

EDUCATION IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS IN METHODIST PROPERTY

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FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT ADVICE FROM THE 13th MAY 2020

1. Introduction

Under its roadmap to lift restrictions step-by-step, the government is outlining that Step 2 will include the measure to provide ‘a phased return for early years settings and schools’ from 1st June 2020. This will need time and planning to ensure safety and the success of this measure, therefore Government policy is encouraging this planning to begin during Step 1 which commenced on the 13th May 2020.

A number of Methodist Church properties provide valuable accommodation for pre-schools and nurseries which fall within this definition. There is therefore an expectation that these pre-schools and nurseries will need to begin planning for reopening. This guidance is produced to assist Managing Trustees and church property stewards in working with early years providers. It intends to cover the property and related legal implications, and how properties can be adapted and run to ensure that all those accessing and working in this environment are kept safe. It is not intended to give guidance on how early years provision will be run and managed from an internal practical or educational perspective day-to-day, as this will be dealt with by the early years providers themselves under separate government guidance. The following guidance covers both potential early years settings in Methodist property:

- Early years education projects run by the Local Church e.g. a Local Church project. (Church Project Early Years Provision)
- Early years education projects run by a third party provider using Methodist premises under a lease or licence (Third Party Early Years Provision)

If there are any employment implications for managing trustees through implementing this guidance then please refer to government guidance for employers during this time at –

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

And consult the Connexional HR team at –

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/employees-and-volunteers/lay-employment-advisory-information/>

2. Government Policy Basis & Timescales for Implementation

‘A phased return for early years settings and schools. Schools should prepare to begin to open for more children from 1 June. The Government expects children to be able to return to early years settings, and for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to be back in school in smaller sizes, from this point. This aims to ensure that the youngest children, and those preparing for the transition to secondary school, have maximum time with their teachers... .’

[Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy](#), pp. 30 (HM Government 2020)

This policy is part of the government's roadmap to lift restrictions step-by-step, and is part of Step 2 covering the area of Education, which suggested planning begins from Wednesday 13th May 2020.

The government has produced and continues to update its guidance for the reopening of early years education, please refer to the following link before embarking on planning for reopening church property for educational purposes. Managing Trustees should note, that following Government guidance is particularly pertinent for Church Project Early Years Provision but also highlight points to be considered by those Managing Trustees considering requests to allow Third Party Early Years Providers to use church premises:

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Planning Guide for Early Years & Childcare Settings

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-early-years-and-childcare-settings-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-early-years-and-childcare-settings>

This government guidance covers all early years providers in England, which include the following groups:

- Local authority-maintained schools
- Non-maintained schools
- Independent schools
- All providers on the early years register
- All providers registered with an early years childminder agency

Managing Trustees need to assure themselves that their provision or provider fits into one of these categories. This guidance and expectation to open is currently aimed only at early years providers who are registered with OfSTED or a Childminder Agency under the Childcare Act 2006. More information on the definition and differentiation on this can be found at -

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted/childcare-and-the-law>.

3. Planning Process Prior to Opening

This initial planning phase will require a significant and dedicated input from Managing Trustees and property stewards in communicating and coordinating the reopening of a property with the early years provider – whether directly employed or a private organisation. In the initial assessment, the following is suggested:

- i. Appoint a suitable church lead for health, safety and safeguarding matters so that the lead for the early years provider has a single point of contact going forward.
- ii. It is important that there is a single point of contact so that decisions can be made quickly and efficiently in response to any issues going forward and clear actions then implemented.
- iii. It is practical to have a designated church committee to support this individual in any decision making or actions, which can be made 'virtually', to ensure consistency of decision & action.
- iv. As stated elsewhere in the Connexional Property COVID-19 guidance, church buildings themselves remain closed and therefore any opening of church property should be limited to the areas occupied or needed by the early years provider where practical (and any other essential groups who have or will be using premises in accordance with Government guidance). This will ensure that once operational, clear monitoring of occupied spaces can be maintained for cleaning regimes and thereby reducing the potential spread of any virus.
- v. In the planning process stage ensure the following:

Important: this planning process is essential, as it checks and ensures that the church property can meet the requirements of the early years provider; or alternatively highlights what other considerations need to be discussed and agreed to make the property safe to open. This is a shared process that should be ‘circular’ in process not linear i.e. each risk and action needs to be constantly reviewed over time so that processes can be monitored and changes made if needed to ensure the safety of all parties.

- a. Liaise with the early years provider before attending site.
- b. Ensure they have a copy of their site risk assessment and have shared it with you.
- c. Ensure they have a live¹ action plan in accordance with the government guidance; and ensure you have a copy of this plan.

