



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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To all local authority Council Leaders, Chief Executives, and Directors of Children's Services

It is now a little over a month since I wrote asking for your support to ensure our most vulnerable children and young people continue to be supported and cared for, and all parents carrying out critical roles can rely on there being a school place if they need one. On Sunday, I paid tribute to those working in nurseries, schools, colleges, universities and children's services. I'm profoundly grateful for their efforts. I am equally grateful for the work you and your teams have been doing to support them and co-ordinate activity locally. That the vast majority of schools have remained open, providing places for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, even over Easter, is an astonishing achievement.

Supporting attendance of vulnerable children and young people

Educational settings remain open and safe for vulnerable children and young people. Being at an early years setting, school or college can be an important lifeline for many vulnerable children and young people, particularly where their needs cannot be met safely at home or where they may be at risk of harm.

So I want to place a special emphasis on the importance of continuing the efforts you and providers are making to ensure as many of these children and young people attend educational provision as possible, where it is in their best interests to do so.

Decisions on attendance will be based on finely balanced discussions between education providers, parents/carers, and others including social workers, local authorities, and other relevant professionals, where applicable. In making these decisions, providers will need to consider the balance of risk, including health vulnerabilities, family circumstances and the child or young person's assessed special educational needs.

In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an education setting, and their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker (where appropriate) and education setting should explore the reasons for this directly with the parent.

Where applicable, designated safeguarding leads and/or equivalent school staff should keep their lists of vulnerable children and young people who should be attending provision under review.

Education providers, social workers, local authorities and other professionals will want to work together to ensure adequate and appropriate arrangements are in place to keep in touch with vulnerable children and young people (whether they are attending provision, or not attending for an agreed or non-agreed reason), such as by letter, phone or visit.

We have refreshed both our [guidance on vulnerable children and young people](#) and our [guidance on social distancing](#) to set out our expectations regarding attendance, as well as the steps education settings should take to support safe provision for these children.

In summary our expectations for who should be encouraged to attend and how we recommend providers follow up on non-attendance is summarised below:

- **Children and young people who have a social worker** – should be encouraged to attend provision, unless their social worker decides that they are at less risk at home than in their placement, for example, due to underlying health conditions. Any unagreed absence should be followed up with the parent/carer, as well as the social worker/ local authority where appropriate.
- **Children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) whose needs cannot be met safely at home** – we expect that many children and young people with EHCPs can remain safely at home. However, we are asking local authorities to work with educational providers, families and the child or young person to carry out a risk assessment to judge whether this is the case. If not, they should attend the educational setting and any absence should therefore be followed up with the parent/carer, and social worker/ local authority where appropriate.
- **Children and young people who are otherwise vulnerable** – education settings, including alternative provision, should use their discretion by working with relevant partners to encourage the attendance of children and young people that they – or other local services, such as local authorities (including children's social care services) or the police - feel would be safer attending a setting. Absence should be followed up with the parent or carer, and other partners where appropriate.

I will be writing this week to schools and colleges to share these expectations and encourage them to keep sharing their lists of vulnerable children and young people who would benefit from attending provision with you, so that you can continue to work together to ensure adequate and appropriate arrangements are in place for all children and young people.

Care leavers

Young people who have left, or are about to leave, care, whether that's foster families or residential care, may be especially vulnerable right now.

So I am asking you to ensure no one has to leave care during this period, by looking very carefully at whether it is safe for those young people who would have been due to move out of your care to do so and to give care leavers extra support.

The £1.6 billion of additional funding announced on Saturday will help local authorities give care leavers, and other vulnerable groups, the support that they need at this difficult time.

NSPCC Helpline

As families stay at home to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, some children and young people may face increased risk of abuse or neglect at home or from strangers online.

To further protect children from harm, we are continuing to support NSPCC's Childline and are working with them to expand the adult helpline by providing them with £1.6 million. This means children have someone to call, and more adults will be able to raise concerns and seek advice about the safety and wellbeing of any child they are worried about.

I hope that you are able to publicise the availability of this through appropriate local channels.

