



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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12 May 2020

A letter to foster carers

We are writing to express our very sincere gratitude on behalf of the Government for your continuing dedication to supporting some of our most vulnerable children at this difficult time. Your role as foster carers is a service that is unrivalled in our society: you open your homes and your hearts to children and young people and create the warm and caring home environment that they need and deserve.

It has been a privilege for the Children's Minister to speak with foster families from all across the country and hear about the amazing role you play in your children's lives. We know how tough and worrying things can be for some foster families at the moment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One issue that foster families have raised with us is their concerns about helping their children to continue to learn. This is why we have asked schools, despite being closed to the majority of pupils, to remain open for foster children who will benefit from the structure and support that school can offer.

To support foster children do school work at home, and maintain contact with friends and birth families, we are also providing free IT devices and equipment for children with a social worker who do not currently have internet access. Your school or local authority will be in touch if you are eligible. We don't expect you to be teachers but, as with all parents across the country, any way that you can support your foster children to continue to learn during these difficult times will be invaluable for them.

We are committed to supporting foster families to stay safe and well. In some situations, foster carers may need access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies. You can request this via your fostering service if you need it. In addition, we have prioritised access to testing for COVID-19 for symptomatic foster carers and their families. We would encourage you to take up the offer of testing if you are concerned that you or any member of your household might have symptoms. Your local authority can assist you to do this and there is more information here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>.

For those of you caring for foster children approaching the age when they would usually have left care, you and your local authority may decide, along with the young person, that it would be in their best interests to stay with you until the current phase of our response to coronavirus is over. Some families have already worked with their local authority to ensure that they can continue to provide much needed stability for these young people, and we are immensely grateful to them.

We have been overwhelmed by the resilience that foster families have shown; you have demonstrated courage and been steadfast in ensuring that the welfare of the children and young people you care for is paramount. As one carer said to us recently: "we stick together, we're a family". That epitomises how you, as foster carers, give so much to society. Please remember that fostering services are there to support and look after you as well as your foster children.

We would also like to express our deep gratitude and thanks to all the children and young people in foster care for the contribution they are making to tackling this pandemic. This is a demanding time for all, but it is especially difficult for children and young people. By responding with cooperation and flexibility to the changes to your routines, you have helped to protect the NHS and to save lives across the country. You should take deep pride in what you are helping us to achieve. Both you, and foster parents are an inspiration. Thank you for everything you are doing.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Ford'.

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families