



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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To everyone helping keep early years settings, schools and colleges open.

On Sunday I paid tribute to those working in education settings up and down the country – including staff in our nurseries, schools, colleges, universities and children’s services. You are providing a vital service and offering children and young people support and stability during this period of profound challenge.

I’m writing to you now to reiterate my gratitude for your efforts in supporting and caring for our most vulnerable children and young people, and particularly for making sure that they, alongside the children of critical workers, can continue to attend school, nursery or college.

Supporting attendance of vulnerable children and young people

I know that you are working hard to ensure that education settings remain open and safe for vulnerable children and young people. I, like many of you, am concerned about those children and young people who may be at risk of harm without the continuity and structure that continued attendance brings.

That is why I want to place special emphasis on your continued efforts to ensure as many of these children and young people are supported to attend where it is in their best interests to do so.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, we have defined vulnerable children and young people as those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan whose needs cannot be met safely in the home environment
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children’s social care services), and who are therefore in need of continued education provision

You will, of course, know your children and young people well. You may consider children on the edge of receiving support from children’s social care services, adopted children, or young carers (among others) as vulnerable.

Please use your professional judgement and discretion, working in partnership with other professional bodies, to consider whether you should provide continued education provision to these children.

We have refreshed our guidance on [vulnerable children and young people and on risk assessments for children and young people with an EHC plan](#) to set out clear expectations on attendance and the judgements we are asking local authorities and education providers to make on whether pupils with an EHC plan are safer at home.

Please do read these guidance documents in full and share them with your colleagues as appropriate.

In brief, our expectations on who should attend and how we recommend providers to follow up non-attendance are summarised below:

- **Children and young people who have a social worker** should be encouraged to attend an education setting unless their social worker decides that they are at less risk at home or in their placement. This could be, for example, due to underlying health conditions. Absence should be followed up with the parent or carer, and with the social worker/local authority where appropriate.
- **Children and young people with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan** – We are asking local authorities to consider the needs of all children and young people with an EHC plan, and make a risk assessment, consulting educational settings and parents or carers, to determine whether children and young people with special educational needs will be able to have their needs met at home, and be safer there than attending an educational setting. Where the risk assessment determines a child or young person with an EHC plan will be safer at home, our recommendation is that they stay at home. Where the risk assessment determines a child or young person with an EHC plan will be as safe or safer at an education setting, our recommendation is that they attend the education setting. Where pupils are expected to attend settings, we would expect providers to follow up with the parent or carer – and social worker/local authority, where appropriate – to explore reasons for any absence.
- **Children and young people who are otherwise vulnerable** – education settings, including alternative provision, can, together with relevant partners, use their discretion to encourage the attendance of children and young people that they or other local services, such as local authorities (including children’s social care services) or the police, feel would be safer by attending an education setting. Any subsequent absence should be followed up with the parent or carer, and with other partners where appropriate.

I appreciate that decisions on attendance are likely to be based on finely-balanced discussions between the education provider (including between schools for dual-registered children), the parent/carer, and others, including

social workers, local authorities and other relevant professionals. In making these decisions, I encourage you to consider the balance of risk involved in attending an education setting, including health vulnerabilities, family or other home circumstances, the child or young person's assessed special educational needs, and any safeguarding concerns.

I am also asking that, where applicable, designated safeguarding leads and/or equivalent staff should keep their lists of vulnerable children and young people who should be attending settings under review and continue to share these lists with local authorities and children's services.

As education providers you will also want to continue your close partnership working with social workers, local authorities, and other professionals to keep in touch with vulnerable children and young people and their parent or carer (whether they are attending provision, or not attending for an agreed or non-agreed reason), including by letter, phone or visit.

I recognise that some providers, particularly early years childcare providers, alternative provision settings, special schools, and residential settings, may be facing very specific challenges, including those stemming from the small sizes of your settings; high staffing ratios; the need for specialist skills or qualifications; and the specific needs of some of the children and young people you work with. Where this makes it more difficult to keep your institution open and safe, please work closely with your local authority to make sure your vulnerable children have a place at another education provider wherever possible.

Finally, I have also written to all local authority Council Leaders, Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services to share this message about continuing to work together to ensure adequate and appropriate arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable children and young people.

Please accept my deepest and sincerest thanks for everything you are doing to support the country during this difficult time. You are making an immeasurable difference for those who need you the most.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education