

## **Learning and teaching in Drama Key Messages from the Covid-19 sub-group advice**

Following the return to full-time schooling in Scotland in August 2020, it has become apparent that, specific advice on the teaching of drama in schools would be a helpful addition to the advice set out in the Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020 document.

This guidance document has been prepared by Education Scotland based on the scientific advice provided by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues and with input from key stakeholders.

While acknowledging the importance of drama education in terms of developing skills and supporting health and wellbeing, and the negative impact of limiting drama in schools, the guidance here follows a precautionary approach based on the latest scientific advice with the aim of minimising the risk of transmission of Covid-19 and allowing schools to remain open.

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.

The guidance will be kept under review and updated when necessary. Local authorities and schools will also need to be able to adapt to local issues, e.g. outbreaks or local increases in cases of COVID-19, and follow any locally-determined advice and guidance.

*This advice is current on this date. The advice is reviewed periodically and may change as evidence is published and more about the virus is understood.*

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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) because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants. The wearing of face coverings is usually not possible for these activities.

There is a hierarchy of risk in these activities: outdoors being safer than indoors; activities undertaken at low volume or that have lower respiratory exertion being safer than aerosol-generating activities; individual or small numbers involved being safer than large groups; activities involving no sharing of equipment being safer than those that do (or where equipment cannot be thoroughly cleaned between uses); and activities which can be done at a distance (or virtually) being safer than those in close proximity. Shorter duration carries lower risk than longer duration.

The reopening of schools is a major and significant step. It is important to enable the actions required to prevent transmission of the virus to become established, and monitoring to be undertaken for a further period before resuming activities which carry such an increased risk. There should be an incremental approach to the introduction of these activities and further consideration should take place later in the school year when there will be further understanding about the virus and viral transmission.

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. It is also important route to equity and inclusion, and the basis of further education and employment for many. For all these reasons, it is important to find safe ways of undertaking Drama activities wherever possible, until they can be recommenced safely in full.

### Drama

There is limited evidence about the effects on coronavirus transmission of participation in drama. At the time of writing, members of SAGE are considering these issues, and advice is anticipated shortly. It is recommended that the advice that follows here is reviewed following clarification of the evidence from SAGE. Meantime, it is our advice that young people should not engage in drama, singing, or playing wind and brass instruments with other people, given these activities pose a potentially higher risk of transmission. However, this does not mean that these activities cannot take place at all, it simply means that an alternative approach should be taken to providing such lessons.

## 2. What mitigations are recommended?

For those young people who have chosen to undertake an SQA qualification in drama, it may well be necessary to record a virtual portfolio.

The risk for staff and for children and young people is also reduced if lessons take place out of doors or under an open-sized gazebo (or equivalent) with appropriate physical distancing in place where possible.

Careful consideration should be given to the cleaning of props for drama, items of set design and other equipment. People should wash their hands before and after touching such shared equipment.

Only when there is a combination of low-risk factors in place should the activity go ahead. Large group activities and those where no distancing can take place between adults or between adults and pupils, should not be re-introduced meantime.

Low risk	High risk
Outdoors or virtual activities (eg recorded performances, outdoor creative dance, use of awnings/gazebos)	Indoor activities in enclosed spaces (eg unventilated classrooms, studios)
Normal breathing and volume of speech (eg low volume monologue/dialogue, mime)	Higher volume or aerosol-generating activities (eg speaking at volume, singing, debating)
Individual or small numbers involved (eg solo performance, dialogue)	Large group (eg larger cast or chorus)
Any equipment is used only by one person (eg actors have their own costumes)	Equipment is shared (eg 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

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

### 3. Current additional Drama subject specific support

*This advice note for school-age children and young people is reviewed regularly and can change as evidence is published and more about the virus is understood. Separate guidance for Early Years and Childcare practitioners is available on the Scottish Government website.*

**The guidance refers to practical classroom drama and not to school productions, which should not take place at the present time.**

#### **Risk Assessments**

- A clear risk assessment should be in place. This needs to address the risks of COVID-19, using the scientific guidance provided above to inform your decisions and control measures. You will need to take account of the needs of those with additional special needs. Your risk assessment should identify clear measures to control the risks in your drama learning environment. Your drama risk assessment will support you to consider whether you have done everything necessary to promote safe learning and teaching during the pandemic. Completed drama risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances and present advice is updated.

