Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance

What parents need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during COVID-19

Updated 16 March 2021

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Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for parents and carers of children at:

- registered nurseries and childminders[footnote 1]
- primary and secondary schools (including special schools and alternative provision) [footnote 2]
- further education colleges[footnote 3]
- wraparound childcare and out-of-school settings

This update includes content on:

- returning to boarding school from overseas, including information on arrangements for pupils to quarantine on arrival in the UK in their boarding house
- additional information to support parents considering elective home education for their child

Overview

During the national lockdown, schools and colleges only allowed vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers to attend. All other pupils and students learned remotely.

Nurseries and childminders (including maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in schools) have stayed open and allowed children to attend their usual hours and should continue to do so.

From 8 March, all children and students should return to school and college. All primary pupils should attend school from this date. All secondary pupils and college students will be offered testing from 8 March, and those who consent to testing should return to face-to-face education following their first negative test result. If consent is not given, they will not be stopped from going back and will return in line with their school or college's arrangements.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has made clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only. Returning to school or college is also vital for their educational progress, for their wellbeing, and for their wider development.

To continue to manage the risks, nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will carry on implementing the range of protective measures that they have been using throughout the autumn term. We have further strengthened these measures to help decrease the disruption the virus causes to education. Current evidence suggests that these measures are still the right ones to take.

Your child's nursery, childminder, school or college can give you more information about the measures they have in place.

Attending nursery and childminders

Whether your child attends nursery, a childminder or another early years setting is your decision, but we do encourage you to take up a place for your child. Attending childcare is very important for the wellbeing and education of children, and supports families.

Shielding advice is currently in place and children who have been confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend education or childcare.

Check if your child is eligible for any of the free childcare entitlements through Childcare Choices. These are worth on average £2,500 a year to parents of some 2 year olds and up to £5,000 a year to parents of 3 and 4 year olds.

Attending school and college

From 8 March all children and students should return to school or college. Attendance is once again mandatory from this date. Secondary aged pupils (year 7 and above) should take part in asymptomatic testing upon their return in the week of 8 March. Pupils can return to school or college following their first negative test result.

Pupils not undergoing testing should attend school in line with the school's phased return arrangements. If you are a parent of a child who is vulnerable or if you are a critical worker, your child should continue to be able to attend school throughout, unless they receive a positive test result.

Mandatory attendance means that it is your legal duty as a parent to send your child (if they are of compulsory school age) to school regularly if they are registered at one. Where a secondary age pupil is not expected to attend due to their school's testing programme in the week of 8 March, absence will not be penalised.

Local authorities and schools have a range of legal powers to enforce attendance if a child or young person misses school without a valid reason.

There is not a corresponding legal duty for post-16 education, but if a young person fails to attend their college may believe they have left the course.

We know some parents will be feeling anxious about their children returning to school or college. If you have concerns about your child attending, you should discuss these with your school or college. They should be able to explain ways they are changing things to reduce risks.

Self-isolation and shielding

A small number of children and young people may be unable to attend in line with public health advice to self-isolate. You should not send your child to school or college if they:

- have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or live in a household with someone who has symptoms
- have tested positive themselves, even if they do not have symptoms
- live in a household with someone who has tested positive, even if that person does not have symptoms
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19)
- are required to self-isolate for travel-related reasons

We know from growing evidence that many children identified at the start of the pandemic as clinically extremely vulnerable, are not at increased risk of serious outcomes from coronavirus (COVID-19) and children are gradually being removed from the shielding patient list as appropriate, following review with a clinician. If your child is confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable, they are advised not to attend school or college until further notice. Find out more on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus (COVID-19).

Your child's school may check that your child is advised not to attend school or college by asking to see a copy of the shielding letter sent to you.

All 16 to 18 year olds with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality will be offered a vaccine in priority group 6 of the vaccination programme. Even if they have been vaccinated, these young people should continue to shield and to self-isolate if they have symptoms or are identified as a close contact of a positive case.

Children who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable should still attend school or college.

