



2020-0054760POGibb

**Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

Ms Jennette Arnold OBE AM  
London Assembly Member for North East  
By email: [Jennette.Arnold@london.gov.uk](mailto:Jennette.Arnold@london.gov.uk)

14 December 2020

Dear Ms Arnold,

Thank you for your letter of 23 September, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding COVID-19 testing in schools. I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

I am extremely sorry for the unacceptable delay in responding to your letter and to your concerns. This has been caused by a significant increase in the number of letters we have received alongside the increased workload for civil servants as we continue to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak for the education sector.

Testing capacity is the highest it has ever been with hundreds of thousands of people being tested every day. Testing capacity has reached over 500,000 tests per day and the Government continue to expand this. Anyone who experiences any COVID-19 symptoms can get a test at a testing site or can order a home test kit. This includes all pupils, teachers, and staff.

Access to priority testing continues to be available to all essential workers and their households. This includes all education and childcare workers, including support and teaching staff, social workers and specialist education professionals. Testing can be accessed via the online booking portal at: [tinyurl.com/Y27r7fc2](https://tinyurl.com/Y27r7fc2).

A supply of home test kits has been provided to all schools, sixth forms and colleges and since 16 September, more have been available to order. Schools, sixth forms and colleges will need a Unique Organisation Number (UON) to place orders for test kits. They can look up their UON at: [tinyurl.com/Y3nlfkbJ](https://tinyurl.com/Y3nlfkbJ), or they can call the Test and Trace helpdesk on 119.

Schools, sixth forms and colleges in particularly high risk areas may also be eligible for an additional delivery of test kits. These will be allocated by the Department for Health and Social Care based on the local prevalence of COVID-19. We continue to work closely with schools, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS Test and Trace to ensure all appropriate steps are being taken to keep staff and pupils safe.

Following the lifting of national restrictions from 2 December, all staff can attend school in all three local restriction tiers, including clinically extremely vulnerable staff. While in school they should follow the measures in our guidance to minimise the risks of transmission. This is available at: [tinyurl.com/YassJxxb](https://tinyurl.com/YassJxxb). Under local restriction tier 3, staff and employers may wish to discuss flexibilities that support clinically extremely vulnerable staff, such as staggered start times to reduce travel during rush hour.

In the future, the Government will only reintroduce formal restrictive shielding advice in some areas in tier 3 where this has been advised by the Chief Medical Officer, and only for a limited period of time. The Government will write to individuals to inform them if they are advised to follow formal shielding and not attend the workplace.

People who live with those who are clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable can attend the workplace unless advised otherwise by an individual letter from the NHS or a specialist doctor.

Head teachers should explain to staff the measures the school has put in place to reduce risks. If staff are concerned, including those who may be clinically vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable or who believe they may be at possible increased risk from coronavirus, we recommend head teachers, CEOs and principals discuss any concerns individuals may have around their particular circumstances.

With regard to remote education, on 1 October, the Department announced a further package of remote education support, designed to help schools build on and deliver their existing plans in the event that individuals or groups of pupils are unable to attend school as a result of COVID-19.

Schools will be able to access a remote education service, where resources and information on remote education will be available. This support has been co-designed with schools and includes a range of school led webinars and resources intended to share good practice. We are also investing £1.5 million of additional funding to expand the EdTech Demonstrator programme, which provides peer-to-peer support for schools and colleges.

This adds to existing support, including the resources available from the Oak National Academy. The Department has made £4.84 million available for the Oak National Academy to provide video lessons for Reception up to Year 11. It provides lessons across a broad range of subjects and includes specialist content for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). The Oak National Academy will remain a free optional resource for 2020-21. Information about the full support package is available at: [tinyurl.com/Y9fz8Y85](https://tinyurl.com/Y9fz8Y85).

Schools have a duty to provide remote education for state-funded, school age children who are unable to attend school due to COVID-19. The Secretary of State gave a Direction which provides an express legal duty on schools to provide remote education in these circumstances. The purpose of this Direction is to provide greater certainty for all involved in the education sector, including parents and teachers.

The Government has also committed over £195 million to enhance remote education, including providing laptops, tablets and internet access for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who need it most. Part of this funding is intended to ensure that every school has access to free, expert technical support in using Google for Education or Microsoft's Office 365 Education. Where needed, teachers can receive help and advice through peer support from schools and colleges more experienced with the use of education technology.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Gibb', written in a cursive style.