

New remote education support for schools, colleges and teachers

Schools, colleges, teachers and pupils across England will benefit from new remote education support to help children learn at home if they have to self-isolate, the Education Secretary has announced today (1 October).

The new support includes an additional 100,000 laptops to be made available for those children most in need if they're required to learn at home, as well as expanding the EdTech Demonstrator programme to ensure schools and teachers are able to make best use of technology available to them to enhance the at-home learning given to their pupils.

The Government has also today published a Temporary Continuity Direction, regarding the provision of remote education in schools, under the Coronavirus Act 2020. The Direction means schools have a duty to provide education to children at home, as they do when children are in the classroom.

Thanks to the hard work of teachers and staff, and the collective effort of parents, over seven million children and young people returned to the classroom in September. The Direction will help provide assurances to both pupils and parents that if pupils have to self-isolate at home their education will not be disrupted.

In the event of a confirmed case, schools are following the necessary guidance, including requiring small groups of children to self-isolate. In these cases, continuing to provide education is an absolute necessity. The Direction helps ensure this and sets a clear expectation on the high-quality education they should receive.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The best place for children and young people to learn is in the classroom, which is why we made it a national priority to get all pupils back into schools and colleges full-time, and why I have been so pleased to see millions of them returning over the past few weeks.

We have also, as we would expect, seen small numbers of students self-isolating in line with public health advice. It's vital these students have access to high quality and consistent remote education.

I know that through the incredible hard work of our teachers and staff, pupils will continue to receive the education they deserve through this academic year, whatever the circumstances, and I will do everything I can to support our schools, colleges and young people in making sure that's the case.

To support schools and colleges, the Government has added 100,000 laptops to the reserve of 150,000 already made available, and the 220,000 already delivered to those pupils most in need so they can continue their education.

The extra devices will be available to support: disadvantaged children in Years 3-11 who do not already have access to a device; disadvantaged, clinically extremely vulnerable children of all year groups who are unable to return to school, and children in all year groups unable to access remote education whilst attending a hospital school.

Over £1m of additional funding will also be invested in expanding the EdTech Demonstrator programme, a network of schools and colleges that provide peer-to-peer support to help teachers and support workers use technology as effectively as possible.

The EdTech Demonstrator programme, which currently has capacity to provide bespoke one to one support to 3,400 schools and colleges, will be expanded to support a further 1,000. The existing network of Demonstrators will grow to 50 schools and colleges, supported by £1.5m of additional funding.

In total, the programme has already provided support to over 6,000 schools and colleges through webinars, tutorials, and bespoke one to one support to school staff.

New resources for staff, including a good practice guide and school-led webinars, will also be made available. This is in addition to the video lessons offered by the sector-led Oak National Academy, into which the Government is investing £4.84m, and other providers of quality education resources.

The package will also see 80 grants of £1,000 to Further Education (FE) providers across England, providing additional training and support for mentors and coaches specialising in assisting teachers with remote education.

Schools that are accessing free devices or that are newly set up on an education digital platform, are encouraged to access the funded support available through the EdTech Demonstrator programme.

Recent attendance statistics show that 99.8% of state-funded schools were open on 24 September, with the overwhelming majority of children and young people continuing their education with minimal disruption.