



**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
Secretary of State

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**To all MPs in England**

1 September 2020

Dear Colleague,

## **THE RETURN OF ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO FULL-TIME EDUCATION**

As we begin the start of a new academic year, I wanted to remind you of all that we are doing to support schools and further education colleges to begin welcoming all children and young people back from today.

As the Prime Minister has made clear, the safe return of all pupils to school and college has been a top priority for this Government. The Chief Medical Officers and Deputy Chief Medical Officers of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales recently set out [the evidence of risks and benefits to health from schools opening](#), concluding that the risk of long-term harm from COVID-19 due solely to attending school is low while the risk of long-term harm from not attending school is high. On 17 August, the government launched a 'Back to School' campaign which aims to reassure parents and explain measures that schools and colleges are taking to reduce the risk of transmission.

### **Measures in place**

The Department for Education first published guidance on 2 July, which clearly set out the actions schools and colleges should take to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This guidance was developed with and endorsed by Public Health England and based on the latest scientific and medical advice and is kept under review. The updated versions are available for [schools](#) and [further education](#).

Schools and colleges have been working hard to prepare for the new term and are implementing these new measures, whilst ensuring children and young people still get the education they deserve. The Prime Minister, the Schools Minister and I have been visiting schools across the country to see first-hand the efforts they have made to ensure they are as safe as possible for children and young people to return. Measures in place include minimising contacts between groups of children as much as possible, encouraging regular handwashing and enhanced cleaning. We have confirmed that secondary schools and colleges will have the discretion to require face coverings in areas outside the classroom where social distancing cannot easily be maintained, if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances. In local intervention areas, schools and colleges should implement this approach for all pupils in year 7 and above, staff and

visitors. Face coverings are not required in classrooms because protective measures in place already mean risks are lower and face coverings could inhibit teaching and learning.

The safety and wellbeing of school and college staff and students has always been my priority. All staff, pupils and their families will continue to have access to testing if they develop COVID-19 symptoms, and every school and college that has been attended by someone who tests positive will receive direct support and advice from their local Public Health England health protection team. Schools and colleges are also being provided with an initial supply of home testing kits to provide to children and staff who develop symptoms while on site and who may otherwise be unable to access a test, as well as a delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE), provided free of charge by the Department of Health and Social Care for the small number of instances where this is needed.

Whilst we begin to welcome every child and young person back to school and college, we will need to plan for the continuity of education if local intervention restrictions are applied to schools and colleges. In local areas where restrictions are implemented for other sectors, we anticipate that education and childcare will usually remain fully open to all. The Department of Health and Social Care has published an overview of the tiers of restriction for education and childcare, to be implemented only where absolutely necessary, in its [contain framework](#). The Department for Education has published [further guidance](#) to help schools plan for Tier 2 restrictions.

## **Transport**

I have been working closely with the Transport Secretary to ensure transport is no impediment to the safe return of all children and young people to school and college. In recent weeks, the Department for Education and the Department for Transport have announced an extension of emergency funding for bus and rail, as well as [funding for additional home to school and college transport](#) for local transport authorities in England.

The Department for Education has also published [guidance for local authorities on home to school and college transport](#), which provides practical advice, based on the same system of controls set out for the [full return to school](#). From the autumn term, local authorities will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport on dedicated school or college transport. However, social distancing should still be put in place within vehicles wherever possible, between individuals or bubbles of children.

Local authorities have a crucial role in managing local travel demand and the Department for Transport are providing direct support to them through a new [Toolkit](#) and one-to-one support where needed.

Wherever possible and safe, we recommend that children and young people walk, cycle or scoot to school or college, in order to reduce congestion on roads and buses. Your support in promoting this message will be hugely appreciated. The Government's overarching Safer Transport communications campaign will continue to provide advice and guidance to passengers and operators of public transport on matters such as planning journeys, avoiding rush hour, social distancing and considering alternatives such as cycling and walking.

All of this effort to reduce risks and make schools and colleges as safe as possible is important in securing the return of all children to full-time education. Thank you for all you are doing to support the schools and colleges in your constituencies as they start welcoming children and young people back for the new term.

Our school and college leaders and staff have done so much to support our response to the coronavirus pandemic. I am sure you will join me in thanking them for all they have already done, and all they will continue to do.

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

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**