



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

Chair of the Education Committee

House of Commons

London

SW1A 0AA

17th May 2021

I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 5 and 11 May 2021.

Prime Minister to revolutionise skills and training opportunities

The government's new legislative programme has been unveiled in the Queen's Speech.

Landmark reforms will support the nation's recovery from the pandemic, building on the progress made so far to level up the country and ensure equal opportunities for all.

The Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee will be a central part of the Queen's Speech. New laws will create a post-16 and adult education and training system that is fit for the future, providing the skills that people need for well-paid jobs and opportunities to train throughout their lifetime.

Face coverings no longer required in schools and colleges from 17 May

Pupils will no longer be required to wear face coverings in schools and colleges from 17 May.

The latest data shows infection rates continuing to decrease, deaths and hospitalisations at their lowest level since July, and the vaccine rollout continuing at pace.

In line with this data, pupils will no longer be required to wear face coverings in the classroom or communal areas in schools and colleges. This will improve interaction between teachers and students, ensuring the clearest possible communication to support learning.

The decision has taken into consideration the latest scientific evidence, medical advice and stakeholder feedback on the impacts of wearing face coverings in schools and colleges.

All remaining university students to return to in-person teaching from 17 May

University students received a boost with the launch of a new employment and skills guide alongside the confirmation that all remaining students can return to in-person teaching from the 17 May.

The new Graduate Employment and Skills Guide brings together a broad range of tools, advice and resources into a five-step plan which will help pandemic graduates consider their post-university choices, identify and develop their critical skills, gain professional experience, and further their career while maintaining good mental wellbeing.

Schools and colleges to benefit from boost in expert mental health support

As part of Mental Health Awareness week, we have announced more than £17 million to build on mental health support already available in education settings, as the government continues to prioritise wellbeing alongside academic recovery.

Up to 7,800 schools and colleges in England will be offered funding worth £9.5 million to train a senior mental health lead from their staff in the next academic year, part of the Government's commitment to offering this training to all state schools and colleges by 2025.

Funding also includes a new £7 million Wellbeing for Education Recovery programme, which provides free expert training, support and resources for staff dealing with children and young people experiencing additional pressures from the last year – including trauma, anxiety, or grief.

Infection rates drop in schools

It is hugely encouraging to see positive cases of COVID-19 continuing to remain low among secondary school pupils and staff. The latest round of the Schools Infection Survey has shown the percentage of secondary school age pupils testing positive for COVID-19 has dropped from 1.4% to just 0.3% compared to November last year.

The research, led by Public Health England (PHE), the Office for National Statistics and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, tested 7,271 secondary school pupils and 2,744 staff for COVID-19 infection between 15 – 31 March.

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 11 May we published the latest figure of 1,313,449 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

The Department's analysis from week 19 data indicates that 92.3% of pupils were in school on Wednesday 5th May 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 19 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>

Other key updates

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

The Department has published guidance explaining the education staff wellbeing charter. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter>

The Department has published its equality impact assessment of the reception baseline assessment. The assessment can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-baseline-assessment-equality-impact-assessment>

The Department has updated its guidance on actions for FE colleges and providers to maintain provision during the coronavirus outbreak. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>

The Department has updated its 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 found 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 its COVID-19 operational guidance for higher education providers. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>

The Department has published updated guidance giving an overview of the National Skills Fund which aims to help adults to train and gain the valuable skills they need to improve their job prospects and support the economy. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-skills-fund>

The Department has published updated guidance with details of free level 3 qualifications available to eligible adults and the colleges and training providers who are currently able to offer free places. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/find-a-free-level-3-qualification>

The Department has published updated guidance about the Institutes of technology wave 2 competition and how to apply. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/institutes-of-technology-wave-2-competition-prospectus>

The Department has updated its guidance on the help available to educational settings and local authorities to support remote and face-to-face education, and access to social care. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has updated its guidance on what all special schools and other specialist settings will need to do during the 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 its guidance for schools and local authorities on school meals arrangements during the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The Department has updated its guidance on school attendance. The guidance for schools covers registers and attendance codes school hours and term dates and improving school attendance. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has updated its guidance on funding claims and reconciliation. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfa-funding-claims>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has issued a financial notice to improve issued to Bristol and South Gloucestershire UTC (BTEA). The notice can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-notice-to-improve-bristol-and-south-gloucestershire-utc-btea>

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has issued a financial notice to improve to The Olive Tree Primary School Bolton. The notice can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-notice-to-improve-the-olive-tree-primary-school-bolton>

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has updated its guidance on how to apply to be on the approved list of independent special institutions. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-to-be-on-the-approved-list-of-independent-special-institutions>

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has updated its guidance on how to register to deliver T Levels in 2023 to 2024 academic year. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-register-to-deliver-t-levels-in-2023-to-2024-academic-year>

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has updated its guidance on how to use the Learning Records Service. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learner-registration-bodies-user-guide>

The Education Skills and Funding Agency has updated its guidance providing information for academies about their annual revenue funding. The guidance can be found at [https:// www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-funding-allocations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-funding-allocations)

The Standards and Testing Agency has published guidance for parents on the reception baseline assessment and what it means for your child when they start school. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reception-baseline-assessment-information-for-parents>

The Standards and Testing Agency has published statutory guidance on the assessment and reporting arrangements for the reception baseline assessment in the 2021 to 2022 academic year. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2021-reception-baseline-assessment-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara>

The Standards and Testing Agency has published guidance on information about the reception baseline assessment used to measure a pupil's progress in primary schools. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reception-baseline-assessment>

Ofqual has published a guide for students on how GCSEs, A levels, vocational and technical qualifications will be graded and awarded in summer 2021. The guide can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-guide-to-awarding-summer-2021>

Ofsted has published management information showing further education and skills inspections and outcomes from September 2020 to August 2021. The information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-management-information-from-september-2020-to-august-2021>

Ofsted has updated its guidance for inspecting how well local areas support children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspection-guidance-for-inspectors>

Ofsted has published statistics on inspections and outcomes in the area of special educational needs and disabilities. The statistics can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/area-send-inspections-and-outcomes-in-england-as-at-31-march-2021>

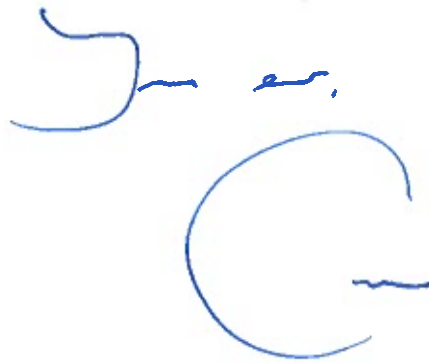
Ofsted has updated its glossary of terms, explaining terms used in Ofsted's official and national statistical releases. The glossary can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/glossary-of-terms-ofsted-statistics>

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

Ofsted has published data on the number of independent schools with alternative provision placements and number of placements with providers not registered as a school between 18 January 2019 and 16 January 2020. The data can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-about-schools-and-pupil-placements-in-alternative-provision>

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission has published updated guidance for families about inspections of local area services for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The guidance can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-information-for-families>

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 small flourish.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education