If your child is unable to attend school or college for these reasons, your school or college will provide support with remote education and pastoral support. If your child is within our definition of vulnerable and unable to attend, it is important that their school or college put systems in place to keep in contact with them. The education setting should notify their social worker (if they have one), and agree with the social worker the best way to maintain contact and offer support to your child. They should also have in place procedures to check that your child is able to access remote education support, to support them to access it (as far as possible) and to regularly check if they are doing so.

If your child is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) and is asked to self-isolate, you do not need to self-isolate unless your child develops symptoms. This also applies to other members of your household (including any other children in the same school or college).

If your child has been a close contact of someone who has tested positive, and then develops symptoms but has a negative test result, they will still need to self-isolate for the full 10 days from the day after contact with the person who tested positive.

Alternative provision, special schools and special post-16 provision

From 8 March, school attendance is mandatory for all pupils. All children and young people should attend their special school, special post-16 provider or alternative provision setting, unless they receive a positive test result or have to self-isolate.

We expect that every 16 to 19 student (or 19 to 25 with an EHC plan) undertakes the majority of their planned hours on site. Special post-16 institutions should continue to allow students to attend as per their usual timetable.

Your child's school or college should continue to work collaboratively with you to agree an approach that is in your child's best interests.

Elective home education

We encourage you to send your children back to school from 8 March but understand some parents may for the first time be considering elective home education (EHE). This is an important decision and should not be entered into lightly. Of course, it should only be made if it is in the best interests of your child. Find out more about EHE.

Parents who are considering home education due to concerns around safety should discuss these with their school, to see what safety measures have been put in place.

If your child is not currently enrolled at a school and you want them to be admitted to a mainstream school, you should apply to the admission authority for the school(s) that you wish to apply for. In some local authority areas, the local authority will continue to coordinate all in year applications for school places. Your local authority website will be able to tell you which system applies in your area. Parents can apply for a place at any mainstream school, at any time.

Schools are not required to provide any support to parents who have withdrawn their child for EHE. It is for parents to be certain that home education is right for their child. Local authorities can provide support and guidance to families who elect to home educate but this is discretionary.

Boarding and residential schools and colleges

From 8 March, pupils can return to boarding and residential schools and colleges.

If your child needs to travel from abroad to return to boarding school, you will need to confirm if you and/or your child can travel to the UK under the current rules. Your child should not travel unless the school has confirmed that they have appropriate arrangements for quarantine in place.

All pupils who travel from abroad must quarantine on arrival in the UK (normally for 10 days). Boarding school pupils can quarantine in their school's boarding facilities. They should buy a home testing package, with coronavirus (COVID-19) tests to be taken on days 2 and 8 after arrival.

If your child meets UK entry requirements and has travelled from or through a 'red list' country in the previous 10 days, then the school must meet additional requirements covering transport from ports of entry to school, quarantine accommodation and testing. These requirements are set out in guidance for boarding schools. If the school has not confirmed that it has arrangements in place that allow for transport, quarantine accommodation and testing that meet these requirements, then your child should not travel.

Anyone who is not a British or Irish national, or who does not have the right to reside in the UK (this includes those with long-term visas), who has travelled from or through a 'red list' travel ban country in the previous 10 days, is not permitted to enter the UK and should not travel.

Holidays

You should plan your holidays within school and college holidays as usual. Avoid seeking permission to take your children out of school or college during term time. You should make sure any travel is in line with national travel guidance.

Keep in mind that you and your children may need to self-isolate when you return from a trip overseas.

Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges have their own health and safety risk assessments, and keep them under review.

As part of this, there are certain approaches that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to implement that are essential to reduce health risks. They will continue to carefully implement these measures. The way to control the virus is with these measures, even with the current new variants, and we have strengthened some of the measures to support the return of all pupils and students.

