

PM confirms schools, colleges and nurseries on track to begin phased reopening

Schools, colleges and nurseries across England remain on track to open to more children from 1 June, the Prime Minister confirmed today (24 May 2020).

Primary schools will welcome back children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, while nurseries and other early years providers will begin welcoming back children of all ages.

Secondary schools, sixth forms and colleges will also provide face-to-face contact for Year 10, Year 12 and equivalent 16-19 further education students to help them prepare for exams next year. It is expected this will begin from 15 June, with around a quarter of these secondary students in at any point.

The Prime Minister today praised teachers, childcare workers and support staff for the brilliant work they have been doing throughout the pandemic.

This includes providing remote education for those not in school, as well as continuing to provide face-to-face education for the children of priority groups, including vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

He also acknowledged that some schools may not be able to reopen immediately, and committed the government to continuing to work with the sector to ensure any schools experiencing difficulties are able to open as soon as possible.

In line with our roadmap setting out how the UK will adjust its response to the virus, our approach to schools remains a cautious, phased one. It is also broadly in line with other European countries.

We continue to consider all the evidence, as we said we would, and will continue to work with schools, teachers and unions over the coming week before making a final decision.

It also remains the case that schools will only reopen to more children if the government's five tests are met by Thursday 28 May.

In the coming days, the Prime Minister will set out the government's progress in meeting these five tests, which are:

1. Protect the NHS's ability to cope. We must be confident that we are able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment right across the UK
2. See a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates from COVID-19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak
3. Reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the board
4. Be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing

- capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand
5. Be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS

Today's announcement comes after a constructive period of consultation with schools, teachers and unions, led by the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson.

Clear, detailed guidance has been published by the Department for Education on how schools can open in a way which is safe for children, teachers and parents.

While we recognise that full social distancing may not be possible, our guidance sets out a range of measures to protect children and staff. This includes:

- reducing the size of classes and keeping children in small groups without mixing with others
- staggered break and lunch times, as well as drop offs and pickups
- increasing the frequency of cleaning, reducing the use of shared items and utilising outdoor space

All children and staff, and their families, will also have access to testing if they display symptoms. This will enable children and staff to get back to school if they test negative, and if they test positive a test and trace approach can be taken.

Children will also be encouraged not to travel on public transport where possible, in line with the advice to the wider population.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This has been a difficult time for the entire country. Education and childcare staff have stepped up to the challenge, making sure children and young people have continued to be supported throughout the past ten weeks.

Our priority is the education and welfare of all children and young people across the country. That is why we want to start a phased wider opening of nurseries, school and colleges is informed by the best possible scientific and medical advice.

We will continue to work with the sector to support them to prepare for wider opening and ensure all children and young people can continue to receive the best care, education and training possible.