

Changes to Operations of Schools and Other Education Providers

I have today received this update from the Government:

Dear John

Today I am setting out in more detail how we will support early years, school and further education settings to welcome back more children from 1 June at the earliest, if we are able to do so safely.

You will have seen the Prime Minister's video address on Sunday where he confirmed that we are now past the peak of the virus and he set out a roadmap for careful modifications to social distancing measures. Now that we have made progress in reducing the transmission of coronavirus we anticipate, with further progress, that from the week commencing 1 June at the earliest we may be able to welcome back more children to nurseries, schools and colleges.

We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by Government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the Roadmap are operating effectively. As a result, we are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

It is now seven weeks since we closed schools, colleges and childcare settings to all but priority groups – vulnerable children and those of critical workers. This has been a huge ask of teachers, parents and especially of children themselves, and the response has been incredible across the board. But we all know that the best place for children to be is in school and it has always been my intention to get them back there as soon as the scientific advice allows. Children returning to educational and childcare settings in greater numbers will also allow more families to return to work.

From the week commencing 1 June at the earliest, I will be asking primary schools to prepare to welcome back children in nursery, Reception, year 1 and year 6, alongside the priority groups currently at school. I will ask secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 and year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year, alongside the full time provision they are offering to priority groups.

We will also ask nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, to begin welcoming back all children from 1 June. Alternative provision settings should mirror the approach being taken for mainstream schools and also offer some face-to-face contact for years 10 and 11 students (as they have no year 12). Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools should look to achieve an equivalent phased return without a

focus on specific year groups.

Our ambition is to bring all primary year groups back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if possible, though this will be kept under review. We will only welcome back additional year groups if the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates it is appropriate to have larger numbers of children within schools. Keeping children and staff safe is our utmost priority.

Our approach is underpinned by our latest understanding of the science, which indicates that we need to take a phased approach in order to limit the risk of increasing the rate of transmission above 1. We know that attending early education lays the foundation for lifelong learning and supports children's social and emotional development.

The three year groups within primary have been prioritised because they are key transition years, and the two year groups in secondary/colleges have been prioritised because they are preparing for key examinations next year. This approach is in line with other countries across Europe, who have begun to bring pre-school and school-age children back in a phased way and are focusing on primary schools and younger children. Approaches between countries will vary slightly based on different public health circumstances.

We are continuing to limit the number of children returning so that settings can reduce the number of people in classrooms compared to usual and put protective measures in place to reduce risks. Children and young people will need to stay within their group wherever possible and we will ask settings to implement a range of protective measures including frequent cleaning, reducing 'pinch points' (such as parents dropping children off at the start and end of the day) and utilising outdoor space.

In early years settings, existing space requirements and staff:child ratios for these age groups should allow for small group working. Staff and children in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their households, and the track and trace approach will be applied to any confirmed cases. Those who are extremely clinically vulnerable, or are living with someone who is, are not expected to attend. Anyone with concerns about underlying health conditions should follow our protective measures guidance.

Public Health England is clear that if settings implement these protective measures, and crucially if they also apply comprehensive infection control measures, such as ensuring symptomatic individuals do not attend settings, regular hand washing, respiratory hygiene and cleaning measures and handling potential cases of the virus as per our advice, then the risk of transmission will be lowered.

I will assess the impact of these changes closely, working with medical and scientific advisers as well as sector leaders. We will provide the sector with further guidance and support to help them to prepare for wider opening over the coming days and weeks. Today we have published the following pieces of guidance:

- Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June;
- Supporting guidance on protective measures which should be implemented in education settings;
- Guidance for parents and carers.

I want to thank the House for supporting schools and other providers in your own constituencies through this incredibly difficult time. I know that I can rely on our education and childcare sectors having the full support of the House as we prepare for this wider opening.

Our education leaders are central to the country's response to this current crisis. I hope you will join me in thanking all those who work in our education and care settings for their efforts.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Education