**Witness Name: Kate Dixon**

**Statement No: 1**

**Exhibits: KD1/01- KD1/35**

**Dated: 31 July 2025**

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

---

**CORPORATE STATEMENT OF KATE DIXON**

**ON BEHALF OF THE**

**DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION**

---

I, KATE DIXON, OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION, SANCTUARY BUILDINGS, GREAT SMITH STREET, LONDON, SW1P 3BT, WILL SAY AS FOLLOWS:

## 1. Introduction

1.1. I, Kate Dixon, am employed by the Department for Education ("DfE" or "the department"), as the Director for Pupil Wellbeing and Safety. I have been in this role since March 2022.

1.2. I make this statement in response to the Covid-19 Inquiry's ("the Inquiry") request for evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 sent on 25 March 2025 ("the Rule 9 request").

1.3. I have been assisted in preparing this statement by officials in DfE who worked in the relevant areas throughout this period. DfE officials have also searched for all relevant documents from the period.

1.4. DfE officials have searched thoroughly for any available evidence in order to set out what happened, when and why as fully as possible. Where there are any gaps in evidence about decision making, this is because DfE has not been able to find evidence to fill those gaps.

1.5. I am satisfied from the documents found and exhibited to this statement, assurance from current and former DfE officials who worked on this area through the pandemic and my own recollection that this statement sets out the key events that occurred during the period as accurately as possible.

1.6. As the Inquiry is already aware from evidence it received in Module 2, the central structures of decision-making changed during the course of the pandemic (and the parameters and timeframes for decisions were often set centrally). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary of State for Education ("SSE") did not have complete autonomy to make core decisions. Consequently, DfE cannot always give a complete picture of decision-making processes that took place outside the department.

1.7. This statement is supported by documentary evidence, which will be referred to in the format (Exhibit KD1/xx - INQ0000).

## 2. Roles and responsibilities of the department

2.1 This section contains an overview of DfE's involvement with children and young people, including its responsibilities in relation to online harms.

2.2 DfE has overall responsibility for setting the policy, accountability and regulatory framework for children's services, including children's social care ("CSC") and safeguarding in relation to children, and education and training including early years, primary and secondary education (including in schools), further education, higher education and apprenticeships and training.

2.3 DfE also has a specific and overarching responsibility for keeping children safe in education, which amongst other things, includes learning within an education setting's premises as well as learning remotely. As part of these responsibilities, DfE publishes guidance to support education settings safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. This is set out in the statutory safeguarding guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education ("KCSIE") and DfE's remote learning guidance (see also paragraphs 3.3 and 5.12). The remote learning guidance is focused on education staff and children's use of technology when working or attending an education setting. A full description of DfE's responsibilities is provided in the second Corporate Statement provided by Susan Acland-Hood dated 12 June 2025 (Exhibit KD1/34 - INQ000587823).

2.4 During the pandemic, DfE's overarching responsibilities for keeping children safe in education remained fundamental; and the principles at the core of the KCSIE guidance was used to inform both our work, and that of many in the sector. It was important to communicate that those core responsibilities for keeping children safe remained consistent and essential. However, the context in which this was being done had changed. In particular, as many children were educated remotely for some periods of time during the pandemic, DfE needed to provide more detailed guidance and information to education settings on how to keep children safe when learning remotely.

2.5 Alongside DfE's specific responsibilities for keeping children safe in education, a number of different departments were responsible and continue to be responsible for online harms and children's overall interaction with online technologies.

2.5.1 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology ("DSIT"): Since taking on the relevant responsibilities from the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport ("DCMS") when it closed in 2023, DSIT is responsible for ensuring that new and existing technologies are safely developed and deployed across the UK. This includes managing the Online Safety Act 2023. This also covers those technologies and associated platforms, sites and online spaces accessed by children.

2.5.2 Home Office ("HO"): HO publishes guidance for parents and carers in areas such as online grooming leading to child sexual abuse, child criminal exploitation, exposure to radicalising content, cyberbullying, exposure to age-inappropriate content, such as pornography and exposure to harmful content, such as suicide content.

