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I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 17 March and 13 April 2021.

Letter to young people

Most schools across England are now in the Easter break following the return of millions of children and young people to schools and colleges on 8 March - in line with the roadmap for exiting lockdown.

Shortly before the end of the winter term I wrote a letter to young people to express my gratitude for the way they have responded to the huge challenges they have all faced throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

I understand that during this challenging year the majority of young people had to completely change the way they learn and interact, and I wanted to show them my admiration for the way they responded to these changes and for the resilience they have shown.

You know that getting all young people back into school and college safely has been my priority throughout the pandemic. I am therefore grateful to all the pupils for continuing to follow all the safety measures put in place in their schools and colleges,

particularly for taking part in twice weekly testing and moving to testing regularly at home through the Easter holidays and after the return to school. Testing is key to stopping the virus spreading and I am grateful to both young people and all the staff who have worked incredibly hard to help establish the testing programme and to prepare pupils and students for home testing.

Coronavirus testing at home

As mentioned before we are grateful to schools and staff for helping during the rollout of asymptomatic testing in secondary schools and colleges. We know that as many as one in three people with Covid are asymptomatic, meaning they have no symptoms of the virus and could spread it without knowing.

This is where asymptomatic testing comes in: all secondary school age pupils and secondary school and college staff are able to take tests twice weekly regardless of whether they have symptoms. The first three of these tests happened in school but from the fourth test onwards pupils started taking them at home.

We are also asking families and carers with secondary school age children to take tests at home. The more tests are carried out, the safer our communities will be.

The Department has published five useful things to know to help young people and families who may have doubts or questions about home testing. The full information can be found at: <https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/03/24/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-home-testing/>.

Testing for Higher Education students

In addition to asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges the Department's Higher Education (HE) comms team has been working with the Cabinet Office to launch social media influencer activity to encourage HE students to go for twice weekly testing.

From 19 March, young influencers, including students, across TikTok have been showing videos of their best outfits as a way of motivating other students to go for regular testing.

Originally, this content was forecast to achieve 118m views. It has since hugely surpassed this benchmark, with over 4.1 billion views, not just in England but around the world, reaching as far as the United States.

Face coverings in schools and colleges to remain in place

The return to school and college from 8 March has been an incredible success largely thanks to staff, parents and pupils and their compliance with the guidance on reducing transmission of the virus.

On top of the protective measures previously in place, such as regular handwashing and ventilation, we introduced face coverings in the classroom for secondary schools and colleges to help reduce transmission in parallel with the introduction of twice weekly testing.

On 6 April the Government confirmed that face coverings should continue to be worn in secondary school and college classrooms as a precautionary measure when students return after the Easter break.

This cautious approach will help limit the risk of transmission and enable continued monitoring of the effect of school and college returns, as twice weekly testing is established and embedded in pupils' routines.

Schools and students have done a great job adapting to Covid secure guidance and working hard to make sure it does not impact learning. We all want to get back to facemask-free classrooms and we will do this in line with the latest scientific data while balancing the interests of students, teachers and the wider community.

It is expected that face coverings will no longer be required to be worn in classrooms, or by students in other communal areas, at step 3 of the roadmap, which will be no earlier than May 17th. At that point the next stage of easements, including increased social contact indoors, will be confirmed following a review of the latest data on infection and vaccination rates.

Any future changes will be confirmed with one week's notice and all other safety measures will remain in place, including regular asymptomatic testing, smaller group bubbles, increased hygiene, ventilation, and social distancing where possible.

The Department has also published a set of questions and answers on why secondary and college students are required to carry on wearing face coverings, which can be accessed here: <https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/04/06/why-do-secondary-school-and-college-students-have-to-carry-on-wearing-face-coverings-your-questions-on-masks-answered/>.

Full Ofsted inspections expected from September

On 29 March I asked Ofsted to resume inspections in the summer term with a view to returning to a full programme of inspections from September 2021. I believe it should be done in a way that is fair and proportionate to schools and other settings still emerging from the immediate impact of the pandemic, whilst making sure parents have the necessary reassurance that only Ofsted can bring.

During the summer term, the majority of Ofsted's activity will continue to be lighter-touch monitoring inspections, as have been in place since January, with a fuller inspection only taking place where there has been a clear improvement from a current Inadequate or Requires Improvement rating, or where there are serious concerns, particularly in relation to safeguarding.

This approach balances the needs of parents and carers to have confidence that standards are being met, alongside schools' and the wider education sector's continued prioritisation of their students' recovery from the impact of the pandemic.

Ofsted is currently running pilot inspections, as it finalises its approach to making sure inspections and judgements over the summer term are sensitive to the context of the pandemic and it will publish its updated inspection handbooks next month.

I will continue working closely with HM Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, to make sure plans are in place as we work towards the inspection regime returning in full, from September.

Kick-start for summer school and activities

On 30 March the Government published new guidance for secondary schools to help progress plans for summer schools. Using the £200 million funding announced in February, young people in England will benefit from a series of summer activities and academic opportunities targeted at those who have suffered the most disruption to their education as a result of the pandemic.

The new guidance will provide advice ranging from academic support to sports and activities, mental health and wellbeing advice, and guidance for accessing premises. Schools will be asked to sign up to run summer schools by the end of April and confirm their plans in June. They will have the flexibility to target the funding to whoever they think could benefit most.

In addition to this, we are determined to work with a national supply contractor to give extra support for councils to deliver the Government's expanded Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF). The national supply contractor will help to scale up plans for

the summer, building on the foundations laid by councils, sporting organisations, charities and the voluntary sector.

Following last summer's HAF programme, which supported around 50,000 children across 17 local authorities, the programme was launched in every council across the country in line with remaining national restrictions, targeted primarily at those who are eligible for free school meals.

