



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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16th July 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Over the past few months, every child and young person in the country has experienced unprecedented disruption to their education as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). The Government is deeply grateful for the role you have played in maintaining the education and support of pupils during this time. When I last wrote to you in March I was asking you to go to exceptional lengths to meet the challenge presented by the pandemic and I am proud - but unsurprised - to see that you have gone above and beyond in rising to it.

As you start to look towards your summer break, I hope you are able to recognise the scale of your achievement in ensuring pupils have continued to learn during this period. I know that schools have been working tirelessly since 23 March to support the most vulnerable children and the children of critical workers in school, alongside providing remote education for those children and young people who have remained at home. Since 1 June, you have opened your doors to increasing numbers of children and young people and I am very pleased to see that 1.6 million pupils are already back in school. I am deeply grateful for your efforts.

We are all aware of the importance of getting all of our children and young people back in the classroom. We all know the impact that lost time in education can have on our children's outcomes. That is why I am asking you to plan for full opening to all pupils in all year groups from the beginning of the autumn term. To support your preparations, on 2 July the government published detailed guidance for schools. The guidance is intended to support all schools to reopen fully and reduce risks. We expect independent schools to follow the guidance in the same way as state-funded schools, where it is applicable, particularly in relation to the control measures set out in Section 1.

Plans for schools to open to all children and young people full-time from the autumn

It is my firm intention that all children and young people return to school next term and the guidance the Department published on 2 July sets out the actions you should take to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your school. The 'system of controls' set out in Section 1 of the guidance is public health advice, endorsed by Public Health England.

Schools should continue to minimise contact between pupils and staff by grouping children by class or year, and maintaining distance where possible. All elements of the system of controls are essential but the way you implement some of the requirements will differ based on the individual circumstances of your school. You will be best placed to understand the needs of your schools and communities, and to make informed judgments about how to balance delivering a broad and balanced curriculum with the measures needed to manage risk. The system of controls provides a set of principles to help you do this.

All staff, pupils and their families will continue to have access to testing if they develop COVID-19 symptoms. Schools will be provided with a small number of easy to use home testing kits to provide to children and staff who develop symptoms and may otherwise be unable to access a test. Every school that has been attended by someone who tests positive will receive direct support and advice from their local Public Health England health protection team.

From the autumn term, I am asking schools to resume teaching a broad and ambitious curriculum for all pupils, with some adaptations to help pupils catch up. The government has announced a £650 million catch up premium for state-funded primary, secondary and special schools to help them make up for lost teaching time. To support schools to make best use of this funding, the Education Endowment Foundation have published a Covid-19 Support Guide for Schools, setting out evidence based approaches to catch-up for all students which schools can use to help them direct their additional funding in the most effective way. Alongside this, the government has announced a £350 million National Tutoring Programme to increase access to high-quality tuition for the most disadvantaged children and young people. Evidence shows that two hours a week of tutoring for a disadvantaged pupil for six to twelve weeks can result in five months of catch up.

The Department's plan is for routine inspections to remain suspended during the autumn term in all schools. Ofsted will carry out visits to some state-funded schools to gather information about how you are managing the return to full education of all your pupils. In independent schools, both Ofsted and ISI will conduct progress monitoring and material change inspections as usual. The Department plans for routine inspections to restart in January 2021, with the exact timing being kept under review.

The detailed guidance for schools is available here:

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

I would like schools to start planning now on the assumption of full reopening from the start of the autumn term.

While the Government's aim is to have all children and young people back at school or college in the autumn, every local authority and educational setting will also need to plan for the possibility of a local lockdown. This should include

how you will ensure continuity of education for those at home and maintain provision for vulnerable children and young people, and the children of critical workers.

School attendance

I am asking schools and local authorities to communicate clear and consistent expectations around attendance to families and to identify pupils who are reluctant or anxious about returning or who are at risk of disengagement, to develop plans for re-engaging them. This should include disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, especially those who were persistently absent prior to the pandemic or who have not engaged with school regularly during the pandemic.

As the schools guidance explains, from the beginning of the new school year the usual rules on school attendance will apply, including:

- parents' duty to ensure that their child attends school, where the child is a registered pupil at school and they are of compulsory school age;
- schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence; and
- the option to issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices, in line with local authorities' codes of conduct.

School workforce

Following the reduction in the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the intended relaxation of shielding measures from 1 August, the Department expects that most staff will attend school from the start of the autumn term.

Schools have a legal obligation to protect their employees, and others, from harm and should continue to assess health and safety risks and consider how to meet equalities duties in the usual way. Following the steps in our guidance will mitigate the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) to pupils and staff and help schools to meet their legal duties to protect employees and others from harm.

Some staff with particular characteristics may be at comparatively increased risk from coronavirus, as set out in the Public Health England COVID-19: Review of Disparities in Risks and Outcomes report:

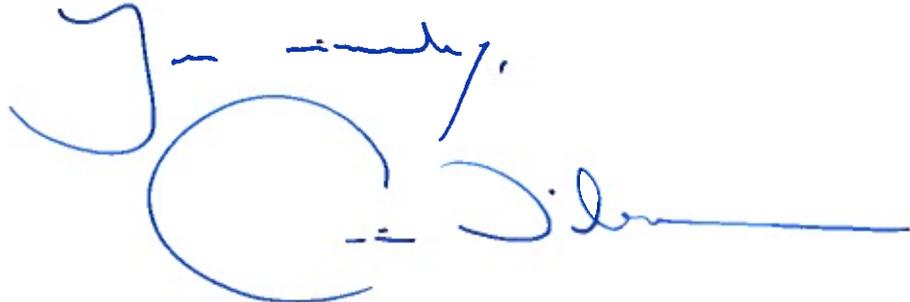
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes>.

The reasons are complex and there is ongoing research to understand and translate these findings for individuals in the future. If people with significant risk factors are concerned, the Department recommends that you discuss their concerns and explain the measures the school is putting in place to reduce risks. You should try as far as practically possible to accommodate additional measures as appropriate.

Schools may need to alter the way in which they deploy their staff, and use existing staff more flexibly, to welcome back all pupils at the start of the autumn term. If, having pursued all the immediate options available, you still have concerns about staffing capacity, we ask that you talk to your local authority or trust.

The start of the new school year will be a busy one and I will continue to do whatever is necessary to support you in the weeks and months ahead. Before we reach that point, I hope that you take the opportunity, along with your teachers and all other vital staff who work in our schools, to recharge and rest over the summer break.

On behalf of my colleagues across Government, I offer my sincere thanks for everything you have done and are continuing to do as we respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a large circular flourish below the name.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education