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Secretary of State

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16th November 2020

I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 5 November and 24 November 2020.

New national COVID restrictions

In my last letter I promised to update you on any changes to Higher Education guidance covering the end of term arrangements. I can now confirm that it has been agreed with all Devolved Administrations that all students should be able to return home for Christmas to spend time with their loved ones if they wish to, and will be supported to do so regardless of where they are at university and where they live. To facilitate this, all universities will be required to move teaching online by 9 December to allow students to return home following the period of national restrictions, which is due to end on 2 December.

Students living at university should remain in their current accommodation and must not move back and forth between their permanent home and student home during term time. Students should only return home at the end of term for Christmas.

The guidance on student movement and plans for the end of term can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/student-movement-and-plans-for-the-end-of-autumn-2020-term>

In addition to the above, the Department has published an update to previously

published guidance for education and childcare settings on the new national measures.

As you know, time out of school leads to both lost learning now and affects children's ability to learn in future, therefore we have specified that during the period of national restrictions schools should continue to allow unrestricted attendance.

We have clarified our position on face coverings, stating that settings have the discretion to recommend the use of face coverings for adults on site, for both staff and visitors whilst acknowledging some individuals may be exempt.

We have also clarified that during the period of national restrictions schools should continue to allow unrestricted attendance and that visits between vulnerable children and their social worker, key worker or other necessary support should continue.

Out-of-school activities and wraparound childcare for home educating parents has been updated, outlining that such activities can continue as part of a child's arrangement to receive a suitable full-time education. Similarly we highlight that schools should be continuing to offer before and after school clubs and activities for their pupils, in order to ensure parents can work, search for work, undertake training or education, or access respite care and in order to enable pupils to access provision that supports their education.

We have confirmed that where a meeting with a GP or specialist clinician has not taken place, the child is still clinically extremely vulnerable and should not attend school.

The Department's full guidance on the new national measures can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-and-childcare-settings-new-national-restrictions-from-5-november-2020#early-years-and-childcare>

Exiting the national restrictions

Since the updates outlined above, the Prime Minister has announced the government's approach to containing the virus and safely exiting national restrictions from 2 December.

As you will be aware it remains the Government's priority is to ensure that education remains open and therefore the policy in England is that education settings will remain open in all tiers. The Government also remains committed to delivering a full set of exams in England next summer. In the coming days the Department will update its guidance to reflect how settings should operate under the strengthened tier system. We will also publish an updated contingency framework in the exceptional circumstances in which further restrictions on education are required in any area but please rest assured the Government will do everything possible to avoid enacting

those contingency measures at any stage.

I would also like to stress that the Government will continue piloting further rapid testing in schools. To date we have ensured that schools and colleges have access to COVID-19 tests, with every school provided with an allocation of tests for staff and students that are not able to access testing via other routes.

In terms of universities, as mentioned earlier, from 3 December to 9 December, students will be allowed to travel home on staggered departure dates set by universities. Tests will be offered to as many students as possible before they travel home for Christmas and every university in England has now been offered access to rapid testing. This alongside reduced social contact due to the period of national restrictions that students will have undergone will make travelling home safer.

Following the end of term break, the Government is looking to make the return to higher education as safe as possible, and will provide further guidance in due course, considering future developments and the relevant scientific advice.

The detailed COVID-19 Winter Plan guidance with the government's plan for managing COVID-19 through the end of 2020 and into the start of 2021 can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-winter-plan>

Expansion of the Holiday Activities and Food programme

The Government has taken unprecedented measures during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to protect the most vulnerable in our society and put in place a strong package of financial support for families and children.

The Government understands that for some families, particularly those with children at risk of missing out on healthy meals, activities, and learning opportunities, school holidays can be a difficult time.

In addition to the recent £170m Winter Grant Scheme provided by the Government, the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018, will also be expanded by the Department across England next year.

It will cover Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021, and cost up to £220m. It will be available to children in every local authority in England, building on previous programmes – including this summer's, which supported around 50,000 children across 17 local authorities.

A link to the Winter Grant Scheme press release can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-winter-package-to-provide-further-support->

[for-children-and-families](#)

Sage report

Earlier this month the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) published research and analysis with a paper prepared by the Department for Education and the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behaviours, relating to the evidence and considerations associated with the closure of schools, including the benefits of remaining in education.

