission.

Low risk	High risk
Outdoors or virtual activities (for example recorded performances, outdoor creative dance, use of awnings/gazebos)	Indoor activities in enclosed spaces (for example unventilated classrooms, studios)
Normal breathing and volume of speech (for example quiet volume, use of monologue, mime)	Louder volume or aerosol-generating activities (for example speaking loudly, singing, face-to-face debating)
Individual, or involving only small numbers (for example; solo performance, dialogue)	Large group (for example large cast or chorus)
Any equipment used by only one person (for example actors have their own costumes)	Equipment is shared (for example shared props, shared costumes). Risk is lessened if equipment can be fully cleaned between each use
Distancing possible between all participants	Physical distancing not possible

3. Further subject-specific advice for drama

These suggestions refer to practical classroom-based drama. School productions should not take place at the present time. Activities that require large groups, or where distancing between adults or between adults and pupils cannot be achieved, should not take place at this time.

Risk Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A risk assessment should be in place, to address the risks of COVID-19, using these guidelines to inform decisions and implement control measures. It will be necessary to take particular account of the needs of children and young people who require additional support to meet their needs. Completed risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances and advice is updated.
Drama spaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish strong drama “room routines”. Sanitise hands on entering and leaving and, if possible, identify a designated area to remove and keep jackets and personal belongings. Additionally, ask young people to put props or resources back in a specific location where they can be left until sanitised for others to use.• Drama teachers should consider the delivery of some lessons in an outdoor space with appropriate shelter where possible. This will require creativity in planning and delivering these sessions for children and young people.• Drama lessons can take place in a large area which is well ventilated and where physical distancing is possible between staff and young people. There may be a need to use alternative spaces such as assembly halls, games halls and general purpose areas around the school to deliver lessons. Drama staff should liaise with senior leaders in school where this is required.• Opening and closing stage curtains should be avoided, as should the use of studio curtains to create more intimate or “black box” type spaces.
Working together
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff should limit the number of children working together on improvised or text-based work to no more than 5.• Children and young people should work individually where possible, and suitable. Where this is not possible, children and young people should work in pairs or small groups. A small group in this context would be no more than five

pupils working together and, where a risk assessment allows, they should remain physically distanced where practically possible.

- Adults working with young people must adhere to physical distancing rules.
- For COVID-19 levels 1 and 2, teachers may consider it necessary for young people to wear face coverings in developmental and rehearsal activities. This could be where physical distancing is not possible.
- For COVID-19 levels 3 and 4, young people in the senior phase should wear a face covering at all times in the classroom. This will create challenges for rehearsal and performance activities, such as ensuring an audience can hear dialogue. Teachers must ensure young people are not disadvantaged by this restriction, for example during assessment of their work.

Hygiene measures

- Regular hand washing/sanitising should form part of classroom routines.
- Keep the use of props/costumes and any other shared resources to a minimum. Provide children and young people with sanitising wipes to wipe down any areas they are working in and any props, set or rostra they may be using.
- Cleaning of electrical equipment, such as sound and lighting, and video recording equipment should be completed by a member of staff, possibly working with young people. It will be vital to ensure that it is done thoroughly and safely, given the additional risks associated with cleaning materials.

Creative solutions

- Technology and digital platforms can be used, to share content and provide alternative contexts for learning about drama and theatre.
- Monologue can be used more often as a device for teaching characterisation, voice, facial expression etc. Monologue cannot be used for assessment purposes except at Advanced Higher level, but provides a possible approach to teaching aspects of practical drama.
- Record work for evaluation and assessment and/or use observational checklists to assess pupils.
- Encourage children and young people to undertake research-based tasks and preparatory work at home.

Planning lessons

- Teachers should consider their choices when selecting texts and use appropriate texts which do not have too many characters on stage at the same time.
- Group work/scenes should avoid any physical contact. Careful consideration should be given to staging scenes as well as positioning and proxemics of pupils/characters.

