

COVID-19 support for teachers and schools

[Guidance updated on 8 January 2021](#)

Changes to our plans for essential school support

Following the start of the third national lockdown, we've updated our plans for essential school support from Teach First staff. This applies to anyone working with Teach First in a school with reference to our Training Programme and Leading Together programme. This guidance will remain in place until Easter in the first instance, unless otherwise communicated. Any updates will also be added to our [COVID-19 guidance pages](#).

During the second national lockdown our CEO, Russell Hobby, wrote a [blog sharing our plans and reactions at Teach First](#). We want to send a huge thank you to our dedicated partner schools for everything you and your colleagues are doing to support disadvantaged communities at a time of great need. If you have any questions about working with Teach First between January and Easter 2021, please contact your relevant Development Lead, University Tutor, or Teach First regional team as needed.

In-person support from Teach First staff

During national lockdown:

Due to the third national lockdown announced on 4 January 2021, we're now pausing all face-to-face visits by support roles in schools until further notice. We'll continue to provide online support to trainees, mentors, programme members and other key school stakeholders as we have been doing whilst considering how we can best support you in this new lockdown situation. Any further updates will be added to these web pages.

Outside of national lockdown (currently paused):

We're planning for our face-to-face support in schools to be made available in all government tiers, but the range of support will vary by government tier. This is also subject to ongoing changes to government or Department for Education guidance and is dependent upon the unique visitor policy for each school.

- **In all tiers** we continue to provide high quality, highly responsive support to trainees, mentors and programme members online. Although face-to-face meetings and support are important, we've received positive feedback about the impact of our online support and we're pleased that trainees and programme members are still making great progress.
- **For schools within Tiers 1 and 2**, we'll be prioritising face-to-face visits for trainees and schools that have the greatest or most imminent need for support. It's possible that the person visiting each school would not be their typical Achievement Partner or Development Lead. School visits regarding fundraising and videography activity might also take place in these areas.
- **For schools within Tiers 3 and 4**, we'll only be able to provide essential face-to-face support. This covers support that can't be done online and without which a trainee or school is at risk of withdrawing from their programme(s). This could be an observation of a trainee for whom progress is 'a cause for concern'; or a group coaching session, which is considered essential support.

We'll continue to provide most of our school support online where it is sensible to do so. To minimise risk and to reduce the likelihood of Teach First spreading COVID-19 between schools, our employees will only be permitted to make one school visit per day and cannot complete school visits in an area under different tier restrictions to the area in which they live.

In-person events for Teach First programmes

Teach First in-person programme events will remain online and **we won't hold any in-person programme events for the rest of the 2020/21 academic year**. This is to prioritise the health and safety of all involved and support with the forward planning for our partner schools and teachers. It covers in-person Training Programme CPD or training days, and those for school leadership programmes.

We are well equipped to continue delivering our programme events and learning modules online, as we have done since the initial lockdown period commenced. In practical terms, this means:

- Trainees, programme members and mentors will continue to have the support of Teach First through their Development Leads, both online and with in-person visits where this is essential. We encourage you to reach out to your Development Lead or Teach First regional team if you have any questions or concerns about this decision.
- This excludes Summer Institute 2021, which is currently being designed and more detailed information will follow.
- This excludes include university partner events related to any of our programmes. Our university partners have been informed of our plans to pause in-person events for the remainder of the academic year. However, they will make independent decisions about university events, and Training Programme university partners will communicate their plans separately.

Launching IRIS Connect as part of our COVID-19 response

We know our schools are facing enormously challenging times; support roles have had very limited or no access to schools, and the usual observations of classroom practice haven't taken place so far.

We're pleased to share that as an additional support package, we'll be working with a small group of trainees to roll out [IRIS Connect](#), with the aim of enabling remote video reflections of classroom practice. We're very excited to be able to offer this before we use it in full for the Training Programme starting in 2021. If you are part of this group, Development Leads will have been in touch with your school before Christmas.

Closing the 'Digital Divide'

We've also been hard at work investigating other ways we can continue to provide support to children who need it the most as part of [our Digital Divide campaign](#). We're calling for large businesses and the government to step forward to help close the digital gap and get the much-needed tech to pupils from poorer backgrounds, so they can continue to study at home if self-isolating.

The launch of our campaign was based on a Teacher Tapp survey we commissioned that found:

- Four out of five (84%) schools with the poorest pupils do not have enough devices and internet access to ensure all self-isolating pupils can keep learning.
- Schools are having to dip into alternative budgets to pay for this, with more than a quarter (27%) of all state schools using their reserve budgets – five times more likely than private schools (5%).

There are great pieces of media coverage in The Times, [The Guardian](#), [The Mirror](#), [BBC News Round](#), [Schools Week](#) and over 250 pieces of [local coverage](#). We're also raising it with MPs in Parliament, to put this issue at the heart of policy makers' agendas.