Actions for nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges

We have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to continue to:

- manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the nursery, childminder setting, school or college, in line with current public health guidance, and minimise contact with anyone who is required to self-isolate by ensuring that they do not attend the setting. Your child should not attend if they have developed one or more coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or tested positive, and your child may be asked to self-isolate from the day of contact with an individual who tested positive and the next 10 full days if they have been in close, face-to-face contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus
- ensure that everyone cleans their hands thoroughly and more often than usual, including when they arrive, when they return from breaks, when they change rooms and before and after eating - this should be done for 20 seconds with soap and running water or hand sanitiser
- ensure good respiratory hygiene for everyone by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach
- maintain enhanced cleaning and ventilation, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces more often

Schools and colleges will minimise contact and encourage maintaining distance as far as possible. It will be different for each school or college. This will involve asking children and young people to:

- stay within specified separate groups (or bubbles)
- maintain distance between individuals

We know that younger school children and those with special educational needs (SEND) may not be able to maintain social distancing. It is likely that for those children the emphasis will be on separating groups.

Consistent groups reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of pupils and staff in contact with each other to only those within the group.

Maintaining distinct groups, or bubbles, that do not mix makes it quicker and easier in the event of a positive case to identify those who may need to self-isolate and to keep that number as small as possible.

Face coverings

In schools and colleges where pupils and students in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by everyone (unless exempt) when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.

In these schools and colleges, we now also recommend that face coverings should be worn in classrooms and during activities, unless social distancing can be maintained. This will not apply in situations where a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons. Face coverings do not need to be worn by pupils or students when outdoors on the premises.

The wearing of face coverings in classrooms is being introduced for a limited time until Easter. It will be kept under review and our guidance will be updated at that point.

This does not apply to children in nurseries, childminders and primary schools. Adults (including staff and visitors) should wear face coverings in situations where social distancing between adults is not possible. They will therefore ask you and other visitors to use face coverings if you come on site.

In colleges, students may also be asked to wear face coverings where:

- the teaching setting is more similar to, or is, a workplace environment
- it is a requirement in the workplace or indoor environment and students are likely to come into contact with other members of the public

It is really important that face coverings are worn correctly. Schools and colleges will let you and your child know their process for making sure face coverings are put on, removed, stored and disposed of properly.

Public Health England (PHE) has published guidance on how to make a simple face covering.

Some pupils, students and adults may be exempt from wearing face coverings. These exemptions will apply in early years, schools and colleges, so any requirement to wear a face covering does not apply to someone who:

- cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical impairment or disability, illness or mental health difficulties

- is with a person who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

We expect people to be sensitive to these needs and be aware that the reason some people are less able to wear face coverings may not be visible to others.

Transparent face coverings which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate can also be worn. There is currently limited evidence regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings, but they may be more effective in reducing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) than not wearing a face covering at all.

Asymptomatic testing

Most nurseries, schools and colleges are taking part in the asymptomatic testing programme. Rapid testing using lateral flow devices (LFDs) will support the return to face-to-face education by helping to identify people who are infectious but do not have any coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms. Those who test positive will self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus and keeping other pupils and students in face-to-face education. Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged.

Nurseries and primary school children

Pre-school children and primary aged pupils do not need to be regularly tested. However, staff will be taking part in the asymptomatic testing programme to help reduce transmission of the virus and keep everyone safe. PHE has advised there are currently limited public health benefits attached to testing primary pupils with LFDs. Primary age pupils, particularly younger children, may find the LFD testing process unpleasant and are unable to self-swab.

Secondary school pupils and college students

Upon return, from 8 March, all secondary aged pupils and students in school and college (year 7 and above) should take a test 4 times - 3 times on site at the school or college's testing site and the fourth at home using a home test kit. The first 3 tests should be taken 3 to 5 days apart. Once pupils and students have had one negative test result they can return to school or college.

After this, all secondary aged pupils and college students will be given home test kits and will be asked to regularly test themselves twice a week at home and report results to NHS Test and Trace, as well as with your school or college. Home testing will also be available for independent training providers and adult community learning providers from the end of March. The home test kits will include instructions for testing and reporting results. Schools and colleges will retain their own small testing sites so that pupils who are unable to test themselves at home can still participate.

