



Department  
for Education

# **What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges**

**February 2021**

# Contents

Contents	2
Who is this publication for?	4
Attending nursery, childminders, school and college	5
Attendance at nursery and childminders	6
Attendance at school and college	6
Critical worker children	8
Vulnerable children and young people	8
Alternative provision (AP), special schools and special post 16 provision	8
Curriculum	10
Remote education	11
Online safety	12
Asymptomatic testing in secondary schools and colleges	13
Holidays	15
Boarding and residential schools and colleges	16
Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible	17
Actions that nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will take	17
Actions you can take	18
Face coverings	19
Arriving at and leaving nursery, the childminder, school or college	19
Using public transport	20
Free home to school transport for eligible children	20
Using dedicated school or college transport	21
Wearing face coverings when travelling to and from school and college	21
Assessment and exams	23
Assessments in primary schools	23
GCSEs and A levels	23
Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs)	23
Ofsted inspections	24
Early years	24
State schools	24
Colleges	24

School admissions	25
Admission processes	25
Admission appeals	25
Entry tests for selective schools	25
School uniform	27
Food	28
Mental health and wellbeing	29
Education, health and care (EHC) plans	31
School trips	32
Wraparound childcare, out-of-school or college activities	33
Extra-curricular activities	33
Managing cases in nurseries, schools and colleges	35

## Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for parents and carers of children at:

- registered nurseries and childminders<sup>1</sup>
- primary and secondary schools<sup>2</sup>
- further education colleges<sup>3</sup>
- wraparound childcare and out-of-school settings

This update includes information on:

- attending nursery, school and college
- remote education
- exams
- asymptomatic testing and lateral flow tests
- Ofsted inspections
- entry tests for selective schools
- food
- EHC plans

---

<sup>1</sup> Nursery and childminder or nurseries and childminders refer to registered nurseries, registered childminders, pre-schools, playgroups and maintained nursery schools.

<sup>2</sup> Primary and secondary schools includes independent schools, maintained schools, academies, free schools, infant schools, junior schools and middle schools.

<sup>3</sup> Colleges refers to sixth-form colleges, general further education colleges, independent training providers, designated institutions, adult community learning providers and special post-16 institutions.

## Attending nursery, childminders, school and college

On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced a new national lockdown. During the lockdown, schools and colleges should only allow vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers to attend. All other pupils and students should learn remotely.

Schools will close as usual over February half-term.

Early years providers should stay open throughout and allow children to attend their normal hours. This includes early years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites. Childminders can also care for school-aged children (reception upwards) if they are vulnerable children or children of critical workers. If your child is in reception, they should only attend education or childcare if they are a [vulnerable child](#) or at least one parent or carer is a [critical worker](#).

The Prime Minister has since made clear that whilst the nation's efforts do appear to have reduced the R rate, we cannot relax measures too soon. If we did this could risk the NHS coming under even more pressure and mean restrictions need to be brought back in and followed for even longer.

As a result we must continue to limit school attendance to help to support the reduction in the overall number of social contacts in our communities. This is a vital intervention in the context of current high prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19).

In the week of 22 February the Government will publish a plan for taking the country out of lockdown. Our aim will be to set out a gradual and phased approach towards easing the restrictions in a sustainable way. Re-opening schools will be the national priority in this plan. We will give schools, colleges, parents and young people a minimum of two weeks' notice ahead of any return to school or college. This means pupils and students will return to on-site education from 8 March at the earliest.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has recently made clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only.

To continue to manage the risks, we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools, and colleges to keep in place the range of protective measures that they have been using throughout the autumn term. Current evidence suggests that these measures are still the right ones for nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to take.

Your child's nursery, childminder, school, or college will be able to give you more information about the measures they have put in place.

## Attendance at nursery and childminders

Whether your child attends nursery, a childminder or another early years provider is your decision, but we do encourage you to take up a place for your child. Attending childcare is very important for the wellbeing and education of children, and supports families.

Shielding advice is currently in place and children who are clinically extremely vulnerable are advised not to attend education or childcare.

You can check if your child is eligible for any of the free childcare entitlements on the [Childcare Choices](#) website. These are worth on average £2,500 a year to parents of some 2-year-olds and up to £5,000 a year to parents of 3- and 4-year-olds.

