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Date: 16th September 2021

Dear Colleague,

On behalf of the Department, I would like to begin by thanking you for your professionalism and resilience in the face of the challenges and uncertainty that continue to be posed by COVID-19. You are improving the life chances of children and are supporting the national recovery from the virus.

I am writing in connection with the [Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) data collection. In the summer term, in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the Department conducted a consultation regarding proposed changes to this data collection.

The consultation yielded responses from early years providers and local authorities (LAs) that providing this data is burdensome.

I understand this and thank all involved for their continued involvement with the data collection. The data collection remains important to the government's understanding of the impact of the pandemic on children and feeds into key decisions about responding to the pandemic. For example, the data has given us evidence about the number of children who have experienced lost time in education as a result of COVID-19. This contributed to [our announcement](#) of an additional £153m investment over three academic years from 2021/22 for training for early years staff to support the learning and development of children.

Additionally, the data allows Parliament to scrutinise the government's COVID-19 response; and it has allowed academic and third sector organisations to undertake research into the impact of the pandemic on providers, parents and children. Though many restrictions have been lifted and life is closer to normal for many of us than it has been for a long time, we are mindful that we need to keep monitoring infection rates and the impact of the pandemic on children and the sector over the course of the autumn.

Plans for autumn term

In response to the messages we've heard about the burden of providing data, we are running the collection less frequently this term. We are planning four collections, one in each month until Christmas, the first of which will take place this week.

These plans will need to remain subject to review if the Government response to COVID-19 changes. We hope that providers will continue to engage with and support LAs to ensure the quality of the data collected is as good as it can be.

We have also heard that our guidance about the data collection has not always been as clear as it could be. We will try to address these points below.

School-based providers

We have heard that some school-based providers are unsure as to whether they should submit attendance data for their early years pupils via the schools' data collection, or via the EY collection that is led by LAs.

We can confirm that attendance data for EY pupils should not be submitted via the school data collection; and that accordingly, schools need to provide information for these pupils to LAs. I will ask that guidance for schools is updated to make this position clearer.

What do we mean when asking for attendance on 'a typical day'?

Due to many children attending EY settings on a part-time basis, we would not expect all children to be in attendance on the day of the data collection. Likewise we understand that providers will experience different patterns of attendance across a week, based on the differing requirements of parents.

Rather than asking for data for a specified day, we ask for data for *any day* in the week which avoids any very unusually busy or quiet days. If the same day is used for each submission, we are able to track actual changes over time, instead of any changes being because attendance data for a different day has been returned.

Future data collections

We will undertake a further consultation when we have more information regarding changes to this data collection that might apply after this term. We are fully aware of the need to limit and reduce the workload that EY settings have; and will listen carefully to any feedback you give us within a future consultation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Mackie', with a stylized, cursive script.

Joanna Mackie

Deputy Director, Early Years and Schools Group