

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS 23 March

The Government guidance clearly states that the safest place for all children is at home. Support for key workers is in this context and so parents who have support from within their family home do so, as long as this isn't with someone who is vulnerable.

The only other children who should be offered a childcare place in school are those with **a social worker or an Education Health and Care Plan**. The guidance does not state that these children must attend school.

It is unlikely that all schools will be able to stay open and some are already closed. As this happens, we will organise groups of schools to work together so that they can share resources. Support from other services can also be coordinated in this way.

For some children statutory assessments are currently taking place and although meeting all our statutory requirements at the moment is very challenging there is a legal requirement for these to continue. If this should change we will let you know as soon as possible.

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS 24 March

Children and young people with an EHC plan will be risk-assessed by their school or college in discussion with, parents the local authority (LA) and health partners, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a place in education to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

As part of the government's emergency powers, the statutory duties on local authorities to maintain the precise provision in EHC plans will be modified, so that educational settings and local authorities use their reasonable endeavours to support children and their families.

Where a local authority is unable to put in place stated provision, they won't be penalised for failing to meet the existing duty in the 2014 Act, nor will parent who agrees to changes in provision be considered to have agreed to a permanent change. The DfE is currently considering

amending the SEND regulations to change timescales for the EHC Plan process.

Children and young people with an allocated social worker must remain in school until a risk assessment by a social worker has taken place.

School attendance and uniform - the DfE is introducing a record keeping system for children of key workers and vulnerable children attending school to keep children safe. Children and young people should remain in uniform so that they are clearly identifiable.

School meals – a number of scams are beginning to emerge; some parents are being asked to provide bank details to keep their free school meal entitlement. Please do not provide your bank details – they are not needed.

School governors – if you are a parent governor please do not visit your school at the moment.

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS 25 March

School closures and clusters

It is becoming increasingly difficult for all schools to remain open, as numbers of staff reduce, and decisions are made about children and young people remaining at home.

Many schools are choosing to work in 'hubs', so that if one school needs to close, we can make sure there is still an offer in the local area.

We have asked schools to let you and us know if they need to close and to inform you about the alternative arrangements.

Letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Yesterday we received a copy of a letter from the Minister responsible for SEND which we have been asked to share as widely as possible.

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/916143/letter-from-the-parliamentary-under-secretary-of-state-for-children-and-families.pdf>

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS 26 March

Free School Meals

The DfE is looking to establish a national voucher scheme for pupils eligible for free school meals very soon. In the meantime, Lancashire County Council is arranging a further delivery of meals for all eligible families and agreeing a way of distributing these through community hubs rather than individual schools. We will update you as soon as possible on the arrangements.

Online Learning Resources

A range of on-line learning resources are being provided for schools to share with those learning at home, including resources for children and young people with SEND.

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS 27 March

Statutory requirements – provision, assessment and planning

The changes to legislation require the Local Authority to use ‘reasonable endeavours’ to ensure that provision and support for children and young people is in place and is prioritised for those who are most vulnerable.

The Local Authority will be applying this principle to a range of statutory processes, such as those relating to Education, Health and Care Plans, Transition Plans and Personal Education Plans.

Easter provision including bank holidays

The DfE is encouraging childcare providers, schools and colleges to continue to look after the children of critical workers’ and vulnerable children throughout the Easter holidays wherever possible. This includes bank holidays where there is demand from parents.

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS 30 March

Free School Meals

The current process for distributing free school meals is an interim measure ahead of the national voucher scheme. We are awaiting information about the national voucher scheme and are in touch with DfE daily.

Updated DfE Guidance on children and young people with an EHCP

The DfE updated their guidance this weekend including:

- temporarily lifting the statutory duty on local authorities to maintain the precise provision in EHC plans, as long as Local Authorities use their 'reasonable endeavours' they will not be penalised for failing to meet the existing duty in section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014
- enabling local authorities to prioritise their efforts to support those with the most complex needs on a temporary basis
- reviewing regulations over matters such as the timescales in EHC needs assessments, and the reviews, re-assessments and amendments processes.

Waiting for an EHC plan to be agreed or the outcome from a tribunal

If the local authority has not yet issued an EHC plan for your child, then they will not automatically fall within the definition of 'vulnerable children' for the purposes of attendance at an education setting during the COVID-19 outbreak. However, their educational setting and local authority have discretion to undertake a risk assessment and offer support if that is needed.

If your child has an EHC plan the local authority remains responsible for maintaining it, including until any appeal to the tribunal has been heard and resolved.

Special school and specialist college provision

Where a child or young person requires ongoing provision, this may continue to be provided at their current special school or specialist college, but not always. Local authorities, schools and colleges, working together and taking into account parents' views, will need to make decisions regarding the provision required to meet the needs of children and young people in their area.

Following discussion with schools, this may involve some special schools and colleges continuing to offer some or all of their provision over the Easter holidays.

Children and young people with an EHC Plan attending mainstream schools and colleges

Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home. If a risk assessment shows that the needs of an individual with an EHC plan cannot be met at home, because for example they have multiple and profound needs and/or personal care needs, it is likely they will continue at their usual school or college. There may however, be a need to attend a different setting, for instance due to insufficient staffing ratios which cannot be remedied by drawing on additional appropriately skilled staff.