New support for remote education and access to social care

Most children are not attending schools, and we are extremely grateful for how schools and colleges have adapted so rapidly to new ways of working by moving resources online, working remotely and changing the way they support their students and each other.

We have already published an initial list of high quality online educational resources including how to support physical and mental wellbeing and materials for teaching children with special educational needs and disabilities. Many commercial providers have also offered high quality educational resources at discounts or for free.

In addition, to support the hard work of schools in delivering remote education, the Oak National Academy was launched on Monday 20 April. This brand-new enterprise has been created by 40 teachers from some of the leading schools across England, backed by government grant funding. It will provide 180 video lessons each week, across a broad range of subjects from maths to art to languages, for every year group from Reception through to Year 10.

The BBC has also launched its own education package across TV and online, featuring celebrities and some of the best teachers – helping to keep children learning and supporting parents.

This is alongside new guidance we published on Sunday 19 April for parents on how best to support their child's education and development at home.

To make sure as many children as possible can access online learning, we have ordered laptops to help disadvantaged young people who would otherwise not have access and are preparing for exams (in year 10).

We will also provide laptops or tablets for care leavers and children with social workers (including families with pre-school age children) to help them stay in touch with the services they need, keeping them safe as well as supporting home learning.

And if disadvantaged children in year 10, care leavers and children with a social worker at secondary school cannot access the internet, we'll provide free 4G routers to get them connected while schools are closed. We are also working with some of the major telecommunications providers to exempt certain educational resource sites from data charges.

The devices and 4G routers will be owned by schools and local authorities. More details on how to access these and our expectations on how they should be distributed will be published on GOV.UK later this week.

For 16-19 year olds, colleges, schools or other providers can support those without access to devices or connections through their flexible bursary funding. Where additional funding is needed to provide this support providers can apply to have their bursary funds topped up to ensure those who need it have access.

Flexibility to use entitlement funding to secure childcare for critical workers and vulnerable children

It is vital that we secure sufficient childcare for critical workers and vulnerable children through the COVID-19 pandemic, and ensure the sector is able to function and allow parents to return to work afterwards. I want to thank the local authorities, childminders, nurseries and schools that are working together to ensure sufficient childcare in their areas. To help them do this, we are providing a range of financial support.

As most early years providers have mixed private and public incomes, we have published guidance setting out how providers can access the CJRS while still receiving early entitlement funding. This confirmed that providers can access the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme (CJRS) to cover up to the proportion of its pay bill which could be considered to have been paid for from that provider's private income.

We will also be publishing guidance to support local authorities to use their free entitlement funding differently, redistributing it – in exceptional cases and in a clearly focused and targeted way – in order to secure childcare for the children of critical workers and for vulnerable children, where their usual arrangements are no longer possible.

This ability to redistribute will enable local authorities to ensure that critical workers, including NHS staff, are able to access childcare where they need it.

Any setting which sees their early entitlement funding reduced in order to fund childcare places elsewhere will be able to increase the proportion of their salary bill eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in line with the department's guidance on access to the scheme.

Temporary changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

We have listened to the early years sector about the challenges faced in providing safe, quality care during this period, including on meeting the requirements in the EYFS statutory framework for children aged 0-5. We have worked quickly to amend regulations, to support early years settings remaining open to care for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

We will be temporarily disapplying and modifying certain elements of the EYFS statutory framework, subject to parliamentary agreement. These changes will allow providers greater flexibility to respond to changes in workforce availability and potential fluctuations in demand, while still providing care that is high quality and safe. Changes include: providers not being required to meet existing learning and development requirements; providers not being required to undertake the EYFS Profile assessment in 2019/20 and therefore no moderation of this by local authorities; providers not being required to undertake the 2 year progress check during the COVID-19 period; exceptions to the qualifications that staff hold in order to be counted in ratio requirements, as well as changes to requirements around paediatric first aid. Local authorities and settings should familiarise themselves with the changes which will be shared on [guidance on gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-years-foundation-stage-guidance).

Once again I'd like to convey my deep gratitude for all the hard work that you and your teams are doing.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education