2.5.3 Department for Health and Social Care ("DHSC"): Children's health policy and delivery is the responsibility of multiple departments and organisations, including DHSC, the NHS and local authorities. DHSC has worked with HO on the guidance mentioned in paragraph 2.5.2 and has also previously issued guidance on screen-based activities and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

2.6 While DfE collects and analyses a wide range of data about children, DfE's efforts are focused on skills, education, childcare and CSC. DfE does not specifically collect data about children's use of online technologies and the impact of using such technologies. Other departments and institutions within government are better placed to provide an overview and comment on these trends, including Ofcom which publishes an annual report on this topic. DfE is however, aware of the wider trends around children's use of technologies and it is a relevant consideration when policy is being developed.

## 3 DfE actions and policies in the pre-pandemic period (up to 31 December 2019)

3.1 This chapter covers DfE's policies in relation to children's use of technology in education settings in the run-up to the pandemic in December 2019.

3.2 In 2019, there was no specific guidance on how to keep children safe when delivering remote education, because almost all education was delivered face-to-face with only a very small proportion delivered remotely. For instance, this might happen in some schools when there was a 'snow day' that closed a school for a whole day, or when an individual pupil needed to remain at home for medical reasons for some time.

3.3 The main DfE policy intervention for reducing online harms was the KCSIE statutory guidance. First published in 2014, the guidance outlined the responsibilities and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. It is published annually, with the latest guidance being released in 2024 (Exhibit KD1/01 - INQ000541090).

3.4 Since its introduction in 2014, KCSIE guidance has undergone several key updates to enhance child protection and safeguarding measures in schools and colleges. The changes relevant to this statement include:

3.4.1 Early help: the 'early help indicators', which alert staff in education settings to children who may need early intervention, were broadened in scope to take account of the role of online harms in triggering such indicators.

3.4.2 Data protection: recommended using DfE Data Protection guidance for schools.

3.4.3 Roles and responsibilities: clarified the roles and responsibilities of education staff in filtering and monitoring online content.

3.4.4 Online safety: emphasized the importance of discussing children's access to online sites with parents.

3.5 DfE also published *Teaching online safety in schools* in 2019 (Exhibit KD1/02 - INQ000610940). The purpose of the guidance was to help schools understand how they could ensure their pupils understood how to stay safe and behave online. DfE continued to update the guidance until January 2023.

**Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum**

3.6 Prior to relationships, sex and health education ("RSHE") becoming statutory in schools in September 2020, most schools taught non-statutory personal, social, health and economic ("PSHE") education as part of their legal duty to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, specified in the Education Act 2002. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provided for regulations to be made for Relationships Education (Primary) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE - Secondary) in all schools in England. The Act also provided a power to make PSHE, or elements of it, mandatory.

3.7 The department published statutory guidance in 2019 with first teaching designated for September 2020 (Exhibit KD1/03 - INQ000610928).

3.8 Within the guidance, which is still in force but which is currently under review (see also paragraph 5.4), there was information on internet safety and harms aimed at teaching for both primary and secondary pupils, as well as guidance on what pupils should know specifically about online relationships and how to identify harmful behaviours online (including bullying, abuse or harassment) and how to report, or find support, if they have been affected by those behaviours.

**Computing curriculum**

3.9 Online safety was also embedded within the computing curriculum, across all key stages, with progression in content to reflect the different and escalating

risks that children and young people may encounter. Through computing, pupils were taught a broad set of principles such as how to use technology safely, responsibly, respectfully and securely, how to keep their personal information private, how to recognise unacceptable behaviour, and where they could go for help and support on content or unwanted contact they came across on the internet, or via other online technologies.

3.10 This broad set of principles was designed to avoid over-prescription; they provided schools with room to innovate, whilst supporting longevity in the content, given the speed of technological advancement.

## 4. DfE actions during the COVID-19 pandemic (1 January 2020 to 28 June 2022)

4.1 This chapter covers DfE's actions during the pandemic period. It provides information on three areas where DfE took action (developing guidance, distributing devices to education settings to give to children most in need of them, and supporting the creation and distribution of appropriate online educational content).

### DfE guidance

4.2 During the pandemic, DfE continued to issue guidance which aimed to help create a safer online environment for children and young people. DfE recognized that children's online lives had expanded as they were learning remotely, especially during lockdowns or owing to the need to self-isolate.