## Attendance at school and college

During the period of national lockdown, primary and secondary schools and colleges will remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers only. Schools and colleges will not allow other pupils or students to attend at this time. If your child is not in one of these groups they will receive remote education.

Recognising the characteristics of their cohorts, where appropriate, special schools and colleges and alternative provision will continue to offer face to face provision for all pupils and students.

Children and young people are eligible to attend school or college if:

- At least one parent or carer is a [critical worker](#), and they can't keep their child at home. Critical workers are those whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and EU transition response. It includes parents who may be working from home
- They meet the definition for [vulnerable children and young people](#)

A small number of further education students and apprentices who would otherwise be completing their courses or apprenticeships in February or March are able to attend where it is not possible for their training or assessment to be completed remotely. This includes:

- those who are due to do a licence to practise, or other occupational competence assessment, including end point assessments in February or March.
- those training for some critical worker roles, for example: engineering, health and social care, manufacturing technologies, nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine, transportation operations and maintenance, agriculture, education and training, and building and construction (where this is connected to utilities and communications) that are due to complete in the next 3 months.

Schools and colleges will continue to record attendance during the national lockdown and will follow up any absences of pupils who they expect to attend. If you wish your child to be absent, we expect schools to authorise the absence. Advice will be issued to schools on what kind of attendance information to include in pupils' end of year reports to ensure that pupils are not unfairly penalised for absence at this time. Parents will not be penalised for their child's absence during this period.

A small number of children and young people eligible to attend face-to-face education or childcare this term may be unable to attend in line with public health advice to self-isolate because they:

- have symptoms or live in a household with someone who has symptoms
- have tested positive themselves, even if they do not have symptoms
- live in a household with someone who has tested positive, even if that person does not have symptoms
- are a close contact of someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) and are requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace or the Public Health England (PHE) advice service
- are required to self-isolate for travel-related reasons
- are clinically extremely vulnerable and are currently following government advice to shield

If your child is clinically extremely vulnerable they are advised not to attend school or college. You can read guidance for [shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Further information for parents is available from the [Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health](#).

If your child is unable to attend school or college for these reasons, ask your school or college what support they will provide for remote education.

If your child is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) and is asked to self-isolate, you and other members of your household (including any other children in the same school or college) do not need to self-isolate unless your child, who is self-isolating, subsequently develops symptoms.

If your child has been a close contact of someone who has tested positive, and subsequently develops symptoms but has a negative test result, they will still need to self-isolate for the full 10 days from the day after contact with the individual who tested positive.

## **Critical worker children**

Your child's school or college will speak to you to identify whether your child needs to attend. You should keep your child at home if you can.

They may ask to see simple evidence to check whether you are a critical worker such as your work ID badge or a pay slip.

If you are concerned that you are not able to send your child to school despite being a critical worker you should first try to resolve any issues with the school, academy trust or college. If you still have concerns you should raise these with your local authority.

## **Vulnerable children and young people**

If your child is in this group we strongly encourage you to take up the place in school or college. This is particularly the case if your child has a social worker, in which case they are expected to attend provision (subject to public health advice) so their needs continue to be met.

If your child does not attend, your school will work with local partners to explore the reason for the absence and discuss any concerns, supporting your child to attend if that is appropriate.

Your child is strongly encouraged to attend school full time unless they are self-isolating or shielding so you should let the school know if you wish them to be absent. Parents will not be penalised if their child is absent from school at this time.

If your child is not attending, their school or college will put in place arrangements to keep in touch and make sure they are able to and do access remote education support. It is possible to revisit the decision not to send your child to school at any point even if they have not attended their setting since the national restrictions were introduced. Parents, carers and young people can talk to their education setting, or social worker if they have one, and would like to return to school. Schools are also able to welcome other children and young people who might newly be vulnerable and benefit from attending on-site provision.

## **Alternative provision (AP), special schools and special post 16 provision**

AP schools should remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers. Recognising the characteristics of their cohorts mean these settings will continue to offer face to face provision for all pupils where appropriate. We expect AP schools to actively encourage your child to attend if they consider them to be vulnerable. They should provide robust remote learning for those who are not attending.

Special schools should continue to welcome and encourage pupils to attend where you want your child to go to school, or in the case of post-16 settings where the young person wishes to attend.

On occasion, there may be circumstances in which AP and special schools cannot offer your child their usual on-site provision because there are not enough staff or staff with the right training available. In those cases they will seek to resume as close as possible to your child's usual on-site provision as soon as possible. In these circumstances, schools should be in touch with you to discuss the right support for your child.

