

Last update 24 March

## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

### FAQs for Early Years and Childcare Settings in Essex

#### **WHO CAN CURRENTLY ATTEND EARLY YEARS SETTINGS?**

Schools and colleges are closed due to the coronavirus, should early years and childcare settings close too?

Schools, colleges and early years settings closed to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday 23 March 2020, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus. Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans. Children who do not fall into these groups should remain at home with appropriate care.

Q. As lockdown has now occurred, do we have to remain open for key/critical workers?

The overriding principle is that early years settings should be closed, but we do still need to be able to offer childcare to the critical workers who do not have any other childcare options to enable them to continue to work. Therefore, we do need to be able find local childcare to meet this need as required. Please see the DfE guidance that was issued on the 24 March 2020 [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): early years and childcare closures](#)

Q. Who are considered key/critical workers?

The DfE have confirmed that the critical roles to the Covid-19 response are critical roles within:

- Health and social care
- Education and childcare
- Key public services
- Local and national government
- Food and other necessary goods

Public safety and national security  
Transport  
Utilities, communication and financial services

For more details on who qualifies as a key worker visit [Maintaining Educational Provision](#) on the Gov.uk site

### **Do both parents need to be key/critical Workers?**

Children with at least one parent or carer who are identified as critical workers by the government can attend if required. However, the overarching principle remains the same that if the child(ren) can be looked after at home then they should be.

### **Can I accept a child who has a parent who is classed as a keyworker but who doesn't live with that parent?**

If there is another parent who can care for the child, then the child should be cared for at home and not in a setting.

### **Are there special arrangements in place for children with SEND?**

Wherever possible children with SEND should remain in their regular setting and continue to be cared for by the staff who they know.

If this is not possible, it will be essential that there is a handover for these children and a sharing of One Planning, and paperwork should be completed in line with Ofsted requirements. Settings could consider the following:

- Children with EHCP – Same as above but copy of EHCP also provided to determine whether needs of the child can be met and how.
- Vulnerable children – Same as above but paperwork goes to social worker also as they may be responsible for co-ordinating
- Summary of child 'All About Me' to support with transition and settling in.

Please ensure you secure the consent of the parent / carer before sharing any information on their child with another setting.

### **If a member of a child's immediate family has the virus, can the child still attend our setting?**

If **any** member of a household has the following symptoms

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

Then **all** household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

## **OPENING AND CLOSING SETTINGS**

**If we have staff available to work but no children attending, are we classed as open?**

You could effectively remain open, but not attend the setting unless you had either vulnerable children or children of critical workers wanting to attend. You could also let ECC know that you have availability to offer childcare to vulnerable children and children of critical workers should there be a need in your area.

**Is there a minimum number of children we should support, is it worth opening if we have just one or two children?**

No, there is no minimum number. We have had several settings contact us to say that they only have a few children and are shutting. We understand that this is difficult to manage, but we do need to be able to provide childcare to vulnerable children and children of critical workers. There may be some other options you could consider, such as:

- Merging sites into one if you are a multi-site provider
- Working with other providers in the area to create a network of support

We are in the process of putting together an information sheet, that may help you work through some options, and this will be issued shortly.

**If we only care for one child on one day, can we say we are closed?**

You need to consider the need of that child and family, and whether it is possible to make alternative arrangements, as set out in the DfE guidance

**If all staff are self-isolating and we cannot open, is there going to be a central register to find out where children could go?**

If this is the case, please ask the parents that are classed as critical workers or parents of vulnerable children to email [early.years@essex.gov.uk](mailto:early.years@essex.gov.uk) for support to find alternative childcare

**If we close who should we notify?**

If your setting has to close due to Coronavirus, **you must immediately inform Essex County Council** by email to the Free Entitlement Funding Mailbox at [Free.EntitlementFundingQueries@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Free.EntitlementFundingQueries@essex.gov.uk)

You must state:

- the closure date
- the anticipated re-open date
- the reason for closing
- and of any extension of closure if necessary.

You must also notify Essex County Council when you re-open via the Free Entitlement Funding Queries Mailbox

\*Please note this process for Coronavirus supersedes the Temporary Closure expectations set out in section 5.8 of the 2020 / 2021 Essex FEEE Contract and Handbook, and the above reporting expectations **must be** followed.

Settings should also notify Ofsted through their online service and their insurance company if required.

