

Date: 23/04/2020
 From: NR I&S

	To Comment/note	To Decide
Secretary of State		X
Nick Gibb	X	
Also copied to: PS, Gibb; PS, Advisers; PERMANENT, Secretary; GRIBBELL, Rory; PATERSON, Chris; SAXTON, Jo; NR; NR; NR; ALL, Nabil; VAUGHAN, Richard; NR; NR; NR; COLLIER, Jack; NR; NR; NR; ROONEY, Marc; NR; NR; NR; Jobshare; NR; NR; BAUM-COTTER, Jobshare; NR; -LAO; NR; NR; NR; NR; NR; NR		

REMOTE EDUCATION DURING CORONAVIRUS: CASE STUDIES GUIDANCE FOR GOV.UK

Purpose

1. To seek approval to publish guidance for schools in the form of case studies on GOV.UK during the week commencing 27 April. See Annex A for the text of the guidance in full.

Recommendation

2. That you agree to:
 - i. publish the case studies guidance during the week commencing 27 April
 - ii. our approach to updating and developing the guidance.

Timing

3. A response by 24 April will allow us to publish the guidance during the week commencing 27 April. No proactive media is planned.

Background

4. The Department is taking action to mitigate the impact of school closures on pupil progress and the attainment gap. As agreed in response to Richard Vaughan’s submission of 15 April, we have published an initial package of guidance and support concerning online safety and safeguarding, and tips on home learning for parents of younger children. The 15 April submission highlighted that additional good practice guidance on remote teaching would be prepared.

Summary

5. Due to the unprecedented circumstances schools are now facing as a result of COVID-19, the extent of provision they are currently offering their pupils is very mixed. We are concerned about the effect this will have on pupil progress and the attainment gap, and to mitigate this, recommend publishing guidance.
6. However, there are challenges in issuing guidance. As we saw in the attempt to agree an open letter on remote education, setting expectations that are seen to be unrealistic for schools and parents risks criticism from the teaching unions.
7. To mitigate this, we recommend that the Department positions itself as the facilitator of school-to-school support and information sharing by publishing guidance in the form of practice-sharing and case studies.
8. To this end, we have collated case studies addressing a range of priority questions for teachers and school leaders, as indicated by our user research. A steering group of trusted sector experts have advised us in detail on tone, content and structure, and their feedback has been very positive.
9. We recommend publishing the case studies guidance during the week commencing 27 April, but will continue to review and update it. We will seek your approval for any substantive changes in future submissions.

Argument

10. Schools are facing an unprecedented challenge in attempting to educate their pupils remotely and as a result provision is currently mixed, with offers from schools ranging from extensive to very limited. We are concerned about the overall impact of such mixed provision on pupil progress, as well as specifically on the attainment gap.
11. To address this, it is necessary to publish some form of guidance that raises expectations concerning what is achievable, and what schools should try to prioritise, as they continue to adapt to entirely new ways of working. Our user research indicates that schools are looking to the Department to issue guidance on how to deliver remote education.
12. However, there are challenges faced by the Department in issuing guidance in these areas. Anything that seems to set formal, standardised expectations for schools at the current time could leave us open to criticism, particularly from teaching unions, and limit the effectiveness of the guidance.
13. To mitigate this, the guidance uses case studies to demonstrate good practice; for it to be well-received, it is essential that the guidance feels to readers like advice from schools on what has worked for them, rather than a set of Government expectations. Case studies have been contributed by schools that are in a variety of circumstances, and that have used pragmatic or innovative means to continue to educate their pupils.

Appendices: Case studies

Appendix A

Supporting primary and secondary age pupils' wellbeing at a multi-academy trust

Case study from a small multi-academy trust of alternative provision schools

The approach to distance learning and safeguarding in our schools has first and foremost been to make sure that our pupils and their families know that we are still here and that we genuinely care about them. They feel isolated, anxious and in some cases very angry, and these are the initial needs we need to meet.

Of course we also need to meet their educational and learning needs by reassuring, coaching, and stretching them in equal measure. The third strand is to continue our partner work with other agencies to ensure that our pupils are safe at home, online and in the community.

To ensure that we are staying present in student lives, we have:

- used a key worker system to make sure every pupil has received a phone call every other day. Some of the pupils who have been identified as most vulnerable have been contacted daily (and in some cases several times a day)
- used work phones and school text messaging systems to stay in contact by text (persistence being the key to making contact with some pupils or families; we keep going until we get a response)
- sent wellbeing activities such as mindfulness colouring sheets, art sketchbooks with pencils, and breathing and meditation activities to help with anxiety
- sent packs of cards and travel games to the families who we know might need additional support in structuring time together, in particular, those families who are living in poverty (sadly there are many)
- sent chocolate bars at Easter and specially designed 'thinking of you' postcards at random times so pupils know that we are there.