



**Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP**

Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP

Chair of the Education Committee

House of Commons

London

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Dear Robert,

As we begin the new year and a new term across our education settings, my priority remains the same, and that is the importance of face-to-face education.

Being in the classroom is undoubtedly the very best place for children so they can continue their learning, which is so important for their education and wellbeing.

There is no doubt that the Omicron variant presents challenges, but the entire education sector has responded with a Herculean effort.

We have introduced a number of measures to bolster support and minimise disruption to education.

### **Face coverings in schools and colleges**

To maximise the number of children in school and college for the maximum amount of time, the Government is temporarily recommending that face coverings are worn in classrooms and teaching spaces for students in year 7 or above.

The advice is short term only to support pupils and teachers as they return to schools this term and builds on the existing proportionate guidance that recommends face coverings for all adults in communal areas of all settings.

The advice on face coverings in classrooms will be in place until the 26 January, when Plan B regulations are currently scheduled to expire, at which point it will be reviewed.

### **Testing**

All secondary schools have been asked to provide one on-site test for pupils ahead of their return to the classroom this term to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

Education staff and college students are being asked to self-test at home before they return and were sent home with tests ahead of the Christmas break.

Students returning to university have also been advised to test before they travel back to campus.

Secondary, college and university students and education staff and early years staff should then continue to test themselves twice a week, and more frequently if they are specifically asked to do so, such as in the event of an outbreak.

### **Vaccinations**

12-15 year olds are encouraged to get fully vaccinated (two doses), to ensure they are protected. 16 and 17 year olds are now eligible for boosters and are being strongly encouraged to take up this offer when invited to do so, along with university students.

### **Additional air cleaning units**

An additional 7,000 new air filters and further temporary measures will be introduced to protect face-to-face education and minimise disruption, ahead of the pupils returning to the classroom this term.

### **Former teachers to support face-to-face learning**

Over 585 former teachers have signed up with supply agencies following my call for them to temporarily return to the profession. Initial data from around ten per cent of supply agencies shows that 485 former teachers have signed up with agencies, with some teachers already placed back in the classroom during the first week of term. A further 100 Teach First alumni have also expressed interest in supporting the workforce. Given the size of the sample, the actual number of ex-teachers who have signed up is likely to be much larger.

### **Update on the rollout of devices**

The government has provided over 1.3 million laptops and tablets to help schools, colleges and other FE institutions throughout the coronavirus 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 January we published the latest figure of 1,723,517 devices having been delivered since the start of the scheme. 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 2 data indicates that 88.6% of pupils were in school on Thursday 6 January with 100% of state-funded schools open excluding settings expected to be on holiday. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus outbreak for week 2 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 50 data indicates that 88.9% of pupils were in school on Thursday 9 December with 99.9% of state-funded schools open. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus outbreak for week 50 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-50>

## **Other key updates**

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

The department has updated guidance on:

- The information parents and carers need to know about attending schools, nurseries and colleges during COVID-19. The guidance can be found 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>
- What special schools and other specialist settings will need to do during the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings>
- Actions for FE colleges and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>
- Actions for higher education providers during COVID-19. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campus>
- Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the 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>

- Get help with technology for remote education. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education>
- Entry testing for admission to state-funded selective schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-assessment-processes-for-selective-school-admissions>
- School attendance. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>
- Advice about COVID-19 for local authorities and their partners to help support and protect vulnerable children. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services>
- Actions for schools during the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>
- COVID-19 test kits for children's homes. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-test-kits-for-childrens-homes>

The department and Cabinet Office has updated guidance on:

- The list of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people who can access full-time education provision in the case of future restrictions on education during the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision>

I hope you find this information useful.



**Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**