Students aged 18 and over should self-test and report the result, with assistance if needed. If your child is aged 12 to 17 they will need adult supervision to self-test and report. You or another adult may conduct the test if necessary. If your child is aged 11 and attending a secondary school, you or another adult should conduct the test.

If your child tests positive, they will need to:

- self-isolate in line with the stay at home guidance (if they test positive at school, you should arrange for them to be collected)
- book a further test (a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test) to confirm the result, if the test was done at home

Testing is voluntary and your child will not be tested unless appropriate consent is in place. We strongly encourage you and your child to take part to help us break chains of transmission and manage the virus. Your child will not be stopped from returning to school or college if you or they choose not to take part in testing. They will be able to return to face-to-face education in line with their school or college's arrangements.

Anyone with symptoms, whether they are involved in this programme or not, should book a free NHS test and follow government self-isolation guidance until the results of their test are known.

If you have any questions about the asymptomatic testing programme, please speak to your school or college.

Asymptomatic testing for parents and adults in households with children at school or college

All adults in households with children of school age without symptoms can also now access regular rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) testing. This includes childcare and support bubbles.

There are different ways for a household, childcare or support bubble to collect their test to take at home twice-weekly:

- through an employer, if they offer testing to employees
- at a local test site – you may need to book an appointment
- by collecting a home test kit from a local test site – anyone aged 18 or over can collect 2 packs of 7 tests
- by ordering a home test kit online – do not order online if you can access testing through other routes, this frees up home delivery for those who need it most

Protective measures in secondary schools and colleges

Alongside asymptomatic testing, secondary schools and colleges should continue to put in place a range of protective measures to minimise the risk of infection spread. All existing protective measures set out in actions for nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges, including social distancing, handwashing, face coverings where needed and bubbles, remain important and the need for these is not lessened.

A negative antigen LFD result should not be read as a means to relax or ignore social distancing or other virus prevention measures intended to reduce transmission. The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the government's testing policy for those with symptoms. It is an additional tool that contributes to reducing risk in nurseries, schools and colleges.

Managing cases in nurseries, schools and colleges

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will take swift action when they become aware that someone who has attended has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). They will contact their local health protection team if they:

- have 2 or more confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) among pupils or staff within 14 days
- see an overall rise in child or staff absence rates where coronavirus (COVID-19) is suspected

The local health protection team will advise what action is required. Closure will not usually be necessary, but some groups may need to self-isolate.

Actions you should take

Do not send your child to their nursery, childminder, school or college if:

- they are showing one or more coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms
- someone in their household is showing symptoms
- someone in their support bubble has symptoms and they have been in close contact with them since the symptoms started or during the 48 hours before they started
- they or someone in their household has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- they are required to quarantine having recently visited a red list travel ban country

Book a test if you or your child develop symptoms. Inform your nursery, childminder, school or college of the results.

If the test is positive, follow guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, and engage with the NHS Test and Trace process.

Other household members (including any siblings) should self-isolate from the day your child's symptoms started (or the day they took a test if they did not have symptoms), and the next 10 full days.

If your child or someone in your household has tested positive while not experiencing symptoms but develops symptoms during the isolation period, they should restart the 10 day isolation period from the day they developed symptoms.

If your child displays symptoms, or has a positive test, while at school or college, they should not use public transport and, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household. In exceptional circumstances, if you cannot arrange to have your child collected and they cannot walk, cycle or scoot home, alternative arrangements may need to be organised by the nursery, childminder, school or college.

Your child does not need a test if they:

- have a runny nose, are sneezing or feeling unwell, but do not have a temperature, cough or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste
- are advised to self-isolate because they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), for example, another pupil in their class, but are not showing symptoms themselves

Please help nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to create the safest possible environments by following this advice and the wider public health advice and guidance.

