

Government delivers more than one million devices to disadvantaged pupils

More than one million laptops and tablets have now been delivered to the most disadvantaged children across the country, as part of a £400 million government investment that will support schools and young people for years to come.

Official statistics published today show the government has delivered 1,055,745 laptops and tablets to the children who need them most to help make sure their education can continue during the pandemic.

Thousands of families have also received additional data from mobile operators, following the Department's work to help children without internet access get online. This has supported access to educational resources to help children while most are being educated from home.

The news comes after the Department for Education last month announced a further 300,000 laptops and tablets to help even more disadvantaged children and young people learn at home. Schools are now receiving these top-ups to their original device deliveries – with those schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged pupils being prioritised to receive devices first.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I know what a challenging period this has been for pupils, teachers and parents – but it has been nothing short of inspiring to see schools and staff going above and beyond, as they always have done, to give our pupils the very best education possible.

Online access has been an important part of this work and will continue to be as we help young people catch-up after the disruption caused by the pandemic, which is why the delivery of these one million laptops is so vital. They represent one million children who will not let their education be overcome by this virus.

I want parents to know that we'll continue to do everything we can to protect our children's education at this unprecedented time and ensure they have the tools they need to get on with and make the most of their lives.

Work to deliver remote learning will lay the foundations for a long-term strategy to take advantage of the opportunities technology presents. The substantial number of devices provided, along with other initiatives such as

the EdTech Demonstrator Programme, mean children will be able to access support for years to come.

The 1.3 million devices the government is providing sits alongside a package of extensive support for the most disadvantaged children. This includes partnering with the UK's leading mobile network operators to provide free data to disadvantaged families, alongside a further £300 million being invested in tutoring programmes building on the existing £1bn Covid Catch Up Fund.

In addition, the Oak National Academy has been 'zero rated' by eleven major telecoms providers, including Vodafone, O2, Three, and BT. This means no data charges will apply if lessons from the country's online classroom are accessed through a mobile phone from participating providers.

The news comes as the government continues to support the most disadvantaged, including those on Free School Meals. Every child eligible for free school meals will be supported while they are learning remotely during the school term, and with the support of the government's £170 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme, every council in England will be keeping vulnerable children warm and well-fed during the February half term.

Julian David, Chief Executive Officer of techUK, said:

Securing 1.3 million devices for disadvantaged children and young people in these challenging times, and delivering over one million, is a testament to how the UK tech industry and government have pulled together to support families that need help the most.

The devices programme is a great example of industry and government collaboration, which will help children's futures for generations to come. I'm keen to deepen this collaboration and see it go even further, and the tech industry stands ready and eager to provide further support for this critical mission.

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive Officer of the Confederation of School Trusts, said:

The milestone of 1 million laptops is really important. Teachers and leaders have worked extraordinarily hard to provide pupils with high quality remote education during the lockdown. Schools are doing their utmost to support these pupils, including through the teacher-led Oak National Academy. We support the Government's ambition to make sure all pupils can access high quality teaching, at home and in school, and will work closely with Government to continue to improve access and connectivity.

In addition, the Department has also made £4.84 million available for Oak National Academy to provide video lessons in a broad range of subjects for

Reception up to Year 11. This will all help to make sure there is as little impact as possible on children's education while they are learning from home.

The Prime Minister has confirmed that the current attendance restrictions in schools and colleges will remain in place until 8 March at the earliest.

Children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people will still be able to attend schools and colleges, including special schools and alternative provision. Early years settings also remain open.