## Curriculum

For those pupils who continue to attend school and college, there may need to be changes to some subjects, such as sport and performance subjects, so that schools and colleges can teach these subjects as safely as possible. Schools have the flexibility to decide how subjects will be provided to pupils attending school while following the measures they have put in place to minimise risks. Further information on these measures is in the section below on helping to make settings as safe as possible.

Colleges are expected to continue delivery so that students of all ages whether learning remotely or attending face to face provision can benefit from their education and training in full.

We have already announced a catch up package worth £1 billion and it remains in place to stop pupils falling behind. As the Prime Minister announced on 27 January, the Government will provide a further £300m to early years, schools and colleges for tutoring and we will work in collaboration with the education sector to develop other initiatives to support catch-up.

During the lockdown, the National Tutoring Programme will continue to offer tuition as normal. Many of the tuition partners are able to offer online tuition at home. We have asked schools to consider what other catch-up support can be delivered remotely.

## Remote education

Schools and colleges have been working hard to implement remote education effectively. Schools have a duty to provide remote education for state-funded, school-age children whose attendance would be contrary to government guidance or law around coronavirus (COVID-19).

Independent schools do not have a duty to provide remote education but must comply with the Independent School Standards, which set out the requirements schools must meet in relation to the curriculum. For all those pupils who are not receiving face to face education independent schools will need to provide remote education in order to meet the standards.

We expect schools to provide any vulnerable children and young people or any children of critical workers who are not attending school or college during the national lockdown with remote education.

Some pupils who have difficulty engaging in remote education may be considered to be vulnerable children or a vulnerable young person and eligible to attend. It is up to your child's school, college or local authority to make this decision based on the needs of your child and family and a range of other factors set out in the our [guidance](#).

Schools should provide remote education equivalent in length to the teaching your child would normally get in school. This will include recorded or live direct teaching time, as well as time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently. It should be suitably tailored if your child has special educational needs or a disability. The amount of remote education should be a minimum of:

- Key Stage 1 (years 1-2): 3 hours a day, on average across the cohort, with less for younger children
- Key Stage 2 (years 3-6) : 4 hours a day
- Key Stages 3 & 4 (years 7-11): 5 hours a day

If you have concerns about the amount or quality of the remote education your child is receiving you should talk to their teacher or headteacher. If, having gone through the school's complaints process, you still have concerns you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider the complaint and take action where appropriate.

Further education providers should deliver remote education for those not eligible to attend. Further information about remote education and how you can support your child while they are learning from home can be found [here](#) on gov.uk

## Online safety

Most people, including children, have been spending more time online, whether that is in the classroom or at home. This will be the case more than ever during the national lockdown.

It is important to have regular conversations about staying safe online and to encourage children to speak to you if they come across something worrying online.

See the [support for parents and carers to keep children and young people safe from online harm and the Support to stay safe online](#). These resources provide guidance to help parents and carers to keep children safe online. They will, amongst other things, support you to talk to your child about a range of online safety issues, set up home filtering in a child-friendly way and set up age-appropriate parental controls on digital devices.

## Asymptomatic testing in secondary schools and colleges

Your child's school or college may be taking part in the [asymptomatic testing programme](#). Asymptomatic testing is a vital part of the Government's plan to suppress this virus. At present, schools in England are only open to vulnerable children and children of key workers. Testing in schools and colleges will help us break chains of transmission of the virus and play a vital part in supporting the return to face-to-face education.

Since January, we have been delivering the programme of rapid asymptomatic testing for the secondary school and FE college workforce and for children and young people in year 7 and above (or equivalent) in all schools, including primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, alternative provision, and colleges.

We expect that the current arrangements will remain in place for secondary schools when they re-open – pupils will be tested on returning and staff will continue to be tested twice a week. Staff in primary schools and maintained nurseries will also continue to be tested twice a week. We will publish our guidance for testing the children who attend these settings in due course.

The widespread rollout of regular testing using rapid lateral flow tests is already proving beneficial in finding people with coronavirus who do not have symptoms and this will continue. This use of regular LFD testing unequivocally supports public health goals to enable the detection of cases and break chains of transmission. It is strongly supported on public health grounds, in schools and other settings, at this stage in the pandemic to ensure that early detection of cases and reduction in onward transmission occurs.

