



**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP**  
Secretary of State  
Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BT

1 September 2023

By email: james.cartlidge.mp@parliament.uk

Dear James,

## **RESPONSE TO REINFORCED AUTOCLAVED AERATED CONCRETE IN EDUCATION SETTINGS IN SOUTH SUFFOLK**

I am writing to update you on the Department for Education's actions in response to the risks associated with the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in schools, colleges and maintained nursery schools.

I appreciate that this change in approach where RAAC is confirmed is concerning but there is nothing more important than the safety of children, young people, and staff in education settings. We have been working proactively with bodies responsible for school, college and maintained nursery school buildings, such as local authorities, academy trusts and voluntary aided bodies, to identify and manage the risk from RAAC in the education estate. Up until now, we have advised responsible bodies to take RAAC areas out of use immediately if assessed by surveyors as 'critical'. Where they were assessed by surveyors as 'non-critical', we have encouraged responsible bodies to take action, but until now did not consider the risk required us to take these spaces out of use.

That position has now changed, following recent cases brought to my attention over the summer, including as recently as last week. From 31 August, the Department is advising schools, colleges and maintained nursery schools with buildings with RAAC confirmed by a surveyor to take the affected space out of use until suitable mitigations have been put in place. This decision has been taken out of an abundance of caution to ensure the safety of pupils and staff.

My team of dedicated caseworkers are contacting schools and Responsible Bodies affected and will continue to provide support to ensure any disruption to face-to-face education is kept to a minimum. The Department will also provide capital funding for measures to mitigate immediate risk such as structural supports or temporary buildings.

The list below sets out the name of the schools and colleges in your constituency, South Suffolk, with confirmed RAAC in part or all of their buildings.

- Hadleigh High School (responsible body: Penrose Learning Trust)
- East Bergholt High School (responsible body: Penrose Learning Trust)

Education settings that are concerned about the presence of RAAC should continue to inform the Department through its ongoing questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to all responsible bodies, asking them to provide information on all their schools so that the Department could understand the prevalence of RAAC across the estate and ensure the correct support is in place. This is still open and available [here](#).

## **Background**

RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete commonly used in construction, mainly between the 1950s and 1990s. Professional advice from technical experts on RAAC has evolved over time and the issue of managing its risks to ensure the safe delivery of services across all sectors has spanned successive governments since 1994. The Department has kept its approach to RAAC under close review in recent years.

Since 2022, the Department has been engaging with the sector to identify buildings that may have RAAC through a questionnaire sent to all responsible bodies. We have followed this up with an ongoing programme of surveys at settings where responsible bodies have told the Department that they suspect RAAC may be present, and we are now accelerating surveys at all remaining schools with suspected RAAC to confirm whether RAAC is present so that the school can take action. All schools, colleges and maintained nursery schools that have already told us they suspect they might have RAAC will be surveyed within a matter of weeks, in many cases in a matter of days. We will continue to press any responsible body that has not conducted checks of all its school buildings for suspected RAAC to do so.

As the understanding of RAAC improves as more evidence is gathered, we continue to assess the latest technical evidence to inform how we can support education settings in managing RAAC. Recent cases presented to the Department, including as recently as last week, means we no longer have confidence that buildings that contain RAAC should remain open without mitigations in place. These cases have prompted the Department to take the precautionary step meaning all buildings where RAAC has been identified will need to be vacated while mitigations are put in place.

## **Support for education settings**

We have already been supporting schools and colleges to ensure risks resulting from RAAC are mitigated – engineers have confirmed that 52 schools and colleges now have these mitigations in place, and we remain in contact with them to ensure that remains the case. As a result of our change in approach, the Department has contacted and advised a further 104 schools and colleges to take any spaces that are known to contain RAAC out of use if they have not already done so.


We have published updated guidance to support the sector. The Department will also assign a dedicated caseworker who will assess the respective site's particular needs and implement individually designed mitigation plans. This could include using other on-site buildings, adding structural supports and, in some cases, erecting temporary buildings. The Department will support responsible bodies with the capital costs incurred to make spaces safe.

Nothing is more important than the safety of children and staff in our schools and colleges, which is why we are taking this precautionary step. Nonetheless, I understand that schools and colleges need to be supported to manage the challenges presented by RAAC and we will continue to support education settings with appropriate measures to minimise any disruption to education.

If your constituents are concerned about RAAC in education settings, further information is available at [the Education Hub](#). My Department continues to engage education settings and responsible bodies to support them in managing RAAC.

My Right Honourable Friend, the Minister for Schools and I will hold a briefing for colleagues on Monday 4 September. Should you have any questions regarding RAAC within the education estate in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact the Department. As things progress, my Ministers and I will work closely with you to ensure you receive regular updates.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a long, sweeping tail extending to the right.

**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State**