

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, has asked for this message to be passed to all those who work in the education sector

The government recognises the huge importance of the role you have played in maintaining the education, training and social care of our children and young people during this challenging time. I recognise that you will have the same anxieties as the rest of the country about your health and that of your families. On behalf of the Prime Minister and the entire government, I thank you all for all of your work so far, and your continued support. I am deeply grateful for the civic spirit and dedication of everyone working in education, and I will continue to provide my full support throughout this crisis.

Next steps

It is clear that education and children's social care settings are increasingly finding it difficult to continue as normal, as illness and self-isolation impacts on staffing levels and pupil attendance. To provide parents, student and staff with the certainty they need we are announcing that schools, colleges and early years settings will be closed to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus.

Examples of these workers include NHS staff, police and delivery drivers who need to be able to go to work. Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans.

A full list of key worker categories will be published by the Cabinet Office tomorrow.

Children who do not fall into these groups should remain at home with appropriate care.

Where schools are unable to provide this reduced provision, local authorities will work with the Department for Education's regional teams to ensure an alternative option is available.

We are expecting early years providers and sixth form and further education colleges to do the same. We are working with Her Majesty's Treasury on the financial support required. We are also asking that independent schools and boarding schools follow the same approach.

Where possible, we would encourage settings to stay open for this purpose throughout the Easter holidays.

Many universities and other higher education institutions are already taking necessary steps to keep their staff and students safe and where possible keep providing education. We are confident vice-chancellors are making the right decisions and the Department for Education continues to support them in doing so.

Temporary suspension of Ofsted inspections

Ofsted is to temporarily suspend routine inspections of schools, colleges, early years settings, children's social care providers and local authorities to reduce the burden on staff who are providing vital services to the nation in response to coronavirus.

Update on assessments and examinations

We can confirm that we will not go ahead with assessments or exams, and that we will not be publishing performance tables for this academic year.

We will work with the sector and Ofqual to ensure children get the qualifications they need.

My Department is working closely with local authorities, representatives of early years, schools and head teachers, regional school commissioners and bodies such as Ofsted and Ofqual about how to deliver this change as effectively as possible.

And we will do whatever is necessary to support local authorities, settings, schools and teachers through the weeks and months ahead.

Free school meal provision

We will give schools the flexibility to provide meals or vouchers to children eligible for free school meals. Some schools are already doing this, and we will reimburse the costs. As soon as possible, we will put in place a national voucher system.

Thank you once again for everything you are doing at this difficult time.

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Education