



2021-0018894POSoS

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
Secretary of State

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**Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP**  
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35 May 2021

Thank you for your email of 18 March, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about the Disabled Children's Partnership's reports, 'The Longest Lockdown', the Loneliest Lockdown' and 'No end in sight', and a coronavirus (COVID-19) recovery plan for disabled children and their families. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families is a priority for this government, and their educational, physical and mental wellbeing remains central to our cross-government response to the COVID-19 outbreak. That is why education settings have remained open for children and young people with an education, health and care (EHC) plan throughout periods of national lockdown.

We want pupils and students with SEND, including those in specialist settings, to continue to receive high-quality teaching and specialist professional support. This is because we know that these pupils and students and their families may well have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

With regard to therapies, our guidance is clear that where children and young people with an EHC plan are in receipt of health provision, settings should be working collaboratively with their local authority (LA), clinical commissioning group and health providers to agree appropriate support in view of the latest and current local public health guidance.

Therapists and other professionals play an important role in supporting children and young people with SEND, and as such, should continue to provide interventions as usual, including where this involves visits to education settings. We recognise that the COVID-19 outbreak has been particularly challenging for these families and children and young people with SEND and that they will need targeted support as part of the recovery from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Turning to short breaks and respite, we have published guidance for children's social care services, making clear that parents or carers of disabled children and young people may continue to access respite care. A copy of the guidance is available at: [tinyurl.com/3kafaufu](https://tinyurl.com/3kafaufu). We have also communicated best practice to Directors of Children's Services and encouraged LAs to ensure that as many disabled children and young people as possible can continue to access these respite services during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Furthermore, we have encouraged LAs to prioritise respite support for disabled children, and to consider flexible and pragmatic options to deliver that support including using Direct Payments and carrying out activities virtually. The government has provided £4.6 billion of additional funding in 2020 to 2021 to support councils through the COVID-19 outbreak to respond to local needs, including to deliver services to support vulnerable children.

In addition, we have expanded the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018. From 2021, the programme will cover the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays at a cost of up to £220 million. Building on previous programmes, it will be available to children in every LA in England and we are working to ensure that the programme is fully inclusive and accessible for children with SEND.

We also provided £40.8 million for the Family Fund in 2020 to 2021, which supported over 90,000 families on low incomes raising children with disabilities or serious illnesses. This included £13.5 million to specifically respond to needs arising from the outbreak. We are continuing to fund the Family Fund this year to support these most vulnerable families.

Regarding flexibility around transition support and additional funding for those in Further Education (FE), arrangements under an EHC plan can continue up to age 25 for those young people who need to take longer to complete their education or training. LAs will need to make a judgement, in consultation with parents and the young person, about whether or not agreed outcomes have been met, and the young person has been prepared and enabled to make a successful transition to adulthood. However, in every case the LA needs to consider whether it is in the best interests of an individual to stay in education.

We have recently agreed that those young people with an EHC plan on a supported internship, a work-focused study programme for those with complex needs, who were not able to meet the core aim of their internship in the 2020 to 2021 academic year may continue their internship into the 2021 to 2022 academic year. It is not envisaged that all supported interns will need to extend their internship for a full year. Providers should determine the length of time that a learner will require based on the needs of the individual, and in agreement with the LA, noting that the legislative and funding arrangements for EHC plans do not allow for a plan to be extended beyond the age of 25.

Regarding wider education recovery, Sir Kevan Collins has been appointed as the Education Recovery Commissioner. He is considering how schools and the system can more effectively target resources and support at pupils in greatest need.

The government has already announced specific targeted support, including for children and young people with SEND, which includes a new one-off Recovery Premium for state primary and secondary schools, building on the £650 million catch-up premium for the 2020 to 2021 academic year, which will be provided to schools to use as they see best to support disadvantaged students. This can include, for example, speech and language therapies or pastoral support for mental wellbeing. This funding can also be used to lay on additional clubs or activities, or for other evidence-based approaches for supporting the most disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND.

The Recovery Premium will be allocated to schools based on the same methodology as the pupil premium, including an additional weighting to specialist settings, recognising the significantly higher per pupil costs they face.

The National Tutoring Programme has also been expanded, which will increase access to high-quality tuition for disadvantaged pupils, helping to accelerate their progress and tackling the attainment gap between them and their peers. In addition, 16-19 tuition fund providers are asked to have regard to the needs of students with SEND when prioritising students that would benefit most from small group tuition.

Furthermore, the proposals to support early language and literacy catch up will benefit all children, including those with SEND. The Reception Year Nuffield Early Language Intervention catch-up programme is suitable for many children with SEND. It is not designed as specialist provision to replace Speech and Language Therapy interventions, but it can supplement these.

£200 million will also be available to all secondary schools, including specialist settings, to deliver face-to-face summer schools. Schools will be able to target provision based on pupils' needs, such as those at key transition points. The size and shape of the summer schools will be decided by school leaders who know best what a most effective summer school will look like for their pupils, allowing them to tailor support for pupils with SEND.

Finally, we are committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people during this period. Children's and young people's mental health and wellbeing is a central part of the education recovery work. On 10 May, as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, we announced more than £17 million of mental health funding to improve mental health and wellbeing support in schools and colleges. This includes £7 million additional funding for LAs to deliver the Wellbeing for Education Recovery programme. This builds on Wellbeing for Education Return in 2020/21, which provided free expert training, support and resources for staff dealing with children and young people experiencing additional pressures from the last year – including trauma, anxiety, or grief.

Alongside this, up to 7,800 schools and colleges in England will be offered funding worth £9.5 million to train a senior mental health lead from their staff in the next academic year, which is part of the government's commitment to offering this training to all state schools and colleges by 2025. This is in addition to the £79 million boost to children and young people's mental health support we announced in March, which will include increasing the number of Mental Health Support Teams.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**