I understand that many students, parents, carers and teachers are anxious and excited about what this summer might bring which is why we are providing clarity, issuing guidance as early as possible, so we can make the most of these opportunities.

We want to give local authorities, parents, carers and teachers the notice they need so they can make their summer plans to prepare large numbers of incoming year 7s for their first experience of secondary school, and to make sure the most disadvantaged children can make the most of the school holidays through the Holiday Activities and Food programme.

I am confident this summer of enrichment and engagement in academic work will be a great success, tailored to local circumstances by their local authorities and also the wonderful heads and teachers who best understand the needs of their students.

Guidance is also available for local authorities to help them make the most of their HAF clubs during the school holidays. While Easter holiday club provision has naturally been affected by the ongoing pandemic, many areas will be offering some valuable face-to-face provision, and other areas are supporting families remotely. This Easter provision is an important milestone as local authorities prepare for their major delivery of the programme this summer. Wider support for vulnerable families is also available from the £229 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme, which has been recently expanded to cover the Easter period.

Update on the rollout of devices

The government is providing over 1.3 million laptops and tablets to help schools, colleges and other FE institutions throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The scale of deliveries was increased following the announcement on 5 January 2021 about a national lockdown and restricting attendance in schools and colleges, but has since decreased following the return to schools on 8 March.

On 13 April we published the latest figure of **1,295,752** devices having been delivered since the start of the scheme.

We are reducing the frequency of the publication of the device statistics from weekly to monthly now that pupils have returned to school. The monthly publication means we are still reporting on progress in delivering services to schools, colleges and other FE institutions. The latest full data on laptops and tablets is available at:

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data>

Attendance

From 5 January to 5 March 2021, pupil attendance was limited to children of critical workers and vulnerable children only. From 8 March school attendance once again became mandatory for all pupils so the week 11 data was the first to start to cover the full return to schools.

The Department's analysis from week 14 data indicates that 90.2% of pupils were in school, excluding settings expected to be on holiday. As some schools were closed that week for the Easter holiday there is no comparable data for the proportion of open state funded schools. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak for week 14 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-14>.

The Department's analysis from week 13 data indicates that 90% of pupils were in school with 99.9% of state funded schools open. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak for week 13 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-13>.

The Department's analysis from week 12 data indicates that 91.2% of pupils were in school with 99.5% of state funded schools open. It is worth remembering that secondary schools were given flexibility to phase the return of pupils between 8 and 12 March to manage testing and the return of pupils. Full data for attendance in education and early years settings during the COVID-19 outbreak for week 12 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-12>.

The Department's analysis from week 11 data indicates that 99.9% of schools remained open. Full data for attendance in education and early years settings during the COVID-19 outbreak for week 11 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-11.](#)

Other key updates

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

The Department published the guidance with details of the summer schools programme for secondary schools including funding, requirements for running a summer school and best practice evidence. The guidance can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-schools-programme.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-schools-programme)

The Department published official statistics on attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak: 23 March 2020 to 1 April 2021. The publication can be accessed at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak-23-march-2020-to-1-april-2021.](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak-23-march-2020-to-1-april-2021)

I issued the twelfth notice to modify pupil registration requirements for temporary pupils during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Further detail can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modification-notice-school-registration-legislation-changes.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modification-notice-school-registration-legislation-changes)

I issued the twelfth notice about changes to state-funded school inspection requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Further detail can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disapplication-notice-school-inspections-legislation-changes.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disapplication-notice-school-inspections-legislation-changes)

The Department has updated the higher education operational guidance and the guidance with information on students returning to or starting higher education during spring and summer 2021 terms. Following the review announced in the COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021 (Roadmap) of when all remaining higher education students can return to in-person teaching and learning, the Government confirmed that these students should return no earlier than 17 May, alongside Step 3 of the Roadmap. The full set of documents can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses)

The Department has updated the early years guidance with information on what childcare services early years settings, childminders and local authorities need to do and 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 guidance on providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to reflect the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and remove advice relating to pre-8 March 2021. The full guidance can be accessed at:

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

The Department has updated the holiday activities and food programme guidance with information for local authorities who should receive funding to support disadvantaged children during the 2021 Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. The guidance can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme>.

The Department has updated the guidance for schools and colleges on who should enter students for exams, the health arrangements for exams and the support DfE is providing. The guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series>.

The Department has updated the remote education guidance with information on good practice to support school leaders in developing their remote education contingency plans. The full guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-good-practice>.

The Department has updated the guidance on asymptomatic testing with information for schools and colleges about testing from January. The full guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-asymptomatic-testing-in-schools-and-colleges>.

The Department has updated the guidance with actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus outbreak. 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 what all special schools and other

specialist settings will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The full guidance can be seen at:

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

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 during COVID-19 in the spring term 2021. The guidance can be seen 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 for schools and local authorities on reducing burdens on educational and care settings during coronavirus (COVID-19).

The guidance can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-reducing-burdens-on-educational-and-care-settings>.

The Department has updated the guidance for all schools on actions to take, during the coronavirus outbreak to reflect the return to schools. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>.

Education and Skills Funding Agency has published the guidance on conditions of funding for Academic mentors programme grant. The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) is to help support disadvantaged pupils to catch-up on missed learning. One pillar of NTP is the academic mentor programme. The full guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academic-mentors-programme-grant-conditions-of-funding>.

Ofqual launched a 2-week consultation on how an autumn exam series for GCSEs, AS and A levels should run this year. The consultation was open between 17 March and 9 April. Further detail can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/consultation-on-autumn-series-2021>.

Ofsted has updated the guidance and information relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) for schools, early years, children's social care and further education and skills providers to reflect our current plans to return to on-site inspection. The guidance can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofsted-coronavirus-covid-19-rolling-update>.

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', is positioned above the printed name.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education