



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

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

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I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 3 and 9 February 2021.

Sir Kevan Collins as the new Education Recovery Commissioner

Since my last letter, the Government announced the appointment of Sir Kevan Collins as the Government's Education Recovery Commissioner.

As you know, the reopening of schools is a national priority and we recognise that school closures have had a huge impact on children's learning. This is why earlier this month the Prime Minister committed to providing a huge programme of catch up, recognising that the disruption of this year has had a huge impact which will take more than a year to make up. This will involve a further £300 million on tutoring programmes, building on last year's £1 billion Covid Catch Up fund, as well as potential plans for summer schools developed in partnership with the education sector.

The Prime Minister has also pledged to work with parents, teachers and schools to develop a long-term plan to make sure pupils have the chance to make up their learning over the course of this Parliament.

Sir Kevan will oversee the work on a comprehensive programme of catch-up aimed at young people who have lost out on learning due to the pandemic. This will include addressing factors such as curriculum content and quantity of teaching time in the coming months, to ensure the impact the pandemic has had on learning is addressed as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

He is a prominent figure in education, having worked in the sector for over 30 years as a teacher, a Director of Children's Services and most recently as Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation.

I know Sir Kevan will be invaluable in supporting all the young people, their families and everyone working in education who has been impacted by and have worked hard through the pandemic.

Sir Kevan will report directly to me and the Prime Minister and I look forward to working together as we deliver our existing National Tutoring Programme, expand our catch-up provision for this year and work on the longer term recovery to make sure every young person has the opportunity to progress and fulfil their potential.

Dr Alex George as the Government's new Youth Mental Health Ambassador

On 3 February, the Prime Minister appointed Dr Alex George to be the Government's Youth Mental Health Ambassador. Dr Alex will advise the Government and raise the profile of mental health education and wellbeing in schools.

The Prime Minister was clear that children and young people have adapted in many ways to save lives and protect our NHS and that this has had a huge impact on their mental health. This is why it is so important to highlight those issues ahead of their return to school.

As Youth Mental Health Ambassador, Dr Alex George will use his clinical expertise and personal experience to champion government's work on children's mental health and shape policy on improving support for young people in schools, colleges and universities.

He will also sit on the new Mental Health in Education Action Group, chaired by Children's Minister Vicky Ford and Universities Minister Michelle Donelan. The Action Group will look specifically at how we support young people with their wellbeing as they return to school and university after this difficult year.

Dr Alex will also provide input on the issues being faced by children and young people and how this can be reflected in the tools and support teachers will need in order to provide high-quality advice and care to their students who need it, and what

more could be done to ensure the mental health curriculum meets the standard children need.

Dr Alex is an A&E doctor and has been a passionate online campaigner for children's mental health since he tragically lost his brother to suicide last year which is why he is best placed to provide input and feedback to government on what more can be done.

Update on the rollout of devices

On 18 January 2021, the House resolved that I should keep Parliament updated on work the Department is undertaking to ensure that every learner has the resources required to learn remotely.

As of 9 February, I can confirm that 986,849 devices have been delivered since the start of the scheme. We have also partnered with the UK's leading mobile operators to provide free data to help disadvantaged children get online as well as delivering 4G wireless routers for pupils without connection at home.

We are publishing information weekly and I will include further information in future updates. Full data on laptops and tablets is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data>

Attendance

The Department's analysis from week 6 data indicates that 159 pupils out of every thousand were in school with over 99% of state funded schools open to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the COVID-19 outbreak for week 6 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>

The Department's analysis from week 5 data indicates that 149 pupils out of every thousand were in school with 99% of state funded schools open to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the COVID-19 outbreak for week 5 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/2021-week-5>

Other key updates

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

I have issued seventh notice to disapply offences for non-attendance in schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disapplication-notice-school-attendance-legislation-changes>

The Department has updated the Get help with technology during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on the 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 the guidance on how schools, 16 to 19 academies, colleges, and other further education institutions, can access digital devices for pupils and students learning remotely. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-laptops-and-tablets-for-children-who-cannot-attend-school-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has updated the guidance for local authorities, trusts, schools, colleges and other further education institutions on getting help with and managing laptops, tablets and 4G wireless routers provided by DfE during coronavirus (COVID-19) for children and young adults most in need. The guidance 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 for schools and local authorities on school meals arrangements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. It can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The Department has updated the guidance on full opening for special schools and other specialist settings, explaining What they settings will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The full guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings>

The Department has updated the guidance on what parents and carers need to know about attending early years providers, schools and colleges in the spring term 2021. The guidance can be accessed at: <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 on Coronavirus (COVID-19) financial support for education, early years and children's social care organisations. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus->

[covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care](#)

The Department has updated the guidance for higher education providers with information on the return of students and NHS Test and Trace channels. The guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>

Ofsted has updated its rolling guidance and information relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) for schools, early years, children's social care and further education and skills providers. The update can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofsted-coronavirus-covid-19-rolling-update>

Public Health England has updated the guidance for headteachers and college principals on the 8 principles for promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing in schools and colleges. The full guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'G' followed by a horizontal line and a large 'W'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education