### **If we must close, who do we signpost Key Worker parents to for care for after school and Pre-School children?**

If you are unable to offer childcare to the children of your critical workers and vulnerable children, please ask your parents that are classed as critical workers or parents of vulnerable children to email [early.years@essex.gov.uk](mailto:early.years@essex.gov.uk) for support to find alternative childcare.

### **If we close what happens on 'headcount day'**

You will be asked to input the information based on the children who were on role to attend had you been open.

In this situation, an email to you from the parents, stating the hours required, will be accepted as a temporary measure until the Parent Declaration can be completed.

### **If we have staff available and no children, does anybody need to come into the place of work?**

No. The Government advice is that everyone should work at home and avoid travel if at all possible.

## **CHANGES TO HOURS PROVIDED TO FAMILIES**

**Do parents need to stick to the standard hours that they currently do, or can we change their hours for this period only, and how do we reflect this on our funding claim?**

For the Summer 2020 term, ECC will allow parents to increase the FEEE funded hours they attend, up to the maximum number of hours a child would be entitled to in the Summer term, as set out below: -

- 13 weeks at 15 hours per week universal FEEE and 15 hours extended entitlement for eligible parents
- or
- 195 hours for universal FEEE and 195 hours for extended entitlement for eligible parents

**If we need to offer longer hours and care in the holidays, how do we claim for this?**

Please see above for if children attend for more hours than were originally claimed for up to the child's maximum FEEE entitlement

If the child will be attending for more hours than are covered by the FEEE funding, you will need to agree these charges directly with the parent.

**We are a term time only preschool, we do not know if we will be insured to open in the Easter holidays.**

If you are not able to offer the children of your critical worker parents or vulnerable children during the Easter holidays, please ask them to email [early.years@essex.gov.uk](mailto:early.years@essex.gov.uk) for support to find alternative childcare.

**As a childminder, if a child that I have for the extended 15 hrs goes to a nursery that claims the first 15 hrs but is now staying closed due to Covid-19, can I claim for the universal 15 hrs as well if the child attends my setting for the whole 30 hours? Can I amend the submitted data for interim headcount?**

Yes, you will be able to claim additional hours for a child in this situation, but as set out above you need to utilise the FEEE funding that you have already claimed

before you claim any additional funding. We will share the process of how to claim additional hours shortly.

## **CHANGES TO THE CHILDREN YOU ARE PROVIDING CARE FOR**

### **If we look after additional children, how do we claim for them?**

In the first instance, we are asking all childcare providers that will be claiming FEEE funding for the Summer 2020 term to use this funding to cover the care of the children that are accessing a FEEE funded place.

If the number of hours and / or children goes over what has been claimed, ECC will be issuing a process for settings to claim the additional funding up to the maximum number of hours a child would be entitled to in the Summer 2020 term, as set out below:

- 13 weeks at 15 hours per week universal FEEE and 15 hours extended entitlement for eligible parents
- or
- 195 hours for universal FEEE and 195 hours for extended entitlement for eligible parents

Please do not ask the child's original setting to pass the funding on to you.

### **As an Early Years provider, are we allowed to take school aged children (e.g. 5 -11 years) of key workers?**

You would need to contact Ofsted to query this with them. You also need to check with your insurance provider that you are covered to provide care for children aged 5 – 11.

### **I have a child whose parents are both key workers, I care for the younger child however the older child attends an alternative setting. Will I be able to care for the older child and claim the funding even though the other provider would have already claimed it. Can it be transferred?**

Yes, if the other setting is closed and not available to offer childcare for the other child. In the first instance, we are asking all childcare providers that will be claiming FEEE funding for the Summer 2020 term to use this funding to cover the care of the children that are accessing a FEEE funded place.

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Please do not ask the child's original setting to pass the funding on to you.

**We've had enquiries from families who are key workers, about the possibility of them attending our setting whilst their own setting is closed. What is the process for enrolling them into our setting and claiming funding/payment for them for the remainder of the spring term and summer term?**

You need to follow your own process for registering children with your setting to ensure you have all the information to meet the child's needs. Paperwork should be completed as Ofsted requirements. Settings could consider the following:

- Critical worker's child - Setting provides parent with copy of registration form. This acts as a passport if the child needs to attend a different setting and gives essential information.
- Children with EHCP – Same as above but copy of EHCP also provided to determine whether the needs of the child can be met and how.
- Vulnerable children – Same as above but paperwork goes to social worker also as they may be responsible for co-ordinating.
- Summary of child 'All About Me' to support with transition and settling in.