As of 19 January, NHS Test and Trace, and Public Health England have reviewed their previous advice on daily contact testing and concluded that in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant, that it requires further evaluation. This review will ensure that daily contact testing is achieving its aims of breaking chains of transmission and reduce cases of the virus in the community. PHE has issued a statement on this matter, which can be found [here](#). Therefore, we have paused daily contact testing in all but a small number of secondary schools and colleges, where it will continue alongside detailed evaluation.

Daily contact testing, can, where approved, be used as an alternative to up to a whole bubble having to isolate where a positive case is detected. It has the potential to be a valuable tool in helping to keep more young people and staff at school, which is the best place for students' development and wellbeing. We will conduct several pilots that will allow us to gather more data and to enhance the evidence base for it.

With the high prevalence of coronavirus in England; the Government, as of 27 January, has temporarily removed the requirement for a confirmatory PCR test. It will only apply

where an individual has returned a positive result using a lateral flow test at a test site. It follows advice from Public Health England that, when COVID-19 prevalence rates are high, the performance of lateral flow devices and PCRs are broadly comparable when used at test sites, significantly reducing the need for routine confirmatory testing. In line with clinical advice, confirmatory PCR testing will remain for primary school staff who are self-testing at home.

If you have any questions about the asymptomatic testing programme please speak to your school or college in the first instance.

## Holidays

As usual, you should plan your holidays within school and college holidays. Avoid seeking permission to take your children out of school or college during term time. You should make sure any travel is in line with the guidance on the [national lockdown](#).

Keep in mind that you and your children may need to [self-isolate when you return from a trip overseas](#).

## **Boarding and residential schools and colleges**

Vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers who have already travelled to their boarding school or residential college should continue to receive face to face education. They may travel to school or college if they haven't already done so in order that they can continue to receive face to face education.

If your child is not in one of these groups but has already travelled to their boarding school or residential college then they can continue to receive remote education in their boarding house or in their residential accommodation. If they haven't yet gone back to school or college then they should not travel and instead receive remote education at home.

## Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible

Each nursery, childminder, school or college will have done their own health and safety risk assessment, and they will keep this under review.

As part of this, there are certain approaches that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to implement that are essential to reduce health risks. Schools will continue to carefully implement these measures, which remains very important given we know the predominant new variant of coronavirus (COVID-19) is more transmissible. The way to control the virus is the same, even with the current new variants.

### Actions that nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will take

All nurseries and childminders are open to young children. Schools and colleges remain open to school children and young people who are vulnerable and the children of critical workers. We have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to continue to:

- manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the nursery, school or college, in line with current public health guidance - this means your child may be asked to self-isolate from the day of contact with the individual who tested positive and the next 10 full days by their nursery, childminder, school or college (based on advice from the PHE advice service or local health protection teams) if they have been in close, face-to-face contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus
- ensure that everyone cleans their hands thoroughly more often than usual, including when they arrive, when they return from breaks, when they change rooms and before and after eating - this should be done for 20 seconds with soap and running water or hand sanitiser
- promote the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach, to ensure good respiratory hygiene
- enhance cleaning and ventilation, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces more often

Schools and colleges will minimise contact and encourage maintaining distance as far as possible. They will decide how best to do this because it will be different for each school or college. This will involve asking children and young people to:

- stay within specified separate groups (or bubbles)
- maintain distance between individuals

We know that younger school children and those with special educational needs (SEND) may not be able to maintain social distancing. It is likely that for those children the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older children, it will be on distancing.

## Actions you can take

If your child is eligible to attend, you should not send them to their nursery, childminder, school or college if:

- they are showing [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms](#)
- someone in their household is showing symptoms
- someone in their support bubble has symptoms and they have been in close contact with them since the symptoms started or during the 48 hours before they started
- they or someone in their household has tested positive for coronavirus (Covid 19)

[Arrange a test](#) if you or your child develop symptoms. Inform your nursery, childminder, school or college of the results.

If the test is positive, follow [guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#), and engage with the NHS Test and Trace process.

Other household members (including any siblings) should self-isolate from the day your child's symptoms started (or the day they took a test if they did not have symptoms), and the next 10 full days.

Your child does not need a test if they:

- have a runny nose, are sneezing or feeling unwell, but do not have a temperature, cough or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste
- are advised to self-isolate because they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), for example, another pupil in their class, but are not showing symptoms themselves

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges are implementing measures from our guidance to reduce health risks and keep children as safe as possible.