Arriving at and leaving nursery, the childminder, school or college

Some nurseries, childminders, schools or colleges may need to stagger or adjust start and finish times. This helps keep groups apart as they arrive and leave the premises. If nurseries, schools or colleges choose to do this it should not reduce the amount of time they spend teaching - but it could mean that your child's start or finish times change.

Schools and colleges will work with any school transport and other transport providers to coordinate, as necessary.

Your nursery, childminder, school or college will be in touch to set out any changes they are making. This might also include:

- new processes for drop off and collection
- not allowing gathering at the school gates
- not being allowed onto the site without an appointment

Please help nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges manage these arrangements, for example by keeping your distance from others when dropping off and picking up your child.

Dedicated and public transport should continue to be in place to enable children and young people to travel to school or college.

Using public transport

Everyone needs to play their part in reducing the demand for public transport. If possible, you should look for alternative transport options, especially walking or cycling or scooting, particularly at peak times.

This will help to ensure that there is enough public transport capacity to allow those who need to use it to travel safely. It will also benefit your family's health. See the guidance from:

- Living Streets on walking to school
- Sustrans on keeping safe on the school run

If you and your child rely on public transport to get to their nursery, childminder, school or college, the safer travel guidance for passengers will apply. In some areas, local

authorities may be providing extra dedicated school or college transport services to help children and young people get to school or college.

You and your children must not travel to nursery, childminders, school or college if you or a member of your household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or have tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

Free home to school transport for eligible children

Local authorities' duty to provide free home to school transport for eligible children is unchanged. This is set out in the home to school travel and transport guidance.

Your local authority might ask you to accept a personal travel budget or mileage allowance instead of a seat on dedicated transport. This may be so they can ensure there is enough dedicated transport capacity for everyone who needs it.

Please accept that offer if you can. It will not affect your child's eligibility for dedicated transport in the future. The local authority cannot make you accept if you do not want to or are not able to.

Local authorities will not expect you to commit to accepting a personal payment or mileage allowance for a specified period of time, but they will need reasonable notice to reinstate home to school transport for your child.

Using dedicated school or college transport

Local authorities, schools, colleges and transport providers will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport, on dedicated school or college transport. This is because:

- dedicated school or college transport often carries the same group of young people on a regular basis, this limits the number of contacts children have
- children and young people on dedicated school or college transport do not mix with members of the public

Local authorities, schools and transport providers will do all that is reasonably practicable to maximise social distancing where possible and minimise the risk of transmission. What is practicable is likely to vary according to local circumstances. This might include:

- asking your child to use a regular seat and sit within their bubble or with the same constant group of children on this transport
- making sure boarding and disembarking is orderly and/or managed
- making sure vehicles are cleaned regularly
- asking your child to regularly wash hands thoroughly before and after travel
- ensuring that transport operators maximise the flow of fresh air

It is important that you follow any local advice provided and that your child knows and understands the importance of following any rules that are set.

Wearing face coverings when travelling to and from school and college

Most children and young people aged 11 and over are now required to wear a face covering on public transport. This does not apply to children and young people who are exempt from wearing face coverings.

The Department of Health and Social Care has advised on when to wear a face covering. If your child is aged 11 or over, they must wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated transport to secondary school or college, unless they are exempt. It is important that they comply with any rules about face coverings on their transport. You will need to ensure that they have a suitable face covering.

If your child needs to share a car to school or college with someone outside of their support bubble or household, they should:

- share with the same people each time
- open the windows for ventilation
- wear a face covering if they are aged 11 or over

It is really important that face coverings are worn correctly. Schools and colleges will let you know their process for making sure face coverings are put on, removed, stored and disposed of properly.

Curriculum

Schools will continue to teach a broad and balanced curriculum in all subjects, and will adapt teaching and curriculum planning to ensure pupils cover the most important content. In some exceptional circumstances, schools may consider it appropriate to suspend some subjects for some pupils, but only where this is in the best interest of the pupil and in discussion with parents.

Colleges are expected to continue delivery so that students of all ages can benefit from their education and training in full.

