



**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

21<sup>st</sup> April 2020

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter sent on behalf of the Education Select Committee. I would like to use this as an opportunity to address the concerns raised in your letter dated 1 April, as well as providing a general update on the Department's COVID-19 response.

I join you in commending the professionalism and dedication of our school workforce, who rightly take their place next to our NHS staff and other critical workers as central to our efforts in battling this virus. This is a difficult time for school staff and I am very grateful for their dedication, which is enabling schools to remain open to children who are vulnerable, and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response.

I agree that the welfare of school staff is paramount and will continue to ensure that they receive the right support and guidance to keep them safe. I would like to assure you that no one experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should be asked to work on the frontline in close proximity to children. Staff in schools experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate for at least seven days (or for 14 days if a member(s) of their household is experiencing symptoms), to reduce the spread in the community. The Government's latest stay at home guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>.

We are strongly advising people, including education staff, with serious underlying health conditions which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), to rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. Staff in this position must not attend work. More advice on this can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>.

Staff with other conditions that mean they are at increased risk of serious illness as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) should work from home where possible, and education and childcare settings should endeavour to support this. More advice on this is included in the social distancing guidance which can be found here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>.

The Government is significantly increasing testing capacity, and the ultimate goal is for anyone who needs a coronavirus test to have access to one. As set out in the Government's Testing Strategy, we are working to expand capacity to 100,000 tests a day by the end of April. While we are building up our testing capacity at pace, we are offering testing to different groups in a phased approach. We plan to roll out testing to critical workers within the education and children's social care workforces in due course.

Regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the vast majority of education and care settings, including day special schools, will not need PPE. PHE guidance is that children displaying COVID-19 symptoms should be at home, meaning that PPE should not be needed in day schools and colleges as it should not be used as a precautionary measure.

If schools previously dealt with the personal care of students, they should already be equipped to continue this care. If they cannot get their regular supplies of PPE from their normal providers, they can contact their local resilience forum who have been given stocks of PPE to deliver to their local community.

Guidance on implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings is available here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>.

Guidance to support the management of children and young people in residential educational settings during the COVID-19 outbreak is also available here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>.

Please see also below a general update on the Department's COVID-19 response:

- **Support for remote learning-** we have announced a package of measures to support remote learning, including for children who are disadvantaged or vulnerable, more information can be found here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-major-package-to-support-online-learning>.
- **Support for vulnerable children-** we are asking our local authorities and schools to ensure every vulnerable child knows that their school is there to

support them, and that systems are in place to keep in touch with those children who are unable to attend because of a health reason. Guidance on supporting vulnerable children and young people during the COVID-19 outbreak can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>.

- **Financial support for education, early years and children's social care-** we have published guidance on financial support for these providers which can be found here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care>.
- **Free school meal provision-** free school meal guidance for schools is available here, including information on the national voucher scheme: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>.
- **Guidance on awarding qualifications in summer 2020-** Ofqual have provided information for schools, students and parents on how GCSE, AS, A level, vocational and technical qualifications will be awarded this summer, more information is available here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020>.
- **Guidance for children's social care services -** we have recently published guidance for local authorities on children's social care services during the COVID-19 outbreak, this can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-on-childrens-social-care>.
- **Funding available to schools to support them with exceptional costs -** extra funding has been made available for schools to cover the financial costs of COVID-19. Guidance covering the 2019-20 summer term can be found via this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools>.
- **Special educational needs and disability (SEND) risk assessment guidance-** we have published guidance on risk assessment for settings supporting children and young people with an education, health and care plan during the COVID-19 outbreak. This guidance can be found here- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance>.
- **Guidance on school and college accountability -** we have confirmed that we will not publish any school or college level educational performance data

based on tests, assessments or exams for 2020. We have published guidance explaining how school and college accountability will operate for the academic year 2019 to 2020. This guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-and-college-performance-measures>.

- **Social distancing in education and childcare settings** - we have updated guidance on social distancing in education and childcare settings, including measures that can be put in place to limit the risk of the virus spreading within these settings, this includes a Q&A which is available here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>.
- **Updated guidance on apprenticeship programme** - we have updated our guidance on the apprenticeship programme response to COVID-19, this includes information on the continuation of training and end-point assessments for furloughed apprenticeships, and the pausing of new funding audits. This guidance can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response>.
- **Updated guidance on maintaining further education provision** - we have updated our guidance for further education providers on maintaining education and skills training provision, it now includes more information on funding, ongoing and online learning, and supporting vulnerable young people. This guidance can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**