¹NOTE: Where mentioned in this guidance, ‘live’ means a document which is reviewed and updated as part of a continuous process of reflection by those who own it, on how well it is working in reality, and making changes to it if needed; it is not intended to be a one solution, static document.

- d. In co-ordination with this shared information, produce a Covid-19 Risk Assessment for the building that can found [here](#);
- e. The church Managing Trustees have an obligation either as employer and early years provider (in relation to Church Project Early Years Provision) or landlord or licensor (in relation to Third Party Early Years Provision) to make every effort to ensure the safety of the educational provider, staff, children, its own church members or other third parties involved in this project.
- f. Follow the outcomes of the risk assessment and produce a live action plan which outlines what physical changes or provisions the Managing Trustees need to instigate to meet the requirements and obligations to the early years provider under their own delivery plan (see later suggestions).
- g. It is advisable to review this weekly, or even daily in the first few weeks, in co-ordination with the early years provider; or sooner if a particular issue arises during the course of the day; this is why the two documents should be seen as ‘live’ documents which evolve to improve through learning and knowledge to ensure best practice is achieved.
- h. Meetings and discussions are important to ensure the planning and ongoing monitoring processes are completed successfully and also that ongoing communication is practical but allows social distancing to be fully implemented, so the medium used should be proportionate:
 - Speak via telephone or an online meeting platform where practical;
 - Use still photographs or ‘live’ recordings and electronic communication if a particular issue needs answers;
 - If a site visit is required then operate a time system so that only essential lead staff are on site and social distancing rules can be accommodated safely;
 - If attending in person and social distancing is not achievable, ensure suitable PPE is worn to avoid potential transfer of any infection e.g. masks, protective glasses & gloves.
- vi. In the planning process, it may be considered that other spaces not usually used by the early years provider are required to ensure that suitable spacing and social distancing for children and adults can be achieved. This could be acceptable, but may have legal and insurance implications, covered in Sections 4 and 5.

- vii. When opening the property for the first time please refer to the separate guidance on the Connexional Team's separate [Re-opening Property Guidance](#) for the necessary risk assessments and health & safety checks. Again, these should be carried out with the support and cooperation of the educational provider.

4. Lease and Other Legal Obligations to Consider

Please [contact TMCP](#) if you have any queries relating to the lease or licence under which a Third Party Early Years Provider uses the church premises.

Specific information relating to COVID-19 and its impact on leases and licences can be found on the TMCP website in their [Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 4 to FAQ 8 inclusive) and their [Licence COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 1 to FAQ 3 inclusive).

Please note:

- If Managing Trustees want to allow a Third Party Early Years Provider to use more of the church building than is currently used under the current lease or licence (to allow for social distancing) then this would need to be documented very carefully. Please [contact TMCP](#) so that full guidance can be provided depending on the circumstances.
- Any requests from tenants for rent concessions in view of COVID-19 must be considered and documented very carefully. Please refer to the guidance in the [Non Residential Leases – requests from Tenants to a Rent Concession](#) article on the TMCP website.
- If Managing Trustees are already using the Standard Pre-School Licence which is provided by TMCP there should be no need to vary this to ensure that the Third Party Early Years Provider follows COVID-19 specific legislation or any additional guidelines or controls that the Managing Trustees need to impose to protect the safety of the building and other users due to COVID-19. Please refer to the [Re-opening Pre-Schools During COVID-19](#) article on the TMCP website.
- Although managing trustee liability is limited under the Standard Pre-School Licence, liability is only excluded so far as it is possible to do so by law. It is therefore critical that care is taken to fulfil the steps set down by the Government and the guidance produced by the Methodist Church in terms of risk assessments and keeping everybody safe, and also to ensure that insurance cover is not compromised (see the next point below). (Please refer to clause 8 of the Standard Pre-School Licence.)
- Please bear in mind that the ability to limit rights that a Third Party Early Years Provider exercises over communal areas will depend upon whether they are using Methodist premises under a lease or a licence. In relation to leases, please refer to [TMCP's Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 7.1). Managing Trustees have more flexibility with licences but will need to consider whether the terms of the licence require formal change. Please contact TMCP for guidance.
- Please consider any services provided to a Third Party Early Years Provider under a lease, e.g. cleaning, very carefully bearing in mind not only the Government's guidance and guidance issued by the Methodist Church relating to COVID-19 but also their legal rights under the lease. Please refer to [TMCP's Lease COVID-19 FAQs](#) (FAQ 7.1).

5. Insurance Matters

Please refer to the [Methodist Insurance website](#) for more information.

