

Briefing for PCF – Friday 27th March 2020

Thank you for all that you are continuing to do to support the families of children and young people with SEND during these particularly challenging times.

Along with the constantly updated advice and guidance on Covid-19 issued through the Department for Education and Public Health England, this briefing is intended to outline and clarify the position from the local authority perspective.

As you are aware, as part of the country's ongoing response to COVID-19, schools, colleges and early years settings have been asked to close to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday 23 March. That said, where it is possible and safe to do so, **all** children and young people (including those with EHCPs) **who can be safely cared for at home should be**. Schools are working directly with families to assess and agree where our children and young people are safest during these exceptional times.

If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.

This also applies to parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response are in the key worker category, however many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home.

If parents or carers have any concerns or issues regarding their child's attendance at school, they should contact the school directly in the first instance.

To date, schools and settings are managing incredibly well with the numbers of children attending and their staff are working exceptionally hard to make sure children's needs are being met and are safe. Multi Academy Trusts are supporting all schools in clusters and are working well to ensure access to learning provision across their clusters is well coordinated. This may mean some children are not always attending their usual place of learning. This is to ensure that numbers in settings are safe and all the guidance relating to social distancing and hygiene are being closely adhered to. Clearly, for some very young children and those with more complex needs this can be challenging however schools are rigidly following guidance around hygiene, cleaning, hand-washing and taking advice from Public Health experts where appropriate. Please be mindful, however, schools and settings still operating

are sometimes doing so with a reduced workforce and the emphasis is on keeping children safe and cared for during this extraordinary period.

Additional information can be accessed through these weblinks.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

<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>

The local authority is collating 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.

With regard to statutory work around SENA processes, Education Psychology and the Specialist Teaching service, we are awaiting further guidance from the Department for Education. Meanwhile, we continue to work as far as possible to carry out our work remotely, however in the extraordinary circumstances we are all now faced with, the impact of Covid-19 has meant that in some cases we are not always delivering services at the same level we would normally.

There are also some limitations to the services we can provide and how we do this, for example:

Support staff and specialist practitioners are in some cases not able to visit schools, settings or homes but are trying to offer a remote service.

Where possible, we are using technology to provide support and advice to some of the most vulnerable children. Schools are also using technology to support children to learn at home.

Statutory work is being prioritised, including advice as part of an EHC needs assessment request, although these will not be able to include direct assessments or classroom observations.

The statutory processes around EHC plans and annual reviews, are continuing as far as possible at the moment through remote working and with a reduced number of officers. We are doing everything we can to continue with business as usual although we may struggle to progress at pace any new requests for an assessment, due to many practitioners and professionals being unable to carry out appropriate assessments or provide robust and detailed advice due to the current circumstances. Please be assured we will endeavour to keep business moving as far as possible and provide a further update when more guidance or temporary legislation is received by the Department for Education.

Transport is 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, this may be in the form of a packed takeaway lunch. Meal vouchers may, in some cases, replace this system when it is be introduced.

Schools are now in the planning phase for Easter holidays as per the DfE guidance (including over the bank holiday) for vulnerable children and those of key workers. Transport operations are also planning for this.

We will continue to keep the Local Offer website maintained with regular updates as we receive more direction and take further decisions. We urge parents and carers to access this regularly to keep informed. There will also be additional useful resources uploaded to help and support families

We would like to thank parents and carers for their patience and understanding as we work through these unprecedented times.



Minister Ford's
open letter to the St