

How France's plan to reopen schools has changed^[1]

The French Prime Minister and Education Minister have released more details about how they plan to reopen the country's schools after May 11th. Here's the latest plan from the French government.

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EXCERPTS

The French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and France's Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer have added more details to the government's plan to reopen education establishments around the country. Indeed some aspects of the initial plan have changed.

"School life will be organised around compliance with strict hygiene measures and the distribution of hydroalcoholic gels", said PM Philippe.

The national plan was presented to parliament but local officials have the power to make adaptations as local circumstances dictate and some measures will apply only to départements where there is a low number of coronavirus cases. We will likely know more about where schools will reopen in the coming days.

Here is a look at what the government has in mind for the return to school post May 11th when the lockdown imposed to fight the spread of the coronavirus pandemic will begin to be eased.

Key dates

May 11th

This is the date when pre-school (maternelles) and primary schools (élémentaire, primaire) will reopen, although the first day will be just for the return of teachers.

Pupils won't return until May 12th.

Classes will be limited to groups of 15 and the reopening will be based on a "voluntary" system.

In other words parents won't be forced to put their kids back in schools, but they will have to ensure they can follow teaching from home.

If classes are oversubscribed the children of keyworkers, vulnerable children or children who are not able to home-school will get priority.

Initially the government's plan was to allow only certain classes to return to pre-school and primary schools on May 11th with the rest to return on May 25th.

But this split has been scrapped in favour of bringing all year groups in the schools back at once.

It's worth adding however that many mayors have already objected to primary schools reopening on May 11th and have threatened to keep them closed.

Teaching unions too have expressed opposition especially in areas hard-hit by the virus such as Paris.

"We are asking for details on the health protocol," said Francette Popineau from the SNUipp-FSU union.

"We also need to be very clear, if a school cannot meet all the sanitary requirement, it must not reopen," she added.

Local authorities have the final say, so it might be the case that come May 11th not all primary and pre-schools in all parts of the country actually reopen.

Nurseries

Crèches will also be able to reopen on May 11th, but children will only be allowed in groups of 10 maximum.

May 18th.

From May 18th secondary schools (*colleges*) will be able to reopen in France. But unlike the reopening of primary schools, this will be based on the government's new "weather map" system for each *département*.

Départements will be coloured red if the virus is still prevalent in the area and hospitals are still under pressure and they will be coloured green if the area is largely free of the virus.

Only secondary schools in the départements coloured green will be allowed to reopen and it won't be all classes. Only years 5 and 6 will return on May 18th. A decision will be taken at the end of May for years 4 and 3.

Class sizes will also be limited to 15 pupils.

'By the end of May'

Initially the government aimed for high-schools (*lycées*) and technical colleges (*lycée professionnels*) to reopen on May 25th but the government has now changed tack.

French PM Philippe said a decision will be taken by the end of May as to when *lycées* will reopen again. If the government gives the green light then these establishments could reopen in June starting with the technical colleges.

Classes will also be limited to 15 so many pupils may have to continue distance learning.

"I want to leave the maximum amount flexibility to school directors, parents of pupils and local communities to work together pragmatically to find the best solutions", said PM Philippe.

Summer holidays

After much speculation that France's sacrosanct summer holidays (*grandes vacances*) could be delayed until later in the summer, France's education minister Jean-Michel Blanquer said on Wednesday that they won't be altered.

So schools will break up for the summer on Saturday, July 4th.

Support will be put in place over the summer for pupils who have fallen behind, the education minister has said.

Normally town halls put in place extra-curricular school clubs for primary school children throughout the summer, but how and if this will be organised has not been decided.

Masks

Education Minister Blanquer has made it clear that all staff working in schools and nurseries will be required to wear masks.

However only pupils in secondary schools (*colleges*) will be forced to wear them. Masks will be made available in schools if pupils don't bring their own.

The government has decided that it would be counter-productive to force primary and pre-school pupils to wear masks.

Teachers

Teachers with "health vulnerabilities" would be able to remain on *télétravail* (working from home).

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: school system ^[4]

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