It is really important that you help nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to implement these actions and create the safest environments by following the advice set out here and wider public health advice and guidance.

## Face coverings

Under national lockdown, in settings where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by everyone (unless exempt) when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. This does not apply to younger children in primary schools and in early years settings who are exempt from wearing face coverings.

In colleges, students may also be asked to wear face coverings where:

- the teaching setting is more similar to, or is, a workplace environment
- it is a requirement in the workplace or indoor environment and students are likely to come into contact with other members of the public

It is really important that face coverings are worn correctly. All schools and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are put on, removed, stored and disposed of properly. They should let you know what their process is.

For nurseries it is not mandatory for staff and visitors to wear face coverings. In situations indoors, outside of classrooms, where social distancing between adults in settings is not possible (for example, when moving around in corridors and communal areas), settings have the discretion to recommend the use of face coverings for adults on site, for both staff and visitors whilst acknowledging some individuals may be exempt.

Some pupils, students and adults may be [exempt from wearing face coverings](#). These exemptions will apply in early years, schools and colleges, so any requirement to wear a face covering does not apply to children and young people who:

- have a disability that means they cannot wear or remove a face covering
- would find wearing a face covering severely distressing
- are with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

We expect people to be sensitive to these needs and to be aware that some people are less able to wear face coverings and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

## Arriving at and leaving nursery, the childminder, school or college

Some nurseries, childminders, schools or colleges may need to stagger or adjust start and finish times. This helps keep groups apart as they arrive and leave the premises. If nurseries, schools or colleges choose to do this it should not reduce the amount of time they spend teaching - but it could mean that your child's start or finish times change.

Schools and colleges will work with any school transport and other transport providers to coordinate, as necessary.

Your nursery, childminder, school or college will be in touch to set out any changes they are making. This might also include:

- new processes for drop off and collection
- not allowing gathering at the school gates
- not being allowed onto the site without an appointment

During national lockdown, dedicated and public transport should continue to be in place to enable children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils and students to travel to school or college.

## Using public transport

Everyone needs to play their part in reducing the demand for public transport. If possible, you should look for alternative transport options, especially walking or cycling or scooting, particularly at peak times.

This will help to ensure that there is enough public transport capacity to allow those who need to use it to travel safely. It will also benefit your family's health. See the guidance from:

- [Living Streets on walking to school](#)
- [Sustrans on keeping safe on the school run](#)

If you and your child rely on public transport to get to their nursery, childminder, school or college, the [safer travel guidance for passengers](#) will apply. In some areas, local authorities may be providing extra dedicated school or college transport services to help children and young people get to school or college.

Children and young people, and their parents and carers must not travel to nursery, childminders, school or college if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or have tested positive for coronavirus.

## Free home to school transport for eligible children

Local authorities' duty to provide free home to school transport for eligible children is unchanged. This is set out in the [home to school travel and transport guidance](#).

Your local authority might ask you to accept a personal travel budget or mileage allowance instead of a seat on dedicated transport. This may be so they can ensure there is enough dedicated transport capacity for everyone who needs it.

We would ask you to accept that offer if you can. It will not affect your child's eligibility for dedicated transport in the future. The local authority cannot make you accept if you do not want to or are not able to.

Local authorities should not expect you to commit to accepting a personal payment or mileage allowance for a specified period of time, but the local authority would need reasonable notice to reinstate home to school transport for your child.

## Using dedicated school or college transport

Local authorities, schools, colleges and transport providers will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport, on dedicated school or college transport. This is because:

- dedicated school or college transport often carries the same group of young people on a regular basis
- children and young people on dedicated school or college transport do not mix with members of the public

Local authorities, schools and transport providers will do all that is reasonably practicable to maximise social distancing where possible and minimise the risk of transmission. What is practicable is likely to vary according to local circumstances. This might include:

- asking your child to use a regular seat on this transport
- making sure boarding and disembarking is orderly and/or managed
- making sure vehicles are cleaned regularly
- ensuring that transport operators maximise the flow of fresh air

It is important that you follow any local advice provided and that your child knows and understands the importance of following any rules that are set.