6. Main Considerations for Managing Trustees in Reopening parts of their Building

Managing Trustees need to be aware that controls within different users' 'separate environments' may be easier to manage with clear guidelines and controls. It is very important that in any planning and proposed changes that equal consideration is given to the interfaces between different occupiers/rooms/properties and within any communal/shared areas. This may be very different for church run early years provision as opposed to third party run early years provision. It is essential that these critical areas of contact between building users are risk assessed, action plans are clear and practical, and then processes are managed and controlled very carefully so that clear plans and areas of responsibility are allocated to a particular user to a shared, agreed standard (e.g. cleaning regimes). For example, such areas might include for example:

- Entrance doorways
- Corridors
- Washroom and WC facilities
- Kitchens
- Halls/Larger Rooms
- Outside spaces

This situation is especially relevant if temporary accommodation changes are being made, beyond the arrangements set out and agreed under an existing lease or licence agreement. It is important that if any changes are made, even temporary, to existing agreements then this is checked with TMCP – refer to their guidance set out in Section 4 above.

The following practical guidance is intended to assist Managing Trustees when they are considering everything from their risk assessment & discussions with their early years provider through to implementing changes to the property (in co-ordination with their early years provider if relevant). It is not intended as a definitive list, as each property should be assessed and changed accordingly to suit site and provider requirements. Please refer to [guidance on safe working in an education and childcare](#).

Managing Trustees should also be aware that they will have a greater responsibility for some of these considerations where this is a church run early year provision, as opposed to one run by a third party. The points raised should therefore be carefully considered depending upon the specific situation:

i. Property Access, Limitations, Security & Means of Escape Matters

As part of the planning, safe means of access and egress for every building user – educational and church members alike is essential. This should be considered in the risk assessments and action plans, but the following general points should be considered:

- Limit the number of key holders to the building to ensure control access.
- Ensure that if a church member is unlocking then they do not fall into 'at risk' categories.
- Limit access to the other parts of the building not opened; this will ensure management of any virus transfer and therefore implications on cleaning regimes.
- Ensure that everyone who accesses the building signs in and co-ordinate with the early years provider the number of visits and personnel on site to ensure that social distances can be maintained.

- Work with your early years provider to ensure that any access or areas in use do not have compromised fire escape routes or means of escape to external areas.
- Work with your educational provider to ensure that any access or building limitations do not compromise security for the open parts of the buildings or other parts of the building.

ii. Moving around the building

- Limit movement between different user group areas within the building(s) to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
- Limit the number of people who use lifts or stairs if possible/relevant.
- Reduce the number of people in high traffic areas, particularly if these are used more regularly by the educational provider as part of a temporary circulation regime.
- Mark areas using tape to help people keep to the advised safe distance limits.
- Consider introducing temporary pedestrian walkways to allow people to maintain social distancing when moving around – this is particularly relevant in external areas for adults picking-up/dropping their children.

iii. Common areas

Agree how communal or common areas are used, such as kitchens, toilets, showers, and changing facilities. The following needs to be considered:

- Physically moving tables/chairs so they are the advised safe distance limits.
- Staggering break times so that people are not using spaces at the same time – this should be more carefully considered depending upon the specific situation relevant to the church property and how it is used.
- Where this is not possible, creating additional space for people to take their breaks in.
- Marking areas using tape to help people keep to the advised safe distance limits.
- Using outside areas for breaks if the locations are suitable and it is safe to do so.

Where you cannot keep to the advised safe distance limits, you need to think about how to keep common areas clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces. You should think about:

- How frequently you need to clean the common areas.
- Identifying objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently you clean them.
- Setting clear guidance and line of responsibility for the use of kitchens, toilets, showers, and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

iv. Cleaning and Hygiene

- Follow the [COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#) guidance.
- Ensure that sufficient handwashing facilities are available that provide running water, soap and paper towels. Where a sink is not nearby, provide hand sanitiser in shared spaces – particularly in entrance areas.
- Use signs and posters to increase awareness of good handwashing technique.
- Provide regular reminders on avoiding touching your face and to cough/sneeze into your arm.

- Set clear guidance for the cleaning of toilets, showers and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.
- Set clear guidance on how to handle and store cleaning materials/products safely (COSHH Guidelines) and when cleaning procedures need to be followed.
- Clean surfaces that children are touching, such as doors, sinks, toilets, light switches, bannisters, more regularly than normal in areas under the church's responsibility.
- Ensure that bins are emptied throughout the day.
- Where possible, all spaces should be well ventilated using natural ventilation (opening windows).
- Prop doors open, where safe to do so (bearing in mind fire safety and safeguarding), to limit use of door handles and aid ventilation.
- Get in touch with buying partners about proportionate supplies of soap, anti-bacterial gel and cleaning products if needed – churches can work together with their education partners to ensure that this is available for all areas of the building being used.
- Please note: There is no need for anything other than normal personal hygiene and washing of clothes following a day in an educational or childcare setting.

v. Information and guidance

- Provide all users of the building with information on procedures & guidance that have been introduced. This could include signs or notices.
- Consider how you will pass information and guidance to people who don't have English as their first language and others who may struggle with written and verbal communication.
- Holding conversations with any interested parties, listening to and acting on their concerns through recording and responding to these at the risk assessment stages and then reflection stages during implementation.

vi. PPE (personal protective equipment)

- Ensure that PPE is available to church members if risk assessments suggest this is necessary when visiting the property, please refer to the following [link](#) for more details.