4.3 On 27 March 2020, the government first published *Coronavirus (COVID-19): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers* (Exhibit KD1/04 - INQ000519928), which included sections on online safety both in schools and colleges and at home. The guidance aimed to support schools and colleges in keeping children safe during the pandemic, particularly during remote learning. Key points on online safety included:

4.3.1 Education and awareness: emphasised the importance of educating students about online safety, including recognising and avoiding online risks.

4.3.2 Parental involvement: encouraged parents to engage in their children's online activities and use parental controls to ensure safe internet use.

4.3.3 Technical measures: recommended the use of filtering and monitoring software on devices to block harmful content and monitor online activities.

4.3.4 Policies and procedures: schools were advised to update their acceptable use policies and establish clear reporting mechanisms for online safety concerns.

4.4 This guidance was updated on 20 May 2020. The updated version provided advice on what schools and colleges should be thinking about as they planned for more children to return to settings from the week commencing 1 June 2020. This involved updating their child protection policy, strengthening safeguarding lead arrangements, and enhancing support for vulnerable children and mental health (Exhibit KD1/05 - INQ000513535).

4.5 On 14 April 2020 HO, DCMS and DfE published joint guidance *Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for parents and carers to keep children safe online* (Exhibit KD1/06 - INQ000542925). The guidance, which was updated in February 2021, aimed to support parents and carers in keeping children safe online during the increased use of digital platforms during the pandemic. Key points included:

4.5.1 Education and awareness: emphasised the importance of having regular conversations with children about staying safe online and encouraging them to speak up if they encounter something worrying.

4.5.2 Parental controls: provided resources to help parents set up home filtering and age-appropriate parental controls on digital devices.

4.5.3 Support resources: included links to various organisations offering guidance and support, such as Thinkuknow, Childnet, Parent Info, NSPCC, and the UK Safer Internet Centre.

4.5.4 Specific risks: addressed specific online harms such as child sexual abuse, cyberbullying, exposure to age-inappropriate content, and the sharing of nude or semi-nude images.

4.6 On 19 April 2020, DfE published *Supporting your children's education during coronavirus guidance* (Exhibit KD1/07 – INQ000610945). The guidance provided information and support for parents and carers of children learning at home during the pandemic and signposted parents to the joint guidance published on 14 April 2020 (see paragraph 4.4). The guidance continued to be reviewed and an update on 1 February 2021 included the following key points:

4.6.1 Expectations for remote education: schools and colleges were expected to deliver high quality remote education, equivalent in length to regular school teaching. This included a mix of recorded or live direct teaching and independent activities.

4.6.2 Daily engagement: schools should have systems in place to check pupils' engagement with remote learning daily, which could include monitoring attendance at lessons and checking completed work.

4.6.3 Support for SEND: remote education should be tailored to meet the needs of children with SEND.

4.7 Also on 19 April 2020, DfE published the guidance document *Help primary school children continue their education during coronavirus (COVID-19)* (Exhibit KD1/08 - INQ000519986). This guidance, aimed at parents and carers of primary-age children, included advice in a section called 'using digital devices' and said, "*Set age-appropriate parental controls on any devices your child is using and supervise their use of websites and apps. See advice on keeping them safe online and talk to your child about online safety*." The guidance

directed parents and carers to the Thinkuknow website for more information about safety. The guidance also suggested how parents and carers could reduce the amount of time children spent looking at screens.

4.8 On 23 April 2020, the guidance document, *What parents and carers need to know about schools and education during the coronavirus outbreak was* updated to include a link to the HO guidance published on 14 April 2020 *Support for parents and carers to keep children safe online* in the support and resources section (Exhibit KD1/09 - INQ000610942). This update was highlighted in the daily sector email sent to education providers on 24 April 2020 (Exhibit KD1/10 - INQ000610927).

4.9 Both sets of guidance referred to in paragraphs 4.6 and 4.7 offered practical support, signposting to resources and services offering advice and intervention. It explained the need for regular, open conversations with children about their online activities, encouraging them to voice any concerns, and discussing the importance of safeguarding login details. The guidance directed parents and carers to tools to help them discuss a range of online safety issues with their children, set up child-friendly home filtering systems and apply age-appropriate parental controls on digital devices. Detailed resources and support relating to specific risks to children were also signposted to including those related to child sexual abuse, criminal exploitation and county lines, radicalisation, sexting, cyberbullying, age-inappropriate content and mental health concerns.

