

From: DfE information <dfe.information@notifications.service.gov.uk>
Sent: 20 January 2021 10:04
To: Janet Perry <janet.perry@tameside.gov.uk>
Subject: Message from Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson

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Message to education leaders from the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson

I am writing to you as school and college leaders to thank you for your flexibility and resilience during this challenging period. I am continually impressed and immensely grateful for all the work you have done in response to the challenges presented by the pandemic.

During this period, leaders and staff have stepped up in so many ways. The role you play is vital in providing vulnerable children and young people, and the children of critical workers, access to on-site education and the best quality remote learning for the majority of our students.

School and college leaders are playing a key role in setting up COVID-19 testing. Testing remains a vital part of our plan to suppress this virus, and the widespread rollout of regular testing

using rapid lateral flow tests is already proving beneficial in finding people with coronavirus before they develop symptoms.

We have consistently been guided by experts, and as part of our testing approach we rolled out daily contact testing in schools on the advice of NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England (PHE).

Both NHS Test and Trace and PHE have now reviewed that advice, and concluded that, in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant, further evaluation work is required to understand the impact of daily contact testing, instead of self-isolation for those who have been in contact with a case, to make sure it is achieving its aim of breaking chains of transmission and reducing cases of the virus in the community.

In light of that assessment, we are pausing daily contact testing in all but a small number of secondary schools and colleges, where it will continue with detailed evaluation to inform any future resumption and to make sure nobody in the remaining settings is put at any risk. Regular testing of staff should continue and will increase to twice weekly as further reassurance and to break chains of transmission during this period.

We know that these are challenging times and want to do all we can to support you.

We have worked collectively to make sure students have access to laptops to allow them to access the quality online education you are providing. Over three quarters of a million laptops and tablets have already been delivered to schools and local authorities, and we will be increasing that to 1.3 million, including extending the scheme to 16-19 year olds in both FE providers and school sixth-forms. This is in addition to ensuring there are connectivity packages available to those that need access to the internet. We have partnered with the UK's leading mobile operators to provide free data to help children get online as well as delivering 4G wireless routers for pupils without connection at

home. We are grateful to EE, O2, Sky Mobile, Smarty, Tesco Mobile, Three, Virgin Mobile and Vodafone. We continue to invite a range of mobile network providers to support the offer through the [Get Help with Technology](#) scheme. Please do continue to register your requirements with my department.

I know you have moved very quickly to delivering remote learning. For those of you who would like further support on this, we are providing support through OAK Academy on lesson content and providing support from other schools and colleges through the EdTech Demonstrator programme. Schools can also get funding and support to set up a digital education platform (Google for Education or Microsoft Office 365 Education). Full details of the support available for remote education can be accessed on the [Get Help with Remote Education](#) page.

We all want to ensure that those students most heavily impacted by the pandemic are able to catch up on missed education. Last year, we launched the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) which is providing up to £350 million of targeted support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils who are most at risk of falling further behind due to having lost time in education. The NTP provides high-quality tuition support for [5-16 year olds](#), funding for small group tuition for [16-19 year olds](#) and support for an [oral language programme](#) for reception-aged pupils.

Given the further disruption to education, we have regrettably had to review our plans for exams this summer, as I announced on 6 January. We cannot guarantee that all students will be able to fairly sit their exams this summer, and it is my firm policy position that alternative arrangements are needed to award qualifications. Together with Ofqual, we have launched a joint consultation to seek views on alternative assessment arrangements for GCSE, AS, and A levels and propositions for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs). The consultation launched on Friday 15th January and will run for two weeks. I am keen to hear your views, both through the written consultation,

and through planned engagement with stakeholder groups, including teacher unions and schools' representatives. You can read more about the [consultation](#), including further detail on the proposals, on GOV.UK.

For GCSE, AS, and A level, it is my firm policy position that students' results should be determined based on teachers' assessment of their performance, informed by a breadth of evidence, and we want to support you to do this. Further detail on VTQs and other general qualifications, with their varied needs and assessment approaches, is available in the consultation and in my [letter to Ofqual](#).

I know there are significant challenges in the coming weeks for school and college leaders. We know that receiving face to face education is best for children's and young people's mental health and for their educational achievement. It is therefore my sincere hope that with the efforts we are all making to contain the virus, children and young people across England will be back in the classroom, spending time with their friends and teachers, and getting back into the rhythms of the school or college year again soon. We are keeping plans for the return to school and college under continuous review and will ensure that children and young people return to face to face education as soon as it is possible. We will inform schools, colleges and parents ahead of the February half term. I will continue to work with you as we deal with this evolving and challenging situation, as well as with health colleagues, the Chief and Deputy Chief Medical Officers.

I would like to thank you for the huge effort that you have put into keeping children and young people safe and learning. I am extremely grateful to you, all your staff, governors and trustees for the immense commitment you have shown. I want you to know that I am committed to supporting you, and I know that together we will get through this as we all strive to deliver the best we can for our pupils and students.

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Education