There may need to be changes to some subjects, such as sport and performance subjects, so that schools and colleges can teach these subjects as safely as possible. Schools have the flexibility to decide how subjects will be provided to pupils attending school. Find out more in helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible.

Catch-up support

We know that extended school and college closures have had a substantial impact on children and young people's learning.

In June 2020, we announced an initial package worth £1 billion which remains in place to stop pupils from falling behind. The Prime Minister announced, on 27 January, that the government will provide a further £300 million to early years, schools and colleges.

The National Tutoring Programme will continue to offer tuition.

Remote education

Schools and colleges have been working hard to implement remote education effectively.

From 8 March, attendance is mandatory for all school-aged pupils. However, where a pupil cannot attend school on site because they are complying with government guidance or law relating to coronavirus (COVID-19), for example, if they need to self-isolate or shield, state-funded schools have a duty to provide remote education for school-aged children.

Independent schools also need to provide remote education in these circumstances to meet the necessary standards.

Where it is needed, schools should provide remote education equivalent in length to the teaching your child would usually get in school. This will include recorded or live direct teaching time, as well as time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently. It should be suitably tailored if your child has special educational needs or a disability. The amount of remote education should be a minimum of:

- 3 hours a day for key stage 1 (years 1 to 2) on average, with less for younger children
- 4 hours a day for key stage 2 (years 3 to 6)
- 5 hours a day for key stages 3 and 4 (years 7 to 11)

You can find out more about your school's remote education offer on their website. If you have concerns about the amount or quality of the remote education your child is receiving, you should talk to their teacher or headteacher. If you have used the school's complaints process and you still have concerns, you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider the complaint and take action where appropriate.

For students aged 16 to 19 in college, from 8 March we expect that every 16 to 19 student (or 19 to 25 with an EHC plan) will attend in person, and will undertake the majority of their planned hours on site.

Where students are unable to attend on site for coronavirus (COVID-19) related reasons, for example because they need to self-isolate or are shielding, colleges should provide remote education to minimise disruption to their learning and progression.

Colleges will use their best endeavours to deliver as much of students' planned hours, recognising this may not be possible in the case of students undertaking a course involving practical teaching and training which necessitates the use of specialist equipment and supervision or with respect to work experience and placements.

You can find out more about your college's remote education offer on their website.

If your child needs more support to access remote education, you should speak to your child's school or college in the first instance. Schools and colleges have been allocated a number of devices and are distributing these to the children who need them most. If your child does not have access to a device, or needs support with internet access for remote education when they are not able to attend in person, we recommend you contact your school or college who should be able to allocate them a device.

Find out more about remote education and how you can support your child while they are learning from home.

Online safety

It is important to have regular conversations with children and young people about staying safe online. Encourage them to talk to you if they come across something worrying.

Find out how to talk to your child about online safety issues and set up age-appropriate parental controls with the following guidance:

- coronavirus (COVID-19): support for parents and carers to keep children safe online
- coronavirus (COVID-19) - staying safe online

Assessments in primary schools

Statutory key stage 1 and 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021 are cancelled.

Schools will continue to use assessment during the summer term to:

- inform teaching
- give you information about your child's attainment in their annual report
- support your child's transition to secondary school if they are in year 6

GCSEs and A levels

GCSE, A and AS level exams will not go ahead this summer as planned.

Students taking GCSE, AS and A levels, will receive grades based on teacher assessment. The exam boards will support teachers to reach their judgements by providing guidance and training.

The DfE and Ofqual launched a consultation on the proposals for alternative arrangements. This closed on 29 January and the response will be published later in year.

Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs)

Due to the continued disruption caused by the pandemic, the government announced that it is no longer viable for some VTQ external exams and assessments to go ahead in February and March.

Exams and assessments for VTQs that require a student to demonstrate proficiency or occupational competence can continue to proceed in February and March, with protective measures in place in line with PHE measures. This includes apprenticeship end-point assessments and assessments for Functional Skills qualifications.

