



Adjusting your staffroom facilities for social distancing



The staffroom has previously been the hub of the school, where staff meet to discuss their day, get support from colleagues, take a much needed break and refuel ready for the next part of their day. But with the new government guidelines suggesting schools use their staffrooms as little as possible, how do we ensure that staff still have this vital lifeline for their mental and physical health?

Below are some ideas to get you started, no schools are the same with different buildings, needs of staff and the resources available to them, so not all of these ideas will work for everyone, but I hope they give you a starting point to work from and help you keep your staff's wellbeing at the top of the priority list.

Please don't forget about you as well, leaders need to take a break as well, they need adult interaction and someone to talk to. Make sure you are not looking after others at the expense of your own wellbeing.

Paying for adjustments

So much money has been spent of making your school a safer place to be, it must seem like a never ending spending spree and you don't have bottomless pits of money. But think outside the box when it comes to funding for the ideas shared here. Your PTA might be able to purchase some things, appeal to local businesses directly or through social media requests, or even ask staff or parents themselves if they could donate or loan things. People may have garden furniture they no longer want, or spare crockery in the garage, a kettle they use for camping. Asking others to contribute shows that you care enough about your staff to think outside the box!

Be creative

We have in our head what a staffroom used to look like and 'should' look like but there is very little in schools that look the same as this time last year so our perception of the staffroom may need to change too. Think about how it can be used by staggering lunch and break times, deploying support staff in different ways to give people a break and thinking outside the box in terms of how you use the spaces in your buildings. If you are using support staff to help give other staff breaks, don't forget that they will need a break too though!

Ask staff what they would like to see, and involve them in the process. They may have ideas you hadn't thought of, and they will feel cared for.

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Why it's important

Staffrooms are not just meeting rooms, they are so much more than that. They are a lifeline for many to talk through their day and seek friendship, advice and some much needed light relief.

Staggered break and lunchtimes may mean that your staffroom can cope with the capacity of your staff, but it also might be necessary to put additional systems in place.

Staff need somewhere to have a break from the students, until now they may have been eating with them in the classroom, but that is not good for their mental health in the long term. Eating 'on the go' is not good for stress levels and does not encourage healthy eating.

Social distancing may mean that they have very little interactions with others over the past 5 months which will be affecting their mental health. We can help staff so much by adapting facilities so they can now socialise again in a safe way

They also need somewhere to store their lunch, heat it up if necessary and eat it. They need facilities to make a drink and somewhere to chat to another adult.

This is all vital for their mental wellbeing.

Using other rooms

Think about what rooms you have around your school that will not be used, or used differently because of social distancing guidelines, do you have an extra hall or gym? Is there a PPA room or meeting room that could be used as an extra staffroom at break and lunch. Are there department areas or offices that could be adapted in the short term for parts of the day.

Ask your staff for suggestions too.



Adjusting your staffroom facilities for social distancing continued ...

Outside space

This is not ideal as we go into the winter months, but it could be a short term solution whilst you get your head around what to do. Gazebos put up outside or using existing outdoor classrooms could give you the space you need to keep staff safe. There obviously wouldn't be the electrical facilities outside, but could they make their food and drink in the staffroom and then bring it outside?

Please try and make sure these spaces are away from where the children are having their break if possible so the staff don't get disturbed.

Toilets

Toilets could be a potential pinch point as they are often a small space and hard to social distance navigating around them. There is also the added problem of having the time to go to the toilet if break and lunchtimes are cut short, assemblies cancelled and new staffing areas not being close to toilet facilities.

Watch out for staff avoiding drinking throughout the day to avoid having to go to the toilet, this could have serious implications on their health.

Making staff feel safer by providing quick to use cleaning equipment like wipes or spray disinfectant may help. Ensuring there are sanitary bins in all toilets will help staff too.

Encouraging use of facilities

Because of stricter social distancing rules we have been used to, staff may be reluctant to leave their classrooms, or gotten out of the habit of taking a break. It is really important that we encourage them to come out of their workspaces and take a break,

It may also be useful to designate some support staff to go around and turn on all the kettles just before break and lunch to make things easier and also have some clean the areas after use if you feel that is necessary.

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What you might need

If you are creating some new spaces for your staff, you will need to replicate the staffroom in smaller sizes.

A kettle is a must, along with extra mugs and the all important teaspoons. A microwave would be a good idea, consider also extra plates and cutlery for each space and a mini fridge would be ideal. Chairs and tables to eat at, spaced out to comply with social distancing rules and some extra hand sanitiser and wipes if there is no sink available. Think about how and where staff will store their lunch. If access to the fridge is restricted could you provide ice packs to help keep it cold? Or provide subsidised school dinners?

New electrical equipment will need to be PAT tested.

PPA/free periods

How staff used to spend PPA/free periods may not be possible in the coming months. It might not be possible to use the staffroom if that is being used for staggered breaks due to space restrictions and noise. Staff may not be able to use their rooms for free periods if classes are staying still and the staff moving around.

Think about providing the flexibility for staff to take their PPA at home to reduce the pressure on rooms at school.

Investing in wellbeing

School budgets have never been stretched so tight as they are at the moment, and this may be leaving you with your head in your hands. But investing in wellbeing now will save money and more importantly stress levels in the future. Ensuring you and your staff are both physically and mentally well will help to avoid staff sickness in the future.

It may not be possible to call on supply teachers to cover sickness so be proactive with wellbeing and health must be a priority from the start.

Don't forget about your own wellbeing too, this needs to be a whole school approach that helps every member of your staff, including you!