



Briefing for PCF – Monday 6th April 2020

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect our daily lives in ways we could never have imagined even a few weeks ago, I would like to reiterate my thanks to you as the Parent Carer Forum in Leicestershire for all that you are continuing to do to support the families of children and young people with SEND during these particularly challenging times.

While the restrictions and limitations on our movements continue, I shall continue to provide a weekly update briefing to you sharing key information about the local authority's actions. I hope you find this useful and please feel free to share this as you feel appropriate.

We are working daily with colleges, schools and early years settings who are continuing to provide learning and support to families. Many continue to open each day for onsite provision for Leicestershire's most vulnerable children, including some of those who have EHCPs or who are the children of key workers, for whom it is deemed 'safest' for them to be in school.

In order to inform decisions around which children and young people are able to continue to access learning in school settings and who are safest being at home, schools have undertaken risk assessments which have considered family circumstances as well as guidance from health and other professionals where appropriate. Decisions have been made at individual pupil level and the local authority is monitoring the situation daily being provided with information regarding attendance and any increase in vulnerability where this may be a concern.

Even where a child or young person is attending a school, this may not be in the child or young person's usual setting and also may not be available full-time, but we are confident that our schools are using reasonable endeavours (as required by the government) to meet needs. Again, this is unlikely to be at the usual level of support and access to the usual curriculum may be limited, however I would

ask that you would work with the schools who are operating to the best of their ability with reduced staffing availability. To address these issues settings, schools and colleges are working collaboratively and in clusters to provide the best possible support in these challenging times.

The local authority is also working closely with our independent sector schools and provisions to ensure that for those children and young people who are enrolled in these establishments, needs are also being met as far as possible. This support will continue over the usual Easter holiday period (including, in some cases, over the bank holidays), again in consultation with parents and the local authority, for a number of children of key workers and those who have additional needs that have been risk assessed as needing school provision. All learning provisions have also had to consider the medical needs of children (and staff) who, because of underlying health conditions may be safer at home. I ask that you would join me in thanking the many teachers and support staff who continue to work tirelessly in their endeavours during this very difficult time.

Remember please - if it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.

The following weblinks may be useful for schools and parents and carers and as these become available I will share these with you.

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The local authority is continuing to collate information from schools regarding their open/closed situation and are receiving daily updates on pupils'

attendance and are closely monitoring this to ensure the most vulnerable children have regular contact.

We are also asking schools now to think about how they will manage the return to usual situation and work towards recovery as this also will need careful planning.

Many Local Authority services are now operating remotely and may be limited in the support they can provide. Some direct work is unable to be carried out at all, however we are developing innovative new practices and methodologies which will be invaluable as we return to normal daily life, whenever that may be.

In order to adhere to social distancing guidance, all group activity short break offers have had to be reduced or paused and we are aware that this will have an impact on families, especially over the Easter period. The local authority is working with providers to see if they can offer alternative support to families. Further updates on this will be circulated next week along with advice and guidance around staying safe when employing assistance in the home through Direct Payments.

Transport is also continuing for eligible children and young people who are attending schools and colleges, although this may not always be through the usual contracted providers.

Free school meals are being made available for eligible children, through either the usual school arrangements or the voucher scheme which has now been rolled out and widely publicised (link attached). These are also available over the Easter holiday period.

Finally, regarding schools and settings, they are being reminded they are required to comply with relevant safeguarding legislation, especially towards vulnerable learners in relation to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006. Where schools have changed provision for vulnerable learners, this could present an issue in terms of safeguarding children.

The Local Authority role in providing a SENA process to assess children and young people for EHCPs and to undertake annual reviews is continuing as far as possible with further guidance still awaited from the DfE as to whether there will be any changes to current processes and practice.