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Secretary of State

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18 March 2021

I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 10 and 16 March 2021.

Children and young people returning to schools and colleges from 8 March

We are now in the second week where millions of children and young people across England are successfully returning to school and college in the first steps towards the roadmap for exiting lockdown.

The return of students to the classroom is backed by a robust testing programme for secondary schools and college students and all staff, a process which was already well-established.

Primary school children have all returned without the need to be tested as they are much less likely to have or transmit the virus. University students on practical courses have also returned to face-to-face learning.

The actions to take during the coronavirus outbreak were updated on 8 March to reflect the return to schools:

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

Twice-weekly testing using rapid lateral flow tests continue to be given for free to all families and households with primary, secondary school and college aged children and young people, including childcare and support bubbles, to help find more COVID-19 cases and break chains of transmission. This is in addition to the regular testing that is already available to all staff in schools and colleges, as well as secondary school and college students above the age of 11.

Other key updates

A new **mental health action group** was launched on 9 March. A coalition of health and education experts met to look at the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and education staff across England. I was joined by ministers from across Government, as well as Youth Mental Health Ambassador Dr. Alex George, to discuss how best to respond to the mental health issues of greatest concern and help education staff manage their mental wellbeing. The meeting builds on the commitment to ensure millions more children and young people have access to specialist support, including significantly expanded mental health services, backed by an additional £79 million. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-action-group-to-boost-mental-health-education>.

From 12 March, schools, colleges and universities could apply for funding to allow students to study and work across the globe as part of **the new Turing Scheme**. The programme replaces the Erasmus + scheme in the UK and is backed by £110 million. It will fund 35,000 global exchanges from September 2021, including university study, school exchanges, and industry work placements. The new scheme aims to improve social mobility, including targeting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Further information on the Turing Scheme can be found at:

[Turing scheme to open up global study and work opportunities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/turing-scheme-to-open-up-global-study-and-work-opportunities)

On 12 March I was able to speak at the **Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) 2021 annual conference** and thank teachers and staff for their work during the pandemic – for everything they have done to keep children and young people learning and as safe each time they have returned to school or college after lockdowns, but also making sure they have been supporting them when they have been at home, so they have had the opportunity to learn. More information is available here: [Education Secretary addresses ASCL conference - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-addresses-ascl-conference)

Finally, on 16 March, we marked **World Social Work Day** – a global event to recognise and celebrate social work practice. To celebrate the day, the department is sharing messages of support across social media channels, both to recognise and raise awareness of the work of child and family social workers. There is no direct link on this, but readers are invited to show their support and join the conversation using #WSWD2021.

I hope you find this information useful.



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Secretary of State for Education