



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

11 November 2020

Dear Robert-

Thank you for your letter of 23 October, following my appearance before the committee on 20 October 2020. I am writing to you to provide additional information.

Remote Education

In our school guidance for full opening, we set out expectations that schools develop plans to offer immediate, high quality, remote education, as and when needed. The Direction makes clear that schools have a duty to provide remote education for state-funded, compulsory school-age children who are unable to attend school due to coronavirus (COVID-19) in line with guidance and the law. The Direction also requires schools to have regard to existing remote education guidance. The guidance itself is non-statutory.

To support schools to meet the expectations set out in the guidance for full opening, the department has announced a remote education support package which can be found on the remote education service on gov.uk. We will take supportive action to help schools with their remote education plans and provision. In the first instance, schools will be signposted to the remote education support package and encouraged to access these resources.

Parents can complain through the usual route if their child is not receiving adequate education while not in school. This is explained on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>. Parents should speak to schools about the remote education provision before raising a formal complaint with

the Department.

With regard to Ofsted's role, routine inspections are currently suspended but inspectors are carrying out a programme of visits to a sample of schools. The visits are based around collaborative discussions about how the school is returning to full education of all its pupils, including through any remote provision. When routine inspections resume, inspectors will take account of remote education as part of its assessments. Schools are also held accountable for the outcomes they achieve by governors and trustees.

Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) can also take supportive measures to help schools in their region with remote education. We are funding School to School Support for schools that need help with COVID-19 recovery, which can include support with developing a school's remote curriculum by reviewing potential contingency plans and sharing good practice. System leaders in education provide support for an average of five days and in line with the current coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for schools. They may, for example, wish to use this to have support from National Leaders of Education (NLEs) who know how to do this well and who can signpost appropriate resources, connect to wider networks and provide advice on planning.

As set out in the Direction, the duty to comply with this Direction by a responsible body is enforceable by the Secretary of State making an application to the High Court or the county court for an injunction, and any such application may be made without notice being given to the responsible body. There would be numerous supportive steps taken to help schools meet their remote education requirements ahead of any legal action.

During my appearance before the committee, Christian Wakeford MP asked how we are assessing the number of children who remain without internet connections, and how we are helping children who need a device to engage in remote education. As part of over £195 million invested in technology to enable access to remote education, over 220,000 laptops and tablets and over 50,000 4G wireless routers have already been delivered during the summer term for disadvantaged children in Year 10, children receiving support from a social worker and care leavers. Since the beginning of the new term in September we have also delivered over 100,000 further devices to schools, with more in the pipeline (see below).

The Department estimated the number of disadvantaged pupils without access to an internet connection using data on pupils eligible for Free School Meals in each school, taking into consideration estimations by Ofcom and reflecting that some pupils would already have access to a private internet connection.

The 4G wireless routers come with free data for the autumn term and will allow local authorities and academy trusts to continue to support disadvantaged children who may have their face-to-face education and care disrupted because of the pandemic. Local authorities and trusts are responsible for identifying the children who need internet access and

providing the routers to them.

Additional 4G wireless routers are being provided this term, where needed. The Department is also working with the major telecommunications companies to improve internet connectivity for disadvantaged families who rely on a mobile internet connection. We are piloting an approach where mobile network operators are providing temporary access to free additional data, offering families more flexibility to access the resources that they need the most. In the pilot, schools, trusts, and local authorities have identified children who need access to free additional data.

We are also making a further 340,000 laptops and tablets available this term where face-to-face education is disrupted. Schools can also order laptops and tablets, alongside 4G wireless routers, for disadvantaged children in years three to eleven, across all year groups who are shielding as a result.

The impact of cancellation of exams on pupils with special educational needs

Tom Hunt MP asked about the impact of cancelling exams this year on pupils with special educational needs. The Government worked with Ofqual to construct the fairest possible model for standardisation to ensure that, as far as possible, standards would be maintained over time. All centre assessment grades were signed off by head teachers or college principals who confirmed that they honestly and fairly represented the grades that these students would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat their exams as planned. Ofqual provided guidance to schools and colleges on objectivity in deciding on their centre assessment grades.

Ofqual conducted an equalities impact assessment as part of their consultation on the exceptional arrangements for summer 2020, including a literature review. Their analysis of calculated grades, published for their symposium on 21 July, showed that there was no evidence that the standardisation model had widened gaps in outcomes for students with and without particular protected characteristics or of differing socio economic groups. Any changes were similar to those seen in previous years, being very small and comparable to typical year-on-year fluctuations. More detail can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-summer-symposium-2020>. Ofqual will also be publishing an equalities analysis in due course on the centre assessment grades which were awarded to almost all students, except where the calculated grade was higher, following the Secretary of State's announcement on 17 August

National Tutoring Programme

The Committee asked a number of questions about the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and how it will work. The programme for 5-16 year olds went live on 2 November and I have set out a summary below of what schools

can expect from each of the two NTP pillars. Further information is available at: <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/faqs>.

