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Secretary of State

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I would like to use this letter as an opportunity to update you on the latest developments regarding the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Please see below an overview of activity over the last week.

On 23 April, DHSC announced the expansion of the Government's testing scheme to all essential workers. If they or anyone in their household has symptoms, they are now eligible for a test to confirm whether they have COVID-19. This includes anyone involved in education, childcare or social work, including both public and voluntary sector workers, as well as foster carers. DHSC has launched a new digital booking service so that employers and eligible essential workers can now book test slots directly. Please find more information on accessing this here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>.

To support early years providers that remain open to vulnerable children and children of critical workers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, we have temporarily disapplied and modified elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. This will allow providers greater flexibility to respond to changes in workforce availability and potential high fluctuations in demand, while providing care that is high quality and safe. More information on the dis-applications made can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2/early-years-foundation-stage-coronavirus-disapplications>.

We have also announced that local authorities will, in exceptional cases, be able to redistribute their free childcare entitlement funding differently to ensure sufficient childcare places are available for the children of critical workers and for vulnerable children, where their usual arrangements are no longer possible as a result of COVID-19. Guidance on this can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>.

We understand the pressure that schools, colleges, and other educational and care settings are under at this time, and therefore, to help reduce burdens on them, we have cancelled or paused all but the most essential data collections until the end of June 2020. Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-reducing-burdens-on>

[educational-and-care-settings.](#)

We have also published information for those schools, colleges, nurseries or other settings considering, or already operating, a cluster or hub model. Information on the factors these providers should be considering can be found here:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-clusters-and-hubs-to-maintain-educational-provision.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-clusters-and-hubs-to-maintain-educational-provision)

In addition to this, we have published guidance on managing school and college premises during the COVID-19 outbreak. This guidance explains what those responsible for education buildings need to do to make sure children and staff are kept safe during reduced occupancy arrangements:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-school-premises-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-school-premises-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak)

To support remote education, we have published guidance to help schools and teachers to understand how to follow safeguarding procedures when teaching remotely during the coronavirus outbreak. More information on this can be found here:

[https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19) Please also find information for parents and carers on how to support their children's learning whilst at home during the COVID-19 outbreak here: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

Regarding free school meals, we are temporarily extending free school meal eligibility to include children from some groups who have no recourse to public funds. Guidance explaining who is eligible and how schools can confirm eligibility and award free school meals can be found here: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/guidance-for-the-temporary-extension-of-free-school-meals-eligibility-to-nrpf-groups.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/guidance-for-the-temporary-extension-of-free-school-meals-eligibility-to-nrpf-groups) Alongside this, we have also provided updated guidance on how further education providers can continue to support those eligible for free school meals at this time: [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions-for-2019-to-2020.](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions-for-2019-to-2020)

We have been working on providing extra support to keep children at risk of neglect or abuse safe during the COVID-19 outbreak. Since I last wrote to you, we have announced that more than £12 million will be spent on 14 projects across the country to tackle the increased risk some children and young people are facing as they stay at home to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This will include money to pay for individual support for families at risk of domestic abuse, community volunteers to work with families, and continued support for teenagers at risk of exploitation. More information on this announcement can be found here: [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multi-million-support-for-vulnerable-children-during-covid-19.](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multi-million-support-for-vulnerable-children-during-covid-19)

We have also announced that we will make £1.6 million available for the NSPCC to expand and promote its national helpline for adults. While social workers remain at the forefront of work to protect vulnerable children, including by supporting them to attend school, expanding the NSPCC Helpline will mean many more adults know how and where to raise concerns and seek advice or support about the safety and wellbeing of children.

Ofqual has published a consultation on the exceptional arrangements for awarding

vocational, technical and general qualifications (other than GCSEs, AS and A levels) in summer 2020. The deadline for responses is 8 May, please find more information here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-consultation-on-awarding-vocational-and-technical-qualifications-in-summer-2020>.

We have also made updates to the school admissions appeals process. New regulations give admission authorities the flexibility to manage appeals whilst ensuring families are supported and not disadvantaged by current measures to protect public health. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-appeals-code>.

In addition to the developments mentioned above, we have also updated some of our current guidance as listed below:

- Local authorities, academy trusts and other responsible bodies overseeing schools, colleges and children's social care have been sent information on how to order IT devices for vulnerable children and disadvantaged young people, more information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19#how-to-apply-for-this-support>.
- We have updated the guidance for parents and carers on the closure of educational settings with additional information on the support available for parents, online educational resources and support for vulnerable children: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>.
- We have provided additional information on furloughed apprentices, end-point assessment, functional skills apprentices and qualification certification: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response#history/>.
- We have also updated our guidance for further education providers on maintaining education and skills training provision. The guidance now includes more information on vulnerable young people, industry placement through the Capacity and Delivery Fund and support for young people unable to access remote education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>.
- The Home Office has published guidance that sets out temporary policy concessions for Tier 4 sponsors, Tier 4 students and short-term study students in response to COVID-19. The guidance includes information on student absences, distance learning, permitted study and extending short-term study leave for international students: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tier-4-sponsors-migrants-and-short-term-students>.

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', written over a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education