Sharing learning from Shanghai on school-reopening under Covid-19: recommendations for UK schools

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Sooner or later, school in UK will have to reopen after the lock-down period. How will they do itHere is the learning from the experience of schools in Shanghai China that have recently been in the reopening process. The three recommendations are based on three interviews held remotely with (i) a regional coordinate who is currently supporting implementation of the schools' action plan, (ii) a headteacher, and (iii) a classroom teacher, all from Shanghai. In addition to measures that are already subject to medical advice, e.g. concerning wearing face-masks, and the escalation of testing and tracing using apps and the QR code system, there are some other principles and processes that have been developed and implemented in Shanghai that we might beneficially emulate. Accordingly, I would recommend three measures that we could implement to prepare schools for re-opening: (1) to maintain social distancing within the school environment; (2) to provide Covid-19 awareness training for teachers, pupils, and parents; and (3) measures to prevent non-essential visits. The local authority (or local committee) would be best placed to coordinate the required resources and disseminate practice standards and support schools as necessary.

The re-opening of schools in Shanghai has been implemented in highly structured stages by reopening sequentially for different cohorts: (1) GCSE (Grade 9) and A Level (Grade 12) as the first cohort; (2) one week later, KS4 (Grade 8) and AS level (Grade 11) as the second cohort; and (3) one week after that, the remaining year groups (except the lower primary group) as the third cohort. Currently there is no timescale for lower primary groups to reopen in Shanghai. The strategy of sequential stages of re-opening aims at gradually increasing the schools' capacity for returning to full operation.

Recommendation 1: to maintain social distancing in the school environment

1.1 Clear signage to define mandatory social distance

In Shanghai, the mandatory social distance within the school environment is 1.2 metres. The mandatory distance measures have been clearly marked on the ground by 'dots' in the classroom, corridors, canteen, and even the toilets (see Fig 1). The entrance to the school demands particular measures to prevent groups of parents and children breaching the social distance mandate so clear

signage has been installed to remind parents and pupils to maintain the mandatory social distance (see Fig 2).

Figure 1 Social distancing floor signage in front of a female toilet   *Figure 2 Floor signage at a school entrance*

1.2 One- way system in circulatory arteries

Toilets, playgrounds, canteens, and classrooms are the main hubs of activity connected by corridors, which are the main circulatory arteries inside schools, so providing a one-way system in both corridors and activity hubs will minimise the risk of breaching the social distance mandate.

1.3 A special route for pupils with present (mild) symptoms

A designated route needs to be identified that can be used to provide exclusive access to a quarantine room in which any pupils presenting symptoms can be isolated. Everyone on the site (staff, including housekeeping staff, pupils, and essential maintenance workers) should be made aware of it. In addition, communication channels between schools and parents should be set up and clarified in case of a medical emergency.

1.4 Temperature and Health Monitoring

Schools in Shanghai have been tasked to scan pupils' temperature (the benchmark is 37.3 degrees), three time per day. This is a precautionary measure intended to identify any child with a fever or other health condition which may be a mild, and hence potentially otherwise undetected, symptom of Covid-19.

Recommendation 2: an awareness course for teachers, pupils and parents

2.1 Staff: before reopening the school, teachers undertake a compulsory online course covering the current medical advice about Covid-19 as well as the school's new policies and procedures implemented to cope with it.

2.2 Students: a Covid-19 awareness course has been added to students' timetables covering the nature of the virus, how to protect themselves and others from it, a to-do or not to-do list, FAQs, etc.

2.3 Parents: a letter can be sent to parents explaining what the school is doing, how it affects parents, and who they could contact in certain scenarios, etc.

Recommendation 3: measures to avoid non-essential visits to the school

Control measures need to be introduced to prevent non-essential contact between external visitors and people required to be on-site. These mainly apply to three types of people: staff (including housekeeping), students, and people from outside, e.g. maintenance and canteen workers and delivery drivers. To avoid non-essential visit, schools should draw up a list of non-essential visitors (namely, not school staff and pupils). Clear instructions about access restrictions for people from outside need to be provided and communicated, e.g. when, where and to whom they should report. A segregated rest-area with washroom facilities may also be needed. An area in which to quarantine and disinfect incoming goods, etc., should also be considered. Information about the new measures will need to be provided in advance to regular external visitors, explaining how they will be affected.