7. Other Considerations for Working with your Educational Provider

The considerations below (in italics) are based on the property related government guidance listed in the links provided earlier. It is important to note that this section should be read differently if this is

- a church run early years provision, or a
- third party run early years provision.

This section is intended to highlight some of the potential issues which may arise beyond the standard government guidance, and how Managing Trustees can respond creatively and positively to some of the issues this might raise. Again, this is not intended as an exhaustive list, and should be based on specific and property related assessment.

i. Other Considerations for Accommodation during Planning and Organising Stage

- *Once risk assessments and plans have been developed and agreed* - ensure that all health and safety compliance checks have been undertaken on site before opening, also follow the 'opening church buildings' guidance provided separately.
 - *Consider how to keep small groups of children together throughout the day and to avoid larger groups of children mixing* – this may mean the Managing Trustees providing additional, suitable space which will need risk assessing and referring to the legal and insurance guidance earlier.
 - *Remove unnecessary items from classrooms and other learning environments where there is space to store it elsewhere* – Managing Trustees need to consider providing temporary storage for this.
 - *Remove soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean (such as those with intricate parts)* – Managing Trustees need to consider providing temporary storage for this. Please refer to the legal guidance earlier regarding providing additional space and [contact TMCP](#) if this will require any amendment or variation to the lease or licence.
 - *Consider how children arrive at the education or childcare setting* – Managing Trustees need to assist education providers in developing an entrance and egress strategy such as using different doors/corridors and limiting access to parking areas or play areas (See earlier note about control and maintenance of shared spaces).
- ii. Communicating your plans**
- *If parents and young people have allocated drop off and collection times* – Managing Trustees may need to consider helping with additional signage and controls for safe queuing measures and the processes for doing so, including protocols for minimising adult to adult contact (for example, which entrance to use).
 - *Make clear to parents that they cannot gather at entrance gates or doors, or enter the site communicate early with contractors and suppliers that will need to prepare to support your plans for opening* – again Managing Trustees can help here with good signage in communal areas, external pathways and at entrance doors.
 - *Discuss with cleaning contractors or staff the additional cleaning requirements and agree additional hours to allow for this* – this is absolutely essential that this process is organised and agreed between all parties, particularly for those areas more commonly used or used by other people. It is important that a schedule of responsibilities is drawn up to ensure that regimes are adhered to and there are no areas of unclear, or no, responsibility.
- iii. When open**
- *Ensure that children are in the same small groups at all times each day, and different groups are not mixed during the day, or on subsequent days* – once again, it might be that the Managing Trustees can offer some additional, temporary, 'breakout' space for the school so that this requirement can be met fully.
- iv. Ensure that wherever possible children and young people use the same classroom or area of a setting throughout the day, with a thorough cleaning of the rooms at the end of the day** - this is covered under [cleaning guidance](#) from the government.
- v. Reduce mixing within education or childcare setting by**
- *Accessing rooms directly from outside where possible* – Managing Trustees can assist here by discussing other means of accessing a room or set of rooms, bearing mind the issue around communal areas and controlled access for safeguarding and means of escape.
 - *Considering one-way circulation, or place a divider down the middle of the corridor to keep groups apart as they move through the setting where spaces are accessed by corridors* – these are areas where Managing Trustees can help facilitate these requirements

vi. Use outside space

- *For outdoor education, where possible, as this can limit transmission and more easily allow for distance between children and staff* – Managing Trustees might want to consider temporarily closing off parking areas etc. to traffic (if safe) to provide additional outside space during this time.

8. If Physical Alterations are required

- In this guidance, it is not intended to suggest that physical changes to a property, either temporary or permanent are required or indeed encouraged. Managing Trustees may consider this though as part of a wider project or expansion of their space for mission in this regard.
- It is also difficult within this document to provide specific guidance and therefore each project should be considered on its own merits.

If such considerations are undertaken, then it is important that Managing Trustees follow the correct process for obtaining consent and advice. This should include their District Property secretary, the Connexional Property Team and Conservation Officer (if relevant) and TMCP.