Our delivery partner, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), has approved 32 Tuition Partners who will offer high-quality, subsidised tuition to schools. The Tuition Partners will offer a variety of tuition models for schools to choose from, including online, face-to-face, small-group and one-to-one tuition. I am pleased that there is a good blend of national and regional providers that can offer support to schools across all regions in England, something I know Committee Members were particularly keen to know. The programme ensures that additional support has been allocated to regions with the largest numbers of disadvantaged pupils and in regions where access to tutoring has historically been lower. Regional support was determined by taking as a baseline the proportion pupils eligible for the pupil premium within a region and then adjusting to recognise the disparities in current levels of provision.

For this academic year, in total, it is estimated that approximately 15,000 tutors will support the scheme offering tuition to over 250,000 pupils. Tutoring will be available to schools in 15 hour blocks to reflect the best practice evidence on tutoring and the cost to schools will be subsidised by 75% through the programme. In order to maximise the impact of tutoring and to support schools, EEF have provided a guide on how to get the best out of tutoring. All schools are now able to book tuition here: <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/ntp-tuition-partners>.

The NTP Academic Mentors pillar, delivered by Teach First, is supporting schools in the most disadvantaged areas to recruit high quality Academic Mentors. These Mentors will be deployed by teachers to provide additional intensive academic support to the pupils most in need, to help them make faster progress. They will be employed and supported by the school; however, the department will cover the cost of the core salaries of all Mentors. The first 188 Academic Mentors have now been placed in schools and there are Mentors in every region of England with further placements to be made. In total, Teach First will recruit and train 1,000 Academic Mentors, with the further cohorts starting in schools in January and February 2021.

The Committee also asked about how we would assess the performance of the programme. I would like to reassure members that quality is at the very core of the programme, with Tuition Partners and Mentors having been selected according to rigorous criteria, with 32 Tuition Partners selected from over 300 applications. Going forward, we will work closely with EEF and Teach First to monitor and assess delivery of the programme to ensure that it offers the best possible support to schools. In addition, EEF will commission several evaluations of NTP Tuition Partners to understand more about the impact of the programme on pupil attainment, as well as the key drivers and obstacles to its implementation.

As I mentioned when I spoke to members of the Committee, the National Tutoring Programme is one part of a range of support that we are providing to

schools. All schools are receiving their share of the £650 million catch-up premium which can be used to prioritise support for all pupils, guided by the level of individual need. The support can include, for example, intervention programmes, extra teaching capacity or access to technology. To assist schools, EEF has published a support guide for schools with evidence-based approaches to catch up for all students. Provisional allocations of the catch-up premium to schools and local authorities have been published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up-premium-provisional-allocations>. The first payment, worth 25% of the provisional allocation, was made to schools at the beginning of October. The second payment will be made in early 2021 and the third payment in the summer term.

Deficits on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

David Simmonds MP asked about the handling of DSG deficits. We recognise that pressures on high needs have contributed to some local authorities having large deficits on their DSG funding. We are working with local authorities to tackle these deficits, through a combination of additional funding, reform from the SEND Review, and targeted support for individual authorities facing particular challenges. As I said in the hearing, there has been a 24% increase in high needs funding from DfE over the two years 2020-21 and 2021-22.

We have developed a management plan template as a supportive tool to enable local authorities to formulate and present their DSG management plans in a format that allows them to focus attention on detailed comparison of high needs provision against spend. Last year, officials arranged and attended meetings with 23 local authorities to offer support and advice on their plans to manage deficits.

We will shortly be commencing the first round of discussions with some of the local authorities with the highest DSG deficits. The aim is to agree a plan of action, along with some additional funding, to enable the authority to pay off its deficit over time. Any such funding will be accompanied by tough additional conditions of grant, to ensure that those authorities are operating as efficiently as possible. We expect to expand the discussions to other authorities during 2021-22, and as necessary in subsequent years.

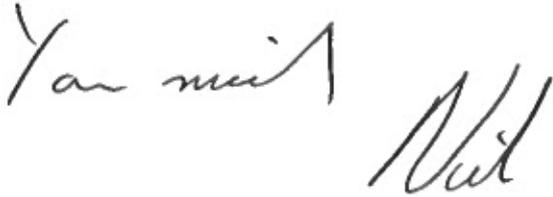
More broadly, our team of SEND advisers provide ongoing support and challenge on service improvement, especially to those areas where Ofsted and CQC have identified significant concerns with services, requiring a Written Statement of Action to be produced. In addition, through the Regional Education and Children's Teams (REACT) project we are working across the department and with Ofsted to bring our support into one coherent offer so that we can best support LAs in their response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Orphan Schools

Finally, Iain Mearns MP asked about the number of orphan schools. I can confirm that, as of 1 October there were 137 schools awaiting conversion to a sponsored academy having received a directive Academy Order. 61 of these were awaiting a sponsor at that time.

Thank you for your interest in these important matters. I do hope these clarifications are helpful.

With best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yan meit' followed by a stylized signature that looks like 'Nick Gibb'.

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