Whilst the paper is the assessment of the evidence at the time of writing, as new evidence or data emerges, SAGE updates its advice accordingly. The latest version can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spi-bdfe-covid-19-benefits-of-remaining-in-education-evidence-and-considerations-4-november-2020>

You may want to note that to help address any questions following its publication the Department has issued a set of Questions and Answers, available at: <https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/11/13/question-and-answers-sage-papers-on-covid-19-transmissions-in-schools/>

Alongside the above the Children's Task and Finish Group (TFC) for SAGE prepared an updated paper outlining the role of children in transmission of COVID-19 which can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tfc-children-and-transmission-4-november-2020>

Association of Colleges Further Education Summit 2020

Earlier this week I had the privilege to speak at this year's Association of Colleges Further Education Summit. You will know how important maintaining face to face education is for me and this was a perfect opportunity for me to thank the colleges for their hard work and praise the innovation they have shown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to keep students learning.

As you know, reforming further education (FE) is a passion of mine which is why bringing FE to the forefront has become my mission as a Secretary of State for Education. During my speech I therefore took the opportunity to set out the Department's ambitious plans to reform the FE sector to ensure young people have a meaningful choice outside of studying for a degree.

I explained that the key aim of the reforms is to give young people choice by ensuring that FE path and studying for a degree are equally regarded. What we want is to re-set the post-16 landscape and bring down the outdated perception that anyone who goes down the FE route has somehow come up short.

Strengthening technical education, rolling out T-Levels, transforming apprenticeships, investing and refurbishing existing FE colleges are just some of the steps we have already taken towards achieving our goal. I am determined for FE to realise its full potential and to do that we need to continue this hard work and focus on new projects such as Lifetime Skills Guarantee launched by the Prime Minister in September or Institutes of Technology which will lead the way in delivering higher technical skills in science, technology, engineering or maths to name but a few; skills that will give this country a competitive edge.

I also highlighted that the plan is not just a response to the ongoing pandemic, but rather a long-term commitment of providing young people with equal options and opportunities across the country.

Attendance

The Department's analysis from week 45 data indicates that 893 pupils out of every thousand were in school with 99.6% of state funded schools open. In week 46 data indicates that 865 pupils out of every thousand were in school with 99.6% of state funded schools open.

Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak for week 46 can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-46>; and week 45 can be found here <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-45>

Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak for week 43 and for early years settings only for week 44 can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-43>; and week 44 here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-44>

Other key updates

In addition to the above, please see below some recent key updates from the Department. The Department has published 'Help with accessing and buying resources for remote education' guidance containing information for schools and school buying professionals on sourcing educational resources during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The guidance can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-with-accessing-and-buying-resources-for-remote-](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-with-accessing-and-buying-resources-for-remote-education)

education

The Department has published coronavirus (COVID-19) catch-up premium guidance setting out which schools are eligible, what the funding is for, when payments will be made and how funding can be used to help pupils catch up on missed education. The full guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/catch-up-premium-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has updated the guidance for local authorities, academy trusts and schools on managing Department for Education (DfE) devices provided for children, families and young adults most in need during coronavirus (COVID-19). The publication can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-provided-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has updated the guidance on full opening for special schools and other specialist settings. The update includes changes on SEND legislation (to reflect that temporary changes have now ceased), the system of controls, residential settings, attendance, workforce, safeguarding, wraparound provision and extra-curricular activity, curriculum expectations, behaviour expectations and contingency planning for remote education. The document can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings>

The Department has updated 'Get help with technology during coronavirus (COVID-19)' guidance for local authorities, academy trusts and schools on devices and support available to provide remote education and access to children's social care. The guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has updated a policy paper on the package of support for students who have to defer their studies. The paper includes details on a range of opportunities to gain new skills, undertake work placements, additional learning and career development support. The recent update covers added information on the dedicated industry seminar programme and a link to sign up to the first seminar. The full paper can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/package-of-support-for-students-who-have-to-defer-their-studies>

The Department has updated the guidance for schools and local authorities on school meals arrangements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The update also covers the guidance on temporary extension of free school meals eligibility to some children of groups who have no recourse to public funds. The full set of guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The Department has updated the guidance on initial teacher training with information for providers about managing initial teacher training courses impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-initial-teacher-training-itt>