#### **Drama spaces**

- 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 to a specific place where they can be left for a period and sanitised.
- Drama teachers should consider the delivery of some drama lessons in an outside space and 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 at present, as should the use of studio curtains to create more intimate or "black box" type spaces.

### **Working together**

- Staff should limit the number of children working together on improvised or text-based work.
- Children and young people should work individually where possible, and suitable, and where this is not possible, in pairs and in small groups. A small group in this context would be no more than four pupils working together and they should remain apart where practically possible.
- Physical distancing should be adhered to wherever practical and possible, particularly between adults working alongside young people in the classroom.
- It may be necessary for young people to wear face coverings in developmental and rehearsal activities where physical distancing is not possible. Drama teachers should use their discretion, and remain as vigilant as possible throughout lessons.

### **Hygiene measures**

- Regular hand washing /sanitising should form part of your planning for the delivery of every lesson.
- 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 or rostra they may be using.
- Cleaning of electrical equipment, such as sound and lighting, and video recording equipment should be done by the member of staff, possibly working with young people to ensure that this is done safely.

### **Creative solutions**

- Use technology and digital platforms where possible, to share content and provide alternative contexts for learning about drama and theatre.
- Monologue should be used more often as a device for teaching characterisation, voice, facial expression etc. Monologue cannot be used for assessment purposes until Advanced Higher but is a possible approach to teaching aspects of practical drama.
- Record work for evaluation and assessment and/or use observational checklists to assess pupils.

- Use blended learning approaches where appropriate, encouraging children and young people to undertake research based tasks and preparatory work at home.

### **Face coverings**

- While the wearing of face coverings in drama classes is not necessary, some rehearsal activity may necessitate the wearing of face coverings for older pupils.

### **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. Teachers should plan for an activity involving pairs or groups to change after approximately 15 minutes. Brief breaks should therefore be built into teacher planning.
- Children and young people should avoid creating improvised scenes which require them to shout.

### **Delivering the Drama curriculum**

- Strenuous movement work should be minimised within the drama curriculum and done on an individual basis where possible. Careful movement work in pairs and small groups may be possible with young people working well apart in order to minimise risk. Teachers should minimise the teaching of group ensemble movement pieces where possible. Touching should be avoided.
- No application of make-up or hair design work should be undertaken at this time by children and young people on each other. In order to accommodate those young people who are progressing through the qualifications in this specialist area ,they should apply their own make up and create their own hair designs. Planning appropriate designs for planned productions would also be an appropriate and safe activity for these 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 related mitigations are adhered to. However, the exploration of volume and vocal projection in class should be avoided to minimise any strong outward breathing. Exploration of volume and projection in voice work would necessitate the use of a face covering.

- Where the remainder of a class form an audience to watch and evaluate the drama work, they should space out wherever possible. Young people seated side by side is a further suggested mitigation where this is not possible.
- Practitioners may wish to teach some elements of the curriculum which require less group based activity at this time, and which can be delivered in alternative ways. For example, research on drama practitioners (AH 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 at all levels.
- Children and young people should work individually where possible, keeping a distance from others. The nature of drama, as a socially interactive activity means that this is, however, not the usual method of exploration for young people, nor the method of delivery for practitioners. Working in pairs where possible, and keeping physically distanced wherever practically possible is advised, with groups kept to no more than four.
- 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 4 characters for example, may provide an interesting context for learning.
- Using stage lighting can create issues around ventilation and air quality in Drama spaces. Young people should avoid positioning lighting or operating sound equipment where possible to minimise the transmission of the virus, unless it is absolutely necessary for their progress in these specialist areas of study. In these cases , 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 like a soap where actors are interacting on camera but are actually quite separate
  - Paired activities using more space in the class
  - Using environments as a stimulus for outdoor work.

- Role playing – where pairs sit 2 metres apart
- Group work with 2 to 4 pupils who are challenged to play roles that maintain a quiet volume.
- Monologue work
- Mask work, with young people making their own mask and keeping it for their personal use

We would encourage private drama teachers and all other drama partners who work with children and young people to read and follow this guidance.