From April onwards, different approaches should be taken to 3 groups of VTQs for awarding in 2021:

- VTQs most similar to GCSE, AS and A levels that are used for progression to further or higher education - exams for these VTQs will not go ahead, and results will instead be awarded using similar arrangements to GCSEs and AS or A levels - this will apply to many VTQs approved for performance tables, such as many BTECs, Cambridge Nationals and Technicals, and also to T Level core assessments
- VTQs used to enter directly into employment - exams or assessments will continue where they are critical to demonstrate occupational or professional competence and can be delivered in line with public health measures - where the assessment cannot take place safely, it will be delayed
- smaller qualifications that are used to progress to further education or employment but are not like GCSEs or A levels in their structure, such as Functional Skills qualifications and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) - exams and assessment for these will continue in line with public health measures, but with alternative arrangements available for those who cannot access the assessments

Ofsted inspections

Routine, graded Ofsted inspections remain suspended for the spring term across early years, state schools and colleges. The intention is for these inspections to resume in the summer term. We are continuing to keep the inspection arrangements under review.

Inspectors are currently conducting monitoring inspections of schools and colleges most in need of support - those judged ‘inadequate’ and some that ‘require improvement’. These inspections, which are not graded, have a strong focus on remote education.

If you have concerns about the quality of education being provided at your child’s nursery, childminder, school or college, or about the wellbeing and safety of pupils, you should talk to them and follow their complaints process. If you still have concerns, you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider whether it is appropriate to take action.

School admissions

Admission processes

Admissions are not suspended during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. You can apply in the usual way and admissions authorities will consider your applications. They will either offer your child a place or, if they refuse to offer a place, offer an appeal.

Admission appeals

If you have applied to a school and it does not offer your child a place, you have the right to appeal this decision. Admission appeals can now be held by telephone, video conference or in writing, instead of face-to-face hearings.

Entry tests for selective schools

Selective schools[footnote 4] will already have run their selection tests for children whose parents want a place for September 2021 and who applied by the closing date for secondary applications, 31 October.

Where school admission authorities still need to assess some late or in-year applicants for ability or aptitude, you might find that they choose to assess aptitude or ability by other means before looking to test children under exam conditions together in test centres. This may include allowing children to take the selection test in their own home (either by a paper test or an online test), or primary school teacher assessment, where this is a viable alternative.

They can, however, choose to test in a test centre (at a school or other venue). The school will explain the process to you.

Travelling to attend a test is considered to be essential travel, but if you need to travel for your child to be tested, you should follow the public transport guidance. Only one person should accompany the child and children outside the family bubble should not be given lifts in private cars.

On arriving at or leaving test centres, parents and children should take the 3 simple actions we must all take to keep on protecting each other - wash hands, cover face, and make space, maintain at least 2 metres distance between themselves and others not in their family bubble, and follow government guidance on face coverings.

Find out about the coronavirus (COVID-19) changes in assessment processes for selective school admissions.

Parents should not wait in their cars outside the test centre and neither parents nor children should congregate around the test venue before, during or after the test.

Neither parents nor their children may attend the test if they are quarantining, showing symptoms, self-isolating or have tested positive. See actions you should take. If you or your child are quarantining, showing symptoms, self-isolating, or are asymptomatic but have had a positive coronavirus (COVID-19) test result within the past 11 days, contact the school, or local authority if it is running the test. The school or local authority will make alternative arrangements to assess your child for ability or aptitude.

School uniform

Schools decide their own uniform policy.

Uniforms do not need to be cleaned:

- more often than usual
- using different methods

Schools will be mindful that some parents may have had difficulty obtaining uniform items.

Increased ventilation may make school buildings cooler than usual over the winter months. Therefore, your child may need additional, suitable indoor items of clothing in addition to their uniform. Where this occurs, schools should ensure that no extra financial pressure is placed on parents.

School and college food

Schools will continue to provide meal options for pupils who are in school. Meals should be available free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. The meals served should meet the school food standards and where possible a hot meal should be available.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meal support for pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals and who are learning at home during term time. The guidance on providing school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak outlines how and when children eligible for free school meals should be supported at home.