## Wearing face coverings when travelling to and from school and college

Most children and young people aged 11 and over are now required to wear a face covering on public transport. This does not apply to children and young people who are [exempt from wearing face coverings](#) because they:

- have a disability that means they cannot wear a face covering
- would find wearing a face covering severely distressing
- are travelling with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate

As [advised by Public Health England](#), if your child is aged 11 or over, they must wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated transport to secondary school or college, unless they are exempt. It is important that they comply with any rules about face coverings on their transport. You will need to ensure that they have a suitable face covering.

If your child needs to share a car to school or college with someone outside of their support bubble or household, they should:

- share with the same people each time
- open the windows for ventilation
- if they are aged 11 or over, wear a face covering

It is really important that face coverings are worn correctly. All schools and colleges should have a process for making sure face coverings are put on, removed, stored and disposed of properly. They should let you know what their process is.

## Assessment and exams

### Assessments in primary schools

Statutory key stage 1 and 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021 are cancelled. This is due to the further disruption caused by restrictions to school attendance.

Schools will continue to use assessment during the summer term to inform teaching and so they can give you information about your child's attainment in their annual report. It will also support your child's transition to secondary school if they are in year 6.

### GCSEs and A levels

We cannot guarantee that all pupils will be able to fairly sit their exams this summer. GCSE, A and AS level exams will not go ahead as planned.

Students taking GCSE, AS and A levels, will receive grades based on teacher assessment. The exam boards will support teachers to reach their judgements by providing guidance and training.

The Department and Ofqual launched a [consultation](#) on the proposals for alternative arrangements. This closed on 29 January and the response will be published later in February.

### Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs)

Due to the continued disruption caused by the pandemic, the Government has announced that it is no longer viable for some VTQ external exams and assessments to go ahead in February and March.

Exams and assessments for vocational and technical qualifications that require a student to demonstrate proficiency or occupational competence can continue to proceed in February and March, with protective measures in place in line with PHE measures. This includes apprenticeship end-point assessments and assessments for Functional Skills qualifications. The position on exams and assessments scheduled for April onwards is considered in our [joint consultation with Ofqual](#). This closed on 29 January and the response will be published later in February.

# Ofsted inspections

## Early years

If you have concerns about the quality of education being provided at your child's nursery or childminder, or about the wellbeing and safety of children, you should talk to the setting and follow their complaints process. If, having done so, you still have concerns, you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider whether it is appropriate to take action. This could involve inspectors phoning the nursery or childminder or if necessary inspecting.

## State schools

The intention is that Ofsted's standard school inspections will remain suspended for the spring term. Inspectors will though conduct monitoring inspections of schools most in need of support – 'inadequate' schools and some schools that 'require improvement'. These inspections, which are not graded, have a strong focus on remote education. Inspectors will be sensitive to the school's context, and support schools to prioritise the right actions.

If you have concerns about the quality of education being provided at your child's school, including remote education, or about the wellbeing and safety of pupils, you should talk to their teacher or headteacher and follow the school's complaints process. If, having done so, you still have concerns, you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider whether it is appropriate to take action. This could involve inspectors phoning the school or if necessary inspecting.

## Colleges

For further education and skills providers inspection activity remains under review and more guidance will be published in due course.

Safeguarding visits will continue in response to concerns raised about providers.

If you have concerns about the quality of education, you should talk to the college or provider in the first instance. You can also follow the formal complaints process with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) regarding any post-16 training provider, college or employer that is funded by ESFA if you have exhausted the provider's own complaints procedure, including any appeals process.

# School admissions

## Admission processes

Admissions are not suspended whilst school attendance is limited. Parents can apply in the normal way and admission authorities must consider their applications and either offer their child a place or, if they refuse to offer a place, offer an appeal.

## Admission appeals

If you have applied to a school and it does not offer your child a place, you have the right to appeal this decision.

[Admission appeals](#) can now be held by telephone, video conference or in writing, instead of face-to-face hearings.

## Entry tests for selective schools

Nearly every selective school<sup>4</sup> will already have run their selection tests for children whose parents want a place for September 2021.

Where school admission authorities still need to assess some applicants for ability or aptitude - who have applied late or who are applying for an in year place – they may choose to assess aptitude or ability by other means ahead of looking to test children under exam conditions together in test centres. This may include allowing children to take the selection test in their own homes (either by a paper test or an online test), or primary school teacher assessment, where this is a viable alternative.

They can, however, continue to test in a test centre. If you are applying for a school which is yet to test, or you are applying for an in-year or late place the school will explain the process to you.