4.10 The guidance mentioned in paragraph 4.5, *Support for parents and carers to keep children safe online* was updated three times: once in June 2020 (Exhibit KD1/11 - INQ000520060) and twice in February 2021 (Exhibits KD1/12 - INQ000520062 and KD1/13 - INQ000520063). The main content stayed largely unchanged, but updates were made to include further resources. The guidance remains live and can be accessed on GOV.UK.

4.11 On 21 May 2020, DfE published *Help secondary school children continue their education during coronavirus (COVID-19)* (Exhibit KD1/14 - INQ000610932). This encouraged parents and carers to talk to their child about online safety, set age-appropriate parental controls on devices, and to try to monitor the websites

and apps their children were using. It also contained links to advice on keeping them safe online and advice from the NSPCC about gaming, joint guidance produced by HO, DCMS and DfE (Exhibits KD1/06 - INQ000542925 and KD1/15 – INQ000610934).

4.12 On 25 June 2020, cross-government guidance from DfE, HO, Public Health England ("PHE") and DCMS was published which signposted to resources and platforms for support and/or reporting concerns, and included information about online harms (Exhibit KD1/16 - INQ000610944).

4.13 On 21 October 2020, DfE published *Keeping children safe during community activities, after-school clubs and tuition: Non-statutory guidance for providers running out-of-school settings* (Exhibit KD1/17 - INQ000610946). In relation to online safety, the guidance emphasised the importance of having an online safety policy in place, as well as advising the following:

4.13.1 Providers should develop and implement an online safety policy to protect children from online risks.

4.13.2 Staff and volunteers should receive training on online safety to recognise and respond to online risks.

4.13.3 Providers should implement appropriate monitoring and filtering systems to safeguard children from harmful online content.

4.13.4 Providers should educate children about online safety, including how to stay safe online and report concerns.

4.14 These measures were designed to ensure that children were protected from online dangers while participating in out-of-school settings.

4.15 On 10 March 2021, DfE published *Safeguarding and remote education - GOV.UK* (Exhibit KD1/18 - INQ000542926). The guidance, which has continued to be updated (the last update was September 2023), provided advice on online safety to support settings to create safe and supportive online learning

environments for both children and teachers including:

4.15.1 Safeguarding children and teachers online as well as reporting concerns.

4.15.2 Advice for virtual lessons, live streaming and providing remote pastoral care.

4.15.3 Online safety advice for parents and carers.

4.16 In September 2021, the next iteration of KCSIE was published. Online safety was embedded throughout the guidance. The document made clear that online safety should be an ongoing and integral theme when devising and implementing policies and procedures.

4.17 In March 2022 DfE published a checklist on remote education, which included question prompts to schools on online harms (Exhibit KD1/19 - INQ000542457).

**Get Help with Technology programme**

4.18 Children's safety was a key consideration in the Get Help with Technology ("GHwT") programme. DfE's GHwT programme aimed to provide laptops and tablets for remote education and give children and young people access to children's services, such as keeping in contact with their social worker. Full details on the setup and distribution of devices under the programme can be found in the second Corporate Statement provided by Julia Kinniburgh dated 17 July 2025 (Exhibit KD1/35 - **INQ000587978**).

4.19 For the purposes of this statement, it is important to note that GHwT devices had software installed to prevent children from accessing unauthorised content. Furthermore, as devices were owned by the relevant responsible body, such as multi-academy trusts, local authorities and dioceses, they were also responsible for ensuring their safe use, as they would be for any device they issued to any

of their pupils (Exhibit KD1/20 – INQ000542866). The software included:

4.19.1 Windows laptops: these were originally specified with a 'DfE build' that included security settings and software. From September 2020, schools could choose either the 'DfE build' or a standard specification allowing them to install their own security software that matched other devices used by the schools. The DfE build included 'Cisco Umbrella' software to provide filtering of online content and 'Microsoft Intune' software to prevent unauthorised installation or removal of software and prevent bypassing of safeguarding measures.

4.19.2 Chromebooks: all Chromebooks came with the option of 'Cisco Umbrella' which was included free of charge until 30 September 2021. Schools were provided with guidance on how to set this up. The software was not compulsory, following stakeholder feedback which indicated schools required more flexibility with filtering software to enable them to match these with other systems used by schools. Chromebooks provided by GHwT from October 2021 did not come with web-filtering software. It was made clear to schools that they were responsible for arranging their own security settings to ensure the devices were safe for children and young people to use.

