

Parliamentary Briefing March 24, 2020

How Devon schools are responding to Covid-19

Introduction

The DfE has issued helpful [guidance](#) in relation to school closures and the role of the Local Authority. It reinforces the Government's expectation that schools and local authorities should work together to ensure that different settings are supported to stay open wherever possible and that this includes academies, the independent sector, and boarding schools.

The DfE is asking all schools and early years settings to remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children. However, "If some schools are experiencing high demand for places or severe staff shortages, local authorities will coordinate support from other schools in the area. Schools are expected to be flexible and work together where required."

Devon is well placed to respond and much of the guidance has already been actioned. Schools and the Local Authority will continue to work closely together to ensure Devon continues to have provision in place that supports our children and critical workers over the holidays and after Easter.

How Devon is responding

The County Council has added a dedicated schools page to the DCC website

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/document/schools-and-families/>

This provides important information for schools and parents relating to Covid 19 including:

- Latest updates and links to DfE.
 - School closures,
 - DfE coronavirus helpline
 - School resources and information on key workers and messages for parents
- The County Council is working with schools to ensure there is as much provision as close to a child's original school as possible. The School Improvement team is contacting any school where it has become apparent that they are unable to meet the needs of those requiring a place. A [link](#) has been set up on the County Council's schools page of the website so parents can report this or register for a place.
 - Our transport team will support the above arrangement to ensure wherever possible that critical workers and vulnerable children will be able to access the available provision. The Safeguarding and Health and Safety teams are also available to provide advice.

- Our schools closure website has been updated and schools need now only report a closure when they are no longer able to remain open for vulnerable, children or those of key workers. The method of notification remains the same.
- To support Special Educational Needs Coordinators with advice about SEND processes a dedicated helpline will be available to SEND staff every day in term time. A similar service will be made available for Early Years settings.
- Specialist staff will be working with our special schools and alternative provision settings to support them staying open. DCC SEN specialist teams will help support these schools. It is also important to note many children and young people with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans will be able to safely remain at home.
- The County Council has reached out to independent schools to get the fullest possible picture of current provision including many of our independent special schools to confirm what they can offer each child. The authority is asking all independent schools to get in touch if they have not already done so.
- The DfE has also stated that “Schools should work with LAs to monitor the welfare of vulnerable children who are not attending school, and other pupils they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes.” To this end the County Council will be providing an approved risk register document as an appropriate method of gaining the level of information the authority requires. The Inclusion and Education Welfare teams and other staff in non-critical school supporting roles will lead this work.
- Messages have been sent to Foster Carers to clarify those Children in Care who need to be in school.
- The DfE has said it will put in place a new process to reimburse schools for exceptional costs that they face as a result of Covid-19. For example, additional costs for schools that remain open through the Easter holidays. Devon is working with schools to ensure parents are informed about what provision will be in place and where.
- The County Council is holding daily conference calls with school representatives to agree any necessary next steps.

Guidance for schools and parents through the Local Offer

The Devon SEN team and Parent Carer Forum are currently compiling information and guidance for schools and parents. Two documents giving guidance on EHC assessments and EHCP reviews will be on the [Local Offer website](#), and a further document about EHCP provision is being developed.

The following may also be helpful to note

Children with a parent or carer whose job is listed on the [Government’s critical worker list](#) will be considered for a school place, so long as their job cannot be done from home. This is **not** an ordered priority list. Children with at least one parent/carer whose job is critical can go to school if required. If necessary, schools can ask for simple evidence that the parent in question is a critical worker, such as their work ID badge or pay slip. It is not compulsory for critical workers to accept the offer of a school place for their child.

Teachers, school and Local Authority staff critical to the COVID-19 response can send their children to school in the same way as other critical workers. However, many such families may be able to ensure their child is kept at home and every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

The County Council will continue to monitor the demand on schools of providing provision for critical workers' children and vulnerable children.

The Council is clear that we must ensure we are doing everything possible to protect the NHS and social care services, to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable and support the community but we must do this without overwhelming schools. The close partnership working between the authority and schools will give Devon the resilience we need to successfully manage this complex transition period.

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