---

<sup>4</sup> Selective schools include grammar schools (which select all their children based on their high academic ability), partially selective or 'bilateral' schools which select a proportion of their intake by ability or aptitude, schools which 'band', i.e. they test all children for ability but admit children of all abilities (equal numbers of high and low ability children) and schools which admit 10% of their intake based on aptitude in the performing or visual arts, sport, modern foreign languages, design and technology or IT.

Travelling to attend a test is considered to be essential travel but, if you need to travel for your child to be tested, you should follow the [public transport](#) guidance. Only one person should accompany the candidate.

On arriving at or leaving test centres, parents and children should take the 3 simple actions we must all take to keep on protecting each other – [wash hands, cover face, and make space](#), at least 2m between themselves and others not in their family bubble, and follow government guidance on [face coverings in educational settings](#).

You may also find some changes in how tests are conducted:

- invigilators may wear facemasks and gloves
- to ensure that the number of children taking tests in one sitting remains small, admission authorities may organise tests across several sittings and in small groups
- admission authorities will also look to enforce social distancing of 2m between every person attending a test centre
- candidates' desks are likely to be separated by 2m in every direction and children will be expected to wash their hands and use antibacterial hand gel

Parents should not wait in their cars outside the test centre and neither parents nor children should congregate around the test venue before, during or after the test. Neither parents nor their children may attend the test if they are:

- showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- self-isolating

If you or your child are showing symptoms or self-isolating, contact the school, or local authority if it is running the test. The school or local authority will make alternative arrangements to assess your child for ability or aptitude.

## School uniform

Schools decide their own uniform policy.

Some schools might relax their uniform policy whilst only certain groups of pupils are attending.

## Food

Schools will continue to provide meal options for pupils who are in school. Meals should be available free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals who are in school. The meals served should meet the school food standards and where possible a hot meal should be available.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meal support for pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals and who are learning at home during term time. This might be lunch parcels or locally arranged vouchers. Your child's school might also order supermarket vouchers through the national voucher scheme.

Further education providers will continue to provide free meals for eligible students, including those who are studying remotely due to coronavirus (COVID-19). This includes students in further education, who are newly eligible.

If your family needs support during the half term break you should contact your local authority in order to access help through the [Covid Winter Grant Scheme](#).

## Mental health and wellbeing

Some children and young people may be experiencing feelings such as anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and the recent change in circumstances.

Schools and colleges will continue to offer pastoral support to pupils working remotely. There are also online resources available to help you and your child with mental health and wellbeing, including:

- [MindEd](#), a free educational resource from Health Education England on children and young people's mental health
- [Rise Above](#), which aims to build resilience and support good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16
- [Every Mind Matters](#), which includes an online tool and email journey to support everyone to feel more confident in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- [Bereavement UK](#) and the [Childhood Bereavement Network](#), provide information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff

[Public Health England's](#) advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing includes key actions you can take to support your child's mental health and wellbeing, such as supporting safe ways to connect with friends. It also emphasises the importance of children continuing to remain fit and active and, wherever possible, having the 60 minutes of daily physical activity, recommended by the Chief Medical Officers. Further advice and support to help pupils remain physically active are available from Youth Sport Trust and [Sport England](#).

The Department for Education has put together some [useful links and sources of support](#) so that children, parents, carers, and school staff can get the advice and help they need.

Where further support is required, NHS mental health services remain open, and they have digital tools to enable them to connect with people and provide ongoing support, so you should continue referring to your local children and young people's mental health service when needed.

There is also a range of support directed at children and young people, including:

- free confidential support can be accessed anytime from government-backed voluntary and community sector organisations by:
  - texting SHOUT to 85258
  - calling Childline on 0800 1111
  - calling the Mix on 0808 808 4994
- online information on COVID-19 and mental health is available on the [Young Minds](#) website

- the [Think Ninja](#) (freely available and adapted for COVID-19) app educates 10-18 year olds about mental health, emotional wellbeing and provide skills young people can use to build resilience and stay well
- [Rise Above](#) (adapted for COVID-19) website aims to build resilience and support good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16

Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service, provides support to children, young people and their families who aren't currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). You can access via the ['See, Hear, Respond' service self-referral webpage](#) or Freephone 0800 151 7015.

It is also vital to report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the [NSPCC helpline](#).