4.19.3 IPads: these devices were primarily issued to schools who were already using 'Apple School Manager'("ASM") to keep their devices safe. Schools were asked to input their ASM organisation ID when ordering devices. ASM enables schools to manage and monitor devices, as well as implement web filtering. For schools that opted for iPads that didn't have ASM, there was a 'white glove service' where the supplier (Computacenter) configured ASM to give an equivalent level of protection to that on the Windows 'DfE Build' and gave some training and handover to the school to enable them to manage the devices.

4.19.4 4G routers: these were supplied with software that filtered content, based on the same specifications as the windows laptops and guidance in KCSIE. The contract specified that internet content filtering had to be in place to prevent children from accessing illegal and inappropriate internet content and to ensure children are safe from terrorist and extremist material.

**Developing online educational content**

4.20 In addition to the establishment of the GHwT programme, DfE collaborated with a range of partners to develop and/or distribute appropriate educational content for children. This included publicising appropriate educational websites, apps and other resources, working with the BBC to develop content to support remote learning, and supporting Oak National Academy ("Oak") to develop and publish online educational content for remote learning.

4.21 DfE developed a shortlist of high-quality sources for different subjects and levels. An initial list of websites, which were identified by some of the country's leading educational experts for English, mathematics, science, wellbeing and SEND was published by DfE on 7 April 2020 (Exhibit KD1/21 - INQ000542870).

4.22 On 24 March 2020, DfE met with senior representatives from the BBC to collaborate on an ambitious and high-quality educational offer to support parents, teachers, and pupils. The briefing note for SSE's meeting with Lord Tony Hall, then Director-General of the BBC, set out DfE's priorities for the BBC's education offer, which covered quality, priority subjects and year groups, resources for parents to help children learn and ensuring sufficient broadcast content for each year group. The new BBC offer, Bitesize Daily, was available from 20 April 2020. It delivered varied content by well-known faces, alongside top-quality teachers and customised learning days, through BBC iPlayer, Red Button, the BBC Bitesize website and the BBC Bitesize app. BBC Bitesize offered curriculum-relevant content for children of all ages throughout the UK (Exhibits KD1/22 - INQ000542452 and KD1/23 - INQ000226744).

4.23 In April 2020, teachers and representatives from leading education organisations came together to set up Oak, a brand-new national teaching resource and online classroom. DfE initially provided conditional grant funding to support Oak's set up cost, and continued to invest in Oak, with a further £7 million invested from the 2020 to 2021 academic year to March 2022.

4.24 During the pandemic Oak played a crucial role in providing remote education. It launched on 20 April 2020 with 180 weekly video lessons for students from reception to year 11, including SEND-specific materials, and over 40,000 online learning resources. Oak's online education model offered a structured curriculum flexible access to daily pre-recorded lessons, and high-quality teaching led by expert teachers and heads of department. Oak's content was available on any device.

4.25 Oak provided a structured and safe online learning environment with high-quality educational content. The platform was designed to be user-friendly and accessible, ensuring that children could engage with their lessons without encountering harmful content. Oak's resources were curated and monitored to maintain a safe online space for students.

4.26 Oak implemented several measures to safeguard students' safety and privacy while providing remote education. To ensure privacy, none of the lessons involved live student-teacher interaction. Quizzes were designed to be self-marking, allowing pupils to receive instant results without teacher intervention. Oak used Vimeo, a video platform with strong privacy controls and no advertisements. All content was peer-reviewed by qualified teachers to ensure its safety and appropriateness. Additionally, measures were taken to secure the website and video platform. Oak adhered to the safeguarding policies issued by the Reach Foundation on 23 April 2020, which applied to all its activities (Exhibit KD1/24 - INQ000621526).

4.27 Oak published evaluation reports in July 2021 and summer 2022. The 2021 report revealed Oak resources were extensively used during the first lockdown. Most teachers cited Oak as their main source of remote learning support due to its alignment with the school and national curriculum. The same report also

highlighted that Oak was a primary source for remote learning, with 110 million lessons started, 40,000 teachers attending webinars, 885,000 resources downloaded, and 239,000 lesson links shared.