Teachers should give consideration to the length of activities being undertaken by children and young people, with brief breaks in lessons built into teacher planning. Additionally, practitioners may wish to allow young people to move to another area of the classroom to avoid lengthy periods in one area.

- Children and young people should not create improvised scenes which require them to use a loud volume.

Delivering the Drama curriculum

- Strenuous movement work should not currently be undertaken within the drama curriculum. Movement work that does not impact on young people's breathing may be conducted in pairs and small groups. It is important that teachers monitor this work to ensure young people maintain appropriate distance from each other to minimise risk. Teachers should minimise the teaching of group ensemble movement pieces where possible. Physical contact should not be allowed during any drama activities.
- Children and young people should not engage in make-up or hair design work on each other. In order to accommodate those young people who are progressing through qualifications in this specialist area, they should apply their own make up and create their own hair designs. Activities that require planning appropriate designs for productions, but without their actual construction, would also be an appropriate and safe activity for young people.
- Voice-based activity should be carefully planned. Exploring pitch, pace, tone, clarity, intonation, emphases, register, accent and dialect can all be taught in ways which support learners, while ensuring COVID-19 related mitigations are observed. However, in classes without face coverings, the exploration of volume and vocal projection should be avoided to minimise any strong outward breathing. In line with current Scottish government guidance, staff and all young people in S3 to S6 within COVID-19 levels 3 and 4 should wear a face covering at all times in classrooms.

- Where the remainder of a class form an audience to watch and evaluate the drama work, children and young people should space out to appropriate physical distance.
- Practitioners may wish to teach some elements of the curriculum which require less group-based activity and which can be delivered in alternative ways. For example, research on drama practitioners (Advanced Higher only), specific drama techniques, theatre arts and research on production concepts can all be delivered creatively to sustain the interest of children and young people. The balance of theory-based and practical work in drama should ensure that the subject remains interesting and motivating for children and young people.
- Use available online resources to facilitate the evaluation of drama performances. There are examples of online performances available to suit a variety of ages and stages.
- Whilst the nature of drama as a socially interactive activity children and young people should work individually where possible. Working in pairs and keeping physically distanced where possible is advised, with groups kept to no more than five.
- Teachers may wish to use the current context as a stimulus for learning. Developing interesting physical theatre, or developing a drama which explores a social issue with a maximum number of five characters for example, can provide an interesting context for learning.
- Using stage lighting can create challenges around ventilation and air quality in drama spaces. To minimise the transmission of the virus, young people should avoid positioning lighting or operating sound equipment unless it is absolutely necessary for their progress in these specialist areas of study. In these cases, particular care should be taken, including young people and staff wearing gloves, sanitising or washing hands before and after use and regularly cleaning equipment.
- Suggested approaches to further support practitioners may include:
 - use of mime activities;
 - setting video tasks;
 - monologue or challenge of filming a scene from a soap where actors are interacting on camera but are actually separate;
 - paired activities using more space in the class;
 - using environments as a stimulus for outdoor work;
 - role playing – physically distanced
 - group work with two to five pupils who are challenged to play roles that maintain a quiet volume; and
 - mask work with young people making their own mask and keeping it for their personal use.

Individuals and organisations working with children and young people outwith schools should consider the relevant Scottish Government guidance available through the links below.

Safer workplaces guidance can be found on the returning to work safely webpage: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-COVID-19-returning-to-work/pages/employers/>

In particular, providers are encouraged to follow the relevant links below:

- The Coronavirus (COVID -19) guidance for sport and leisure: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-sport-and-leisure-facilities/>
- The Coronavirus (COVID-19): general guidance for safer workplaces: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/>;
- the Coronavirus (COVID-19): small and micro businesses guidance: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-small-and-micro-businesses-guidance/>;
- the Coronavirus (COVID-19: guidance for the performing arts and venues sector: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-performing-arts-and-venues-sector/>;
- Where children are being taught, the Coronavirus (COVID-19): organised activities for children provisional guidance: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/>

The guidelines above will be updated in response to changing circumstances and scientific advice. Providers are advised to check the guidance regularly.

