



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
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16 September 2020

Dear Robert,

I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 2 September and 15 September.

After months of hard work and dedication from school staff across the country to implement protective measures first set out by the Department in July, over the last two weeks pupils have been welcomed back into classrooms for the autumn term. On 7 September, I wrote to teachers, leaders, and school staff to thank them for all their work in welcoming pupils back to schools, colleges, and other settings up and down the country. I have been absolutely delighted to see on social media some of the reunions that have been taking place and am filled with admiration for the magnificent way teachers, leaders, and school staff have responded to this national priority.

Schools, colleges, and other settings are now open to all pupils in all year groups and our primary focus is to support settings. Changes to school attendance will only ever be an absolute last resort.

In areas of national intervention, where restrictions have been implemented for other sectors, we anticipate that education and childcare provision will usually remain fully open to all.

We are confident that local lockdown measures, combined with NHS Test and Trace, are effective enough to mean we will not have to reduce school attendance. However, in preparation for a worst-case scenario the Department has set out the Contain framework for exceptional circumstances.

The framework sets out the confidence planning and an overview of tiers of restriction for education and childcare settings. This may involve limiting attendance to priority

year groups, or in more serious cases, closing impacted schools, except for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. In those situations, restrictions will be implemented in a phased manner – the key aim being to retain as much face-to-face provision as possible.

We began publishing attendance statistics for the autumn term on 15 September and these can continue to be monitored here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>.

Over 99.9% of state-funded schools were open on 10 September. Of the small proportion of schools (less than 0.1%) that were closed, this was due to both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related reasons. We estimate 92% of state-funded schools were fully open on 10 September. Responses indicate that, for most schools that reported they were not fully open, this was due to non-COVID-19 related reasons. Of all schools that responded, 1% said they were not fully open due to suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Approximately 88% of pupils on roll in state-funded schools were in attendance on 10 September. Attendance was higher in fully open schools - we estimate 90% of all pupils on roll in fully open state-funded schools were in attendance on 10 September.

Pupils have returned to school with a 'system of controls' in place to keep all pupils and staff safe by minimising direct contacts and maintaining social distancing wherever possible. This full return comes with the unanimous backing from the Chief Medical Officers across the four nations of the UK in their recent consensus statement, highlighting that the health risk posed by COVID-19 to children is extremely low and noting the significant risk to young people's wellbeing if they are not in school. Further to our advice on protective measures, the Medical Director of Public Health England and Chief Medical Adviser of NHS Test and Trace wrote to school and college leaders on 3 September with advice on testing and shielding. Their letter can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-phe-and-nhs-test-and-trace-to-school-and-college-leaders> and the consensus statement can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-schools-and-childcare-reopening>.

Other key updates

In addition to the above, please see below some recent key updates from the Department.

The Department has updated guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The latest guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

The Department has updated the guidance for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>

The Department has updated the guidance on what all schools will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak from the start of the autumn term which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

The Department has updated the guidance on what all special schools and other specialist settings will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak from the start of the autumn term to support the return of children and young people with special education needs and disability (SEND). The latest guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings>

The Department has published guidance for residential educational settings with international students under the age of 18 entering and travelling to the UK during the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-boarding-schools-with-international-students>

The Department has update the guidance on what further education (FE) providers need to know for the autumn term so that students of all ages can benefit from their education and training in full which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>

The Department has updated the guidance for schools and local authorities on school meals arrangements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The Department has updated the guidance for higher education (HE) providers in England on when and how to reopen their campuses and buildings which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>

Following announcements made on 4 May 2020 and 27 June 2020, the Department has published the Government's plans to achieve significant reductions in

bureaucracy for the research, innovation and university sectors. This policy paper can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-bureaucratic-burdens-higher-education>

The Department has published details on a range of opportunities to gain new skills, undertake work placements, additional learning and career development to support students who had planned to start higher education this year but who have had to defer until next year. Whilst this package is targeted at those who had not planned to defer, some of the options, such as the skills toolbox, will be open to those who had planned to defer. In addition, where there is space on any of the other initiatives all students deferring will be eligible. Full details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/package-of-support-for-students-who-have-to-defer-their-studies>

The Department has published updated guidance on early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework disapplication's due to coronavirus (COVID-19), which are reviewed on a monthly basis and due to end on 25 September 2020. New regulations will come into force on 26 September 2020 and will only apply where a provider is prevented from complying with the prescribed requirements of the EYFS due to coronavirus (COVID-19) related restrictions or requirements which have been imposed on a geographical area by regulations or a direction. Full details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2/early-years-foundation-stage-coronavirus-disapplications>

The Department has updated the guidance aimed at helping post-16 educational establishments in HE and FE, including sixth form colleges, understand PPN 02/20 and PPN 04/20. The latest version is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/procurement-policy-notice-ppn-0220-supplier-relief-due-to-covid-19-additional-post-16-educational-sector-guidance>

The Department has updated advice for providers offering early years initial teacher training (ITT) and updated guidance for all ITT providers about managing ITT courses impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-itt-requirements-supporting-advice> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-initial-teacher-training-itt>

The Department has updated guidance for schools on how to access digital devices for children requiring access to remote education due to shielding or local coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions. The updated guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-laptops-and-tablets-for-children-who-cannot-attend-school-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department wants to build temporary educational psychologist capacity in England to support schools and colleges returning in September and has published guidance for former educational psychologists who may be interested in temporarily returning to the profession and practising educational psychologists who may have additional capacity to offer support for a limited period. The full guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-psychologists-support-for-coronavirus-covid-19-recovery>

Ofqual has published the outcome of the consultation on arrangements for vocational and technical qualification assessments in 2021. Responses to the consultation have been carefully considered and given the high level of agreement to the proposals, Ofqual have confirmed their decisions and that the proposed arrangements are being implemented in full. The full outcome is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-assessment-and-awarding-of-vocational-technical-and-other-general-qualifications-in-2020-to-2021>

Ofsted has published updated guidance for education providers about Ofsted's phased return to inspection which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-plans-from-september-2020>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education