The Department has updated the guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children's social care to include guidance on aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) in education and children's social care settings. The full guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care>

The Department has updated the guidance for reopening higher education buildings and campuses with how higher education (HE) providers can minimise risk, and with information about NHS test and trace channels. The full set of guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>

The Department has updated the guidance for parents and carers of children attending community activities, holiday or after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school settings. The guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

The Department has updated the guidance on actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus outbreak to reflect the most recent information, including the New National Restrictions which came into force on Thursday 5 November. The full set of guidance can be found at:

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

The Department has updated the guidance on providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak with information about the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the national restrictions guidance, the package of support available for those who have been made redundant on or after 15 October, and functional skills. The publication can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response>

The Department has updated the guidance on protective measures for providers of community activities, holiday or after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school settings offering provision to children during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The publication can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after->

[school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak](#)

The Department has updated the guidance on what parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges in the autumn term during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The updated guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

The Department has updated the guidance for residential educational settings with international students under the age of 18 entering and travelling to the UK. The full publication can be found at:

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

The Department published latest vulnerable children and young people survey as part of its transparency data. The summary of local authority survey in England is designed to help understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak on children's social care. The full set of data is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vulnerable-children-and-young-people-survey>

The Department has updated the guidance to support management of children and young people in residential educational settings, including boarding schools, residential special schools and children's social care. The guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>

The Department has updated the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework guidance with amended content on EYFS coronavirus disapplications to reflect the updated arrangements that were put in place from 26 September 2020, and national restrictions. The guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework-2>

The Department has updated the guidance on school leadership support with how school leaders can get help from system leaders to overcome challenges they have faced following the COVID-19 outbreak. The updated guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-leadership-support>

The department has updated the guidance for children's social care services with

advice about coronavirus (COVID-19) for local authorities and their partners to help support and protect vulnerable children. The publication can be accessed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services>

The Department has updated the transport to school guidance with a link to the guidance on national restrictions from 5 November. The full guidance can be found at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020?utm_source=87cee944-f032-4662-93a2-fdc249e6b5b0&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate#history

The Department has updated the guidance on the use of face coverings for schools and other education institutions that teach people in years 7 and above in England with a link to the guidance on national restrictions from 5 November. The publication can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education>

The Department has updated the guidance on actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The full guidance can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>

The Department and the Cabinet Office have updated the list of critical workers (key workers) who can send their children to school or other educational settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The list can be accessed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision>

The Department along with the Department of Health and Social Care have updated the guidance on actions for leaders and staff when using the NHS COVID-19 app in education and childcare settings with the requirements on displaying QR codes alongside the information classified as necessary or required. Links to wraparound care and early years providers guidance have also been added. The publication can be accessed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-the-nhs-covid-19-app-in-schools-and-further-education-colleges>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published an update on the most recent information and actions from the ESFA for academies, schools, colleges, local authorities and further education providers. The correspondence update can be accessed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-18-november-2020>

As part of transparency data Ofsted published data about its visits to state-funded schools between 1 September 2020 to 31 October 2020. The documents can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-on-covid-19-visits-schools>

Ofsted published its second report on the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic across the sectors it inspects and regulates. The report finds that some children, of all ages and backgrounds, have lost some basic skills and learning as a result of school closures and restrictions on movement. Ofsted COVID-19 set of publications can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ofsted-covid-19-series>

Ofsted also published new guidance on how to report any confirmed cases of COVID-19 at a nursery, childminder business or other day care setting. The guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tell-ofsted-if-you-have-a-covid-19-incident-at-your-childcare-business?>

Ofqual published the decisions and analysis of consultation on proposals to modify the assessment requirements for GCSEs in modern foreign languages in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The publication can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/conditions-and-requirements-for-the-assessment-of-mfl-gcses-in-2021>

Ofqual also published conditions and requirements, and corresponding guidance, applying to AS, A level and GCSE qualifications being awarded in 2021. AS and A level publication can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-conditions-for-2021>

GCSE publication can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-subject-level-conditions-for-2021>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a large, stylized 'G' and 'W'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education