



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

Your ref: 2020-00xxxxxPOSoS

25th February 2021

I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 10 and 23 February 2021.

Schools and colleges to open to all pupils on 8 March

On Monday 22 February, the Prime Minister set out the Government's plan for the return of all pupils to education settings, as part of the roadmap for the easing of restrictions and recovery from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Thanks to the successful roll out of the vaccine programme, a reduction in transmission and less pressure on NHS capacity, face to face education will return in all schools, colleges and further education settings. School attendance will be mandatory for all pupils from 8 March, with secondary schools and colleges having discretion over the first week back to enable students to be tested on return.

Early years settings will continue to be open to all children, as they have throughout the period of national restrictions. Wraparound childcare, including childminders, should also allow attendance from 8 March to enable parents to work, seek work, attend education, seek medical care or attend a support group. Vulnerable children may attend these settings regardless of circumstance. From 29 March, all children will be able to access any outdoor childcare or supervised activities. University students on practical courses who need to access specialist facilities and equipment will also return on 8 March.

As mentioned in my previous correspondence, we have always been clear that the

return to face-to-face education is the national priority and that we would give schools, students and parents 2 weeks' notice ahead of any change. We have prioritised the return to school for all pupils due to the significant and proven impact caused by being out of school to the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

As more students return to schools we advise staff and students in secondary schools and colleges to wear face coverings in all areas, including classrooms, where social distancing cannot be maintained and as an additional temporary measure.

As you will be aware, we have also committed to review by the end of Easter holidays, the options for the remaining university students to return. This will take account of the latest data and will then be a key part of the wider roadmap steps. We will give students and institutions a week's notice ahead of any return.

Testing

As part of the full return to schools, primary school staff will continue to take two rapid COVID-19 tests each week at home.

In terms of secondary schools and colleges all students will take three COVID-19 tests as they return to the classroom from the 8 March at existing school testing facilities.

Schools and colleges will have discretion on how to test students over that week to enable their return to the classroom. After the initial programme of three tests in school or college, students will be provided with two rapid tests to use each week at home.

Secondary school and college staff will also be provided with two tests to use each week at home and for university students returning to in-person teaching and learning on 8 March, twice weekly testing will continue to be available for all on campus.

I recognise that education and childcare staff as well as parents have worked very hard to make sure students have continued to receive a high-quality education throughout this lockdown. I am confident that the testing of staff and students ahead of their return to secondary schools and colleges, alongside strengthened safety measures, should reassure families and staff that extra measures are in place alongside the existing bubble system, enhanced hygiene and COVID secure precautions.

Education recovery package

Further to the above, on Wednesday 24 February, the Government announced additional elements of the recovery support package to help children and young people catch up on missed learning and development due to the pandemic.

The new recovery package for England includes:

- A new one-off £302 million Recovery Premium for state primary and secondary schools to help them bolster summer provision for their students. It will build on the Pupil Premium and schools will be able to use it as they see best to support disadvantaged students.
- £200 million (from the £300 million announced by the Prime Minister in January to expand our successful tutoring programmes). This will fund an £83 million expansion of the National Tutoring Programme for primary and secondary schools, which has been shown to boost catch up learning by much as 3-5 months at a time; a £102 million extension of the 16-19 Tuition Fund for a further year to support more students in English, maths and other vocational and academic subjects; and £18 million funding to support language development in the early years, supporting a critical stage of child development.
- £200 million (including the final £100 million from the Prime Minister's announcement) will be available to secondary schools to deliver face-to-face summer schools. Schools will be able to target provision based on pupils' needs. This is alongside wider support funded through our Holiday Activities and Food Programme across the country.
- A range of high-quality online resources will be available for all teachers and pupils, starting from the summer term and throughout summer holidays. These will be provided by Oak National Academy, to help give pupils the confidence they are ready for the next academic year.

As outlined in my previous letter to you, the newly appointed Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins, will lead the way on longer-term engagement work with teachers, school and college leaders, educational charities and families to review how evidence-based interventions can be used to address the impact the pandemic has had on learning.

Rapid testing kits available in nurseries

Ensuring young children can access the care, support and social interaction they need during these critical early years, is crucial to their development. And this is why early years settings have remained open to all children throughout the current national lockdown.

We also understand that up until now early years staff have been accessing testing through local community testing programmes. By providing the majority of early years staff with home testing kits, we will now be able to better meet the needs of our early years workforce and identify positive cases more quickly to break the chains of transmissions.

Nursery staff will be supplied with lateral flow device (LFD) test kits to self-swab twice a week, with test results provided in 30 minutes. Testing will help to identify positive cases, particularly those who may have the virus and do not have symptoms.

This is important as up to one in three people who have the virus have it asymptotically and show no symptoms. This means people could be spreading the disease unknowingly. Staff who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus.

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 17 February, I can confirm that 1,055,745 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 for week 8 data indicates that there were an estimated 453,000 children attending early years childcare settings on Thursday 18 February, which is approximately 43% of the usual daily level. Data for attendance in early years settings during the COVID-19 outbreak for week 8 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 7 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/2021-week-7>

The Department's analysis from week 6 data indicates that 159 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 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/2021-week-6>

Other key updates

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

The Department has published a paper summarising evidence in relation to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, particularly around children, young people and education settings. The publication can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-summary-covid-19-children-young-people-and-education-settings>

The Department has published statistics on known, confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in higher education as reported by providers. The statistics can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-reporting-in-higher-education-providers>

The Department has updated the guidance with actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak. The guidance can be found at:

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

The Department has updated the guidance on what childcare services early years settings, childminders and local authorities need to provide during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The guidance can be accessed at:

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

The Department has updated the Special Schools and other specialist settings guidance about what all special schools and other specialist settings will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The guidance can be accessed at:

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

The Department has updated the Higher education providers guidance 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-campus>

The Department has updated the Actions for FE colleges and providers during the

coronavirus outbreak guidance about what they will need to do during the COVID-19 outbreak to maintain provision. The guidance can be accessed 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. It can be found 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) outbreak. The guidance can be accessed at:
<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 for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The guidance can be found 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 what parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges in the spring term 2021. It 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 contingency framework for education and childcare settings setting out how settings can prepare for restrictions to help contain community transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). The publication can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings>

The Education and Skills Agency has updated the catch-up premium guidance about the COVID-19 catch-up premium allocation tables and conditions of grant for the academic year 2020 to 2021. The guidance can be accessed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up-premium-provisional-allocations>

The Department has updated the Initial Teacher Training guidance with information for

providers about managing initial teacher training courses impacted by COVID-19. The guidance can be accessed at:

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

The Department has updated the school support recovery offer on how school leaders can get help from system leaders to overcome challenges they have faced following the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The publication can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-leadership-support>

The Department has updated its 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 managing DfE devices provided 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>

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

Ofsted has updated its summary of research findings on remote learning from several strands of research activity carried out in 2020. The findings can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-research>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a large circular flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education