## 5 Post pandemic period: 29 June 2022 to date

5.1 Following the pandemic, DfE has continued to work across government to better understand the impact of technology on children and young people as well as ensuring policy remains in line with changing technologies. This chapter details the main actions that DfE has taken following the end of the pandemic.

### Data and insight

5.2 DfE is committed to working across government and stakeholders outside of government to better understand the impact of technology on children and young people. DfE's Areas of Research Interest, published in April 2025 (Exhibit KD1/25 - INQ000610931), includes, as part of the government's Opportunity Mission, understanding the impacts of social media and screen time, and ensuring healthy technology use. It also explores how to harness technological advances for productivity and informed decision-making while maintaining safety, addressing the long-term opportunities and challenges of AI, and supporting learners with special needs.

5.3 DfE's Chief Scientific Officer has been supporting DSIT to commission a feasibility study on data and methods to understand the impact of social media and smartphones on children. The study began on 2 December 2024 and ran until May 2025. The main objective of the study was to ascertain which methods would be most effective in determining the causal effects of social media and smartphones on the developmental outcomes of children (aged 3 to 21 years) over the next two to three years. The outputs from the project are expected to be published shortly. In addition, DfE is aware of two reports into children's online safety published in April 2025 by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, both of which we are considering in relation to education.

**Keeping Children Safe in Education**

5.4 In September 2022, DfE amended KCSIE in relation to online safety:

5.4.1 Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their school or college has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place, which are regularly reviewed for effectiveness.

5.4.2 Leadership team and relevant staff should have an awareness and understanding of the provisions in place, manage them effectively and know how to escalate concerns when identified.

5.4.3 DfE also worked with Ofsted so that these changes to KCSIE were properly understood and incorporated into inspector training and were clear in Ofsted's inspection handbooks.

5.5 DfE also sits on the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCIS) with DSIT, HO and 200 organisations drawn from across government, industry, law, academia and charity sectors that work in partnership to help keep children safe online (Exhibit KD1/26 - INQ000610949).

**Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum**

5.6 A review of the RSHE curriculum is currently underway. This is in line with the government's commitment to review the RSHE curriculum every three years to ensure it accurately reflects the world in which children and young people live.

**School technology standards**

5.7 DfE is enhancing and clarifying the technology standards to which schools must adhere as outlined in KCSIE. Currently, KCSIE mandates that schools

implement appropriate filtering and monitoring systems. DfE has detailed what constitutes appropriate filtering and monitoring within the Filtering and Monitoring Standards. In all, there are presently 11 more detailed standards; we aim to make 6 of these mandatory by 2030 and are helping all schools to achieve this outcome. These 6 standards include network switching, Wi-Fi, broadband, filtering and monitoring, cybersecurity, and digital leadership and governance. The proposals were outlined in a consultation (Exhibits KD1/27 – INQ000610948 and KD1/28 - INQ000610930) which ran from 21 March 2025 to 23 May 2025, with the outcome to be published when analysis of responses is complete (Exhibit KD1/29 - INQ000610947).

**Remote education**

5.8 DfE has published updated guidance for schools since the pandemic on providing remote education (Exhibit KD1/30 – INQ000575797). It was published on 30 March 2022 and updated on 19 August 2024. The guidance covers two main scenarios:

5.8.1 Scenario 1: where school access for pupils is restricted, which could include restrictions introduced as part of a future national emergency or pandemic; and

5.8.2 Scenario 2: where individual pupils are unable to attend school but are able to learn.

5.9 The guidance says that it may be helpful for schools to have a remote education plan. The guidance recognises that many schools are likely to have a plan in place already and it would be good practice to keep this plan up to date. The guidance also sets out the expectation that teaching provided, via remote learning, should be "high quality, meaningful, ambitious, and cover an appropriate range of subjects to enable pupils to keep on track with their education". The guidance also explains that schools should consider using live

or recorded direct teaching time, provided either by school staff or by external providers such as Oak.

5.10 The guidance suggests that schools needing further guidance to develop remote education provision should consider providing remote education that is equivalent in length to the core teaching time pupils would receive in school, where possible, taking into account the individual needs of pupils, including the need to have regular breaks from screen time. It also encourages schools to work to overcome barriers to digital access for pupils, including by distributing school-owned devices. The guidance is kept under review as technology evolves, including as any new online harm risks emerge.