Colleges will continue to provide free meals for eligible students, including those who are studying remotely due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

If your family needs support during the Easter break, you should contact your local authority to access help through the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

Mental health and wellbeing

Some children and young people may be experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Schools and colleges will continue to offer pastoral support to any pupils who need to work remotely.

Support for children and parents

Online resources to help you support your child with mental health and wellbeing, including:

- MindEd - a free educational resource on children and young people's mental health
- Every Mind Matters - an online tool and email journey to support everyone in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- Bereavement UK and the Childhood Bereavement Network - information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff

PHE's advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing includes key actions you can take to support your child. It also emphasises the importance of children continuing to remain fit and active and, wherever possible, having the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Youth Sport Trust and Sport England have advice and support on helping children and young people stay physically active.

Use the DfE blog to find mental health resources for children, parents, carers and school staff.

NHS mental health services remain open, and have digital tools to connect with people and provide ongoing support. Please use your local children and young people's mental health service when needed.

Support for children and young people

Get free, confidential support at any time by:

- texting SHOUT to 85258
- calling Childline on 0800 1111
- calling the Mix on 0808 808 4994

Find help online through:

- Young Minds - information on coronavirus (COVID-19) and mental health
- Think Ninja - a free app for 10 to 18 year olds to help build resilience and stay well
- Every Mind Matters - building resilience and supporting good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16

PHE has also launched new e-learning which can help parents and carers to support their children and young people in emergency or crisis situations.

Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service, provides support to children, young people and their families who are not currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). Use the See, Hear, Respond self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015.

It is also vital to report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the NSPCC helpline.

Education health and care (EHC) plans

If your child has an EHC plan they should receive the support they need as usual when they attend their nursery, childminder, school or college, and should be encouraged to attend now.

Mandatory attendance applies again from 8 March.

There may be circumstances in which early years providers, schools and colleges cannot offer your child their usual on-site provision because there are not enough staff or staff with the right training available. In these cases they will seek to resume as close as possible to your child's usual provision as soon as possible.

Early years providers, schools and colleges will be in touch with you to discuss the right support for your child. Any decisions taken should be regularly reviewed.

School trips

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will not go on educational visits at this time. This advice will be kept under review.

Wraparound childcare, extra-curricular, and out-of-school or college activities

We have published separate guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This sets out who can attend before and after-school clubs and other out-of-school activities and the measures in place, and the position for the Easter holidays. Vulnerable children and young people can access this provision in any circumstances.

If eligible, you should try to:

- send your child to the same settings consistently
- limit the number of settings they attend
- ensure they attend only one out-of-school setting in addition to school or college
- use settings local to your home or child's school or college, such as settings within walking or cycling distance

Contingency planning

If your child is self-isolating or shielding in line with government guidance, your school or college will provide remote education.

If restrictions in nurseries, childminders, schools or colleges are again needed to help contain the spread of the virus, there may be some changes to how they operate. Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will be prepared for this, following contingency framework guidance we have published.

If there does need to be any restrictions in childcare or education, decisions will be made by the government on a case-by-case basis.

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1. Nursery and childminder or nurseries and childminders refer to registered nurseries, registered childminders, pre-schools, playgroups and maintained nursery schools. ↩
2. Primary and secondary schools includes independent schools, maintained schools, academies, free schools, infant schools, junior schools and middle schools. ↩
3. Colleges refers to sixth-form colleges, general further education colleges, independent training providers, designated institutions, adult community learning providers and special post-16 institutions. ↩
4. Selective schools include grammar schools (which select all their children based on their high academic ability), partially selective or 'bilateral' schools which select a proportion of their intake by ability or aptitude, schools which 'band', that is they test all children for ability but admit children of all abilities (equal numbers of high and low ability children) and schools which admit 10% of their intake based on aptitude in the performing or visual arts, sport, modern foreign languages, design and technology or IT. ↩

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