## Education, health and care (EHC) plans

At the start of the outbreak last year, we needed to make some of the law around delivering the specified special education and health care provision within EHC plans more flexible.

This flexibility has now ended, which means that if your child has an EHC plan they should receive the support they need as usual when they attend their nursery, childminder, school or college. All schools and colleges are expected to allow and strongly encourage children and young people with EHC plans to attend. In particular, children and young people with a social worker are expected to attend provision (subject to public health advice), given their safeguarding and welfare needs.

Schools and colleges should follow up on absences of pupils and students who are expected to attend in person, but where a parent wishes for their child to be absent, we expect the school or college to authorise the absence during this national lockdown period. Absence will not be penalised.

Children and young people with EHC plans who have not attended following the introduction of national restrictions can revisit that decision at any point, and parents, carers and young people should talk to their school or college and social worker (if they have one) if they wish to do so.

On occasion, there may be circumstances in which early years providers, schools and colleges cannot offer your child their usual on-site provision because there are not enough staff or staff with the right training available. In those cases they will seek to resume as close as possible to your child's usual provision as soon as possible. In these circumstances, early years providers, schools and colleges should be in touch with you to discuss the right support for your child. Any decisions taken should be regularly reviewed.

## School trips

We have advised nurseries, childminders, further education settings and schools against all educational visits at this time. This advice will be kept under review.

## Wraparound childcare, out-of-school or college activities

Out-of-school or college settings and wraparound childcare should continue to operate for children eligible to attend school or college (vulnerable children and young people, and children of critical workers). This includes respite provision for families of disabled children.

This is also the case where electively home educating parents are using these settings as part of their existing arrangements for their child to receive a suitable full-time education. For the duration of the national lockdown, children and young people who are electively home educated should only attend out-of-school settings for face-to-face provision where they would be considered to be vulnerable children and young people, or are the children of critical workers.

Out-of-school and wraparound providers should be moving to remote provision as far as possible for those not eligible to attend for onsite provision.

Some children who have difficulty engaging in remote education may be considered to be [vulnerable children](#) and therefore eligible to attend provision. It is up to the child's education provider or local authority to make this decision based on the needs of the child and their family, and a range of other factors, as set out in the [guidance on Children of critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings](#). If your child is eligible to attend these settings, we are still recommending that you limit the number of out-of-school or college settings that you send your child to as far as possible in order to minimise mixing between different groups of children.

Further advice on the precautions you should take if sending your child to these settings is available in the [guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

## Extra-curricular activities

Nurseries and schools should continue to offer before and after-school provision for those children eligible to attend (vulnerable children and young people, and children of critical workers). This provision is important to ensure that parents and carers who are critical workers can continue to work, as well as to provide enriching activities for vulnerable children that improve their wellbeing or support their education.

Nurseries, schools and parents should also work closely with any external providers which these pupils may use, to ensure as far as possible, children can be kept in a group with other children from the same bubble they are in during the school day. However, where it is not possible, schools or external providers should seek to keep children in small, consistent groups with the same children each time, as far as this is possible. If

necessary, it would be appropriate for one staff member to supervise up to two small groups, provided that any relevant ratio requirements are met.

There is updated [guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) which sets out what precautions parents should take if they choose to send their eligible child to these settings during the national lockdown.

## Managing cases in nurseries, schools and colleges

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges will contact their local health protection team if they:

- have 2 or more confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) among pupils or staff within 10 days
- see an increase in child or staff absence rates due to suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The local health protection team will advise what action is required. Usually, closure will not be necessary, but some groups may need to self-isolate.

If an outbreak in a school or college is confirmed, a mobile testing unit may be dispatched. They will test everyone who may have been in contact with the person who has tested positive. Testing will first focus on the person's class, followed by their year group, then the whole school or college, if necessary.

Schools and colleges have been working hard to implement remote education effectively. Your child's school or college will provide remote education if:

- they need to self-isolate
- groups of pupils or students need to self-isolate
- a larger restriction of attendance at school or college is needed
- they are shielding as per government advice



Department  
for Education

© Crown copyright 2021

This publication (not including logos) is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

To view this licence:

visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3)

email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

About this publication:

enquiries [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

download [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Reference: DfE-00007-2021



Follow us on Twitter:  
[@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)



Like us on Facebook:  
[facebook.com/educationgovuk](https://facebook.com/educationgovuk)