**Encouraging better use of technology**

5.11 The pandemic demonstrated the need that education settings have for technology that meets a good standard, in order to deliver effective remote education. The department is investing £45 million to improve internet connectivity in schools over the next year (Exhibit KD1/31 – INQ000610936) as well as developing the 'Plan Technology For Your School' tool (Exhibit KD1/32 – INQ000610937) that will help schools meet the department's incoming digital and technology standards (Exhibit KD1/33 – INQ000610938), which will include filtering and monitoring and cyber security standards.

**Safety**

5.12 Safety is a key consideration of DfE's *remote learning guidance* (Exhibit KD1/030 - INQ000575797). This guidance links to the separate guidance on safeguarding and remote education (Exhibit KD1/18 - INQ000542926). This separate guidance was originally published in March 2021 and updated in November 2022. It includes information on:

5.12.1 Safeguarding children and teachers online, including links to the statutory KCSIE guidance.

5.12.2 Reporting concerns, including harmful and upsetting content as well as bullying.

5.12.3 Online safety advice for parents and carers.

5.12.4 Virtual lessons, live streaming and recorded videos and how to stay safe.

5.12.5 Providing pastoral care remotely; and

5.12.6 Handling of personal data.

5.13 The current guidance includes provision for keeping children safe during remote education. DfE considers that these are sufficient to keep children safe in the event of a national emergency that requires a move to remote learning. However, technology, risks and harms evolve over time. DfE will continue to keep the guidance under review to adapt to future changes.

## 6 Conclusion

### The impact of the pandemic

6.1 Prior to the pandemic, most children's education was delivered face-to-face. The closure of education settings to most children in March 2020 necessitated a major shift to remote education. This shift meant that many children had to learn online and use computers and other devices to a greater extent.

6.2 Furthermore, with society being asked to stay at home, many children spent more time online for leisure as they were unable to do their usual outdoor activities. While the amount of time children had spent online and on devices had been increasing prior to the pandemic, these trends continued during the pandemic and beyond.

6.3 The overall evidential picture of the impacts of children spending more time online has a degree of uncertainty. There is ongoing discussion on this highly relevant topic amongst academics and across government. It is, however, evident that there are opportunity costs if children, especially younger children, spend significant amounts of time online instead of engaging in other activities such as sleep, physical exercise and the creative arts. DfE is involved in cross-government efforts to better understand these impacts, including the DSIT study mentioned in paragraph 5.3 and participation in the online safety cross-government working group. As our understanding evolves, the DfE will continue to collaborate with other government departments to consider appropriate policy responses on a cross-government basis.

**The education sector response**

6.4 I would like to put on record my thanks for the hard work of education staff in making this rapid and significant shift to remote education. Not only did education staff need to make this shift, but they also needed to continue educating many children within their setting as well as ensuring that vulnerable children were safe and being looked after.

6.5 DfE worked with the education sector to strengthen its approach to remote learning and adapt policy and delivery as the pandemic progressed. As detailed in this statement, DfE's efforts focused on providing more detailed guidance on remote education, including on how to reduce the risk from online harms, supporting Oak, the BBC and other organisations to produce and host appropriate high quality educational content and distribute devices, via responsible bodies, to vulnerable and disadvantaged children so that they could learn remotely and keep in contact with children's services (where required).

6.6 As the pandemic progressed, DfE was continuously considering and mitigating the risks around online harms to children. The department sought to help education settings reduce the risk of online harms in relation to remote

education. This was mainly focused on the use of statutory and non-statutory guidance aimed at schools, most notably the KCSIE guidance.

**Post-pandemic response**

6.7 Following the pandemic, there is a suite of guidance in place to support education settings to deliver remote education in the event of a future national emergency. DfE safeguarding guidance and remote education guidance helps ensure that the education sector is better prepared for such an event. Schools are encouraged to develop remote learning plans. These will be based on their own learning during and after the pandemic as well as their own professional expertise on how best to deliver remote education for their specific cohorts of children.

6.8 Owing to rapidly changing technology, the DfE recognises that this is a fast-moving policy area. It is crucial to continually update plans and guidance. DfE is committed to working across government to consider the most effective policy responses to manage children's increasing use of technology, as well as collaborating with the education sector, the technology sector, and the Inquiry to learn how to better protect children from online harms in future national emergencies.

**Statement of truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signature:

**Personal Data**

Dated: 31 July 2025