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Please do not ask the child's original setting to pass the funding on to you.

If the child will be attending for more hours than are covered by the FEEE funding, you will need to agree these charges directly with the parent.

**If a child is claiming funding from another provider who is closed and on their headcount, but attends another setting which is open, can the funding be transferred? Does the setting who have claimed have to transfer the funding to new provider?**

Please see response to question above.

**If child is placed in another setting, what paperwork should go to new setting?**

Paperwork should be completed as Ofsted requirements. Settings could consider the following:

- Critical worker's child - Setting provides parent with copy of registration form. This acts as a passport if the child needs to attend different setting and gives essential information
- Children with EHCP – Same as above but copy of EHCP also provided to determine whether the needs of the child can be met and how.
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## **FEEE AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

**What will happen to the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) funding if an early years setting has to close due to the Coronavirus? Will Essex County Council (ECC) claim funding back for any days the setting is closed?**

ECC will continue to pay FEEE funding to early years and childcare providers if they need to close due to the Coronavirus.

**Fees outside of FEEE may have to be refunded if a setting is forced to close. What financial help is available if this causes sustainability pressures?**

The 2020 budget provides support for public services, individuals and businesses affected by Coronavirus. More information can be found at [Guidance to Employers and Business About Covid-19](#) on Gov.uk

**Will summer term funding be paid in one payment or as an interim and final payment?**

The usual payment process will apply for the Summer 2020, with an interim payment and a final payment.



**We will have to pay Statutory Sick Pay to staff from Day one which is a little less than paying the full wages bill. Will it be easier to claim this back? Will there be any funding available to cover any potential increased cost of any SSP payments should settings find this causes them to get into financial difficulties?**

The 2020 budget provides support for public services, individuals and businesses affected by Coronavirus. More information can be found at [Guidance to Employers and Business About Covid-19](#) on Gov.uk

**If a childminder's family member is required to self-isolate, this may mean they are not able to work. This could have financial implications, what help is available?**

The 2020 budget provides support for public services, individuals and businesses affected by Coronavirus. More information can be found at [Guidance to Employers and Business About Covid-19](#) on Gov.uk

**Sickness policies can state that "fees are still payable when a child is off sick." Would this still be appropriate to apply if the household are in isolation?**

You should review the wording in your policy to see if this can be applied in this instance. Further advice could be available from the Legal Helplines if you are a member of the Early Years Alliance, PACEY or the National Day Nursery Association.

**If our setting has to close, are we covered by our insurance for loss of earnings?**

Please check your policy as we have been made aware that some policies may not cover loss of earnings.

**If you are have questions about FEEE because you are providing additional hours or childcare to new children please see these sections**

## **OTHER QUESTIONS AND FURTHER LINKS**

**If staff are required to self-isolate, this will affect ratios and the setting may have to close. Will Ofsted relax the ratios for a setting to remain open?**

[The DfE \(COVID-19\): early years and childcare closures guidance](#) issued on 24 March covers this point as follows:-

Paragraph 3.30 of the EYFS states:

‘Exceptionally, and where the quality of care and safety and security of children is maintained, changes to the ratios may be made.’

We consider the extent of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to be an exceptional temporary circumstance in which the staff to child ratios set out in the EYFS can be changed if necessary. However, childcare providers or schools remain responsible for ensuring the safety and security of children in their care.

### **What happens if I am due an Ofsted inspection?**

The Department for Education has confirmed that Ofsted is to temporarily suspend routine inspections of schools, colleges, early years settings, children’s social care providers and local authorities to reduce the burden on staff who are providing vital services to the nation in response to coronavirus.

### **Can we take children out for a walk?**

Outdoor activity in private outdoor space could continue, i.e. the back garden of a childminder or outside space in a nursery taking care to ensure the environment is thoroughly cleaned. However, childcare providers should follow the latest government advice and avoid using public spaces.

### **Further Links**

Other guidance previously issued for education settings can be found on the Gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

Contact the Department for Education via email or phone:

[Dfe.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk](mailto:Dfe.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk).

0800 046 8687 (Opening times 08:00 – 18:00 Monday to Friday).

[www.essex.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.essex.gov.uk/coronavirus)

Essex County Council’s website also has a [Supporting Business Through Coronavirus](#) page with relevant links

