Dear Provider

Please see below links to the most recent guidance from the DfE for information.

Coronavirus guidance on vulnerable children and young people - [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people?utm\_source=43db9677-ce2a-4e29-8eb6-c9eb1c5c7fcd&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\_content=immediate](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Fcoronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people%3Futm_source%3D43db9677-ce2a-4e29-8eb6-c9eb1c5c7fcd%26utm_medium%3Demail%26utm_campaign%3Dgovuk-notifications%26utm_content%3Dimmediate&data=02%7C01%7C%7Cd8041b7e5b22417af35508d7cf095560%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637205511315838723&sdata=k7Fl%2B%2Fv8oh385HFf2Z42bGwjWhx0ZEyU1eQeNNsPG8w%3D&reserved=0)

COVID-19 – Ofsted - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofsted-coronavirus-covid-19-rolling-update>

We appreciate that it will take you some time to digest all of the documents, therefore to save time we have pulled the guidance documents together into a Checklist for Early Years and Childcare Settings Remaining Open for Vulnerable Children & Children of Key Workers for you and your staff to use;  this will support you going forward.   The checklist is attached to this email.

Please let us know if you find this helpful or if you need any other similar types of documents to provide support to you during this challenging time.

One of the key issues for you will be the identification of and numbers of parents claiming critical worker status.   The key advice to all of your parents is that **schools and early years settings are closed, to reduce the spread of the virus.    The advice of Mike Gogarty, ECC Director of Public Health over the weekend is:**

“To reiterate, school and early years setting closures are critical to reduce population spread to a level the NHS can cope with. This is essential to save lives. If a substantial number of children attend school and early years settings this will unravel this initiative and make pandemic likely”.

It is therefore really important that where possible you limit the amount of parents accessing your provision to the **absolute minimum** that you can.  This will be very hard, and we do appreciate that.

We have picked up that large employers are issuing blanket letters to staff (Greggs, Pets at Home, Sky) and these need to be challenged.  We are also aware that the NAHT have issued guidance on prioritising critical workers to schools, where staff numbers are reduced to help them to manage the situation, and you may find this guidance helpful to yourself too.  We have provided some suggested advice on how to respond to these issues, below:

* Do not feel awkward about questioning parents who are claiming critical worker status and their reasons for this, unless their role is clear - you may want to quote the guidance that has been issued, as a checklist:
  + Are you able to keep your child(ren) at home? Do you have a member of the household who is not a critical worker, if so, why are they not staying at home to look after the child(ren) as expected by the Government?
  + Can you explain why your role is deemed business critical by your employer in the national response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency.  The guidance states:

*“If workers think they fall within the critical categories above, they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service”*

It has been made clear to all ECC staff who are deemed to be  critical workers, that they must observe the guidance and to only use the offer of a place if there are no alternative arrangements for childcare.

**Cllr David Finch,** Leader, Essex County Council has also written to all Essex residents to reiterate the message:

*Even though some schools and early years settings across Essex will stay open, you should* ***ONLY*** *take your children to them, if you have been notified that you are a critical worker* ***AND*** *if you absolutely have* ***NO*** *other option.*

* If you feel you cannot operate safely for the numbers of children you are being able to offer care for, please contact us via the Free Early Education Entitlement Funding mailbox ([Free.EntitlementFundingQueries@essex.gov.uk](mailto:Free.EntitlementFundingQueries@essex.gov.uk)) so we can identify if there is any support we can offer you.
* IF you are unable to continue to stay open and offer childcare to your children, you will need to consider how you will meet the needs of your vulnerable children either by keeping in touch with them if they are at home or supporting them with finding alternative childcare and ensuring any critical paperwork is shared

We accept that this is going to be very challenging for many of you.    You  need to be cognisant of good hand hygiene throughout the day and social distancing guidance (2 metres).  ECC has asked the DfE to consider specific  social distancing guidance for educational settings, as the current guidance is not helpful to you at the moment.

We are also aware that you may need to explore ways to provide cover for the Designated Safeguarding Lead / Deputy Safeguarding Designated Lead role in the event of absence due to staff sickness.  If you are finding this difficult to cover, please let us know and we will see if there is any support we can offer

Having looked at  the increasing number of guidance documents from the government and the updates, it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate all of the information.  Our priority this week is to provide a ‘what you need to know’ FAQ style guide and update this  as and when required, and one key area we know is around the support the government has announced to small businesses.  We will reference the source documents for you, but we hope it will save you time reading the numerous updates.

If you need any support for children with an EHCP, then please speak to your local ECC SEND contact directly, so we can try and ensure this will be provided.   NASEN have produced some very helpful advice, which can be found here.  [https://nasen.org.uk/news/covid-19-important-information-and-faqs.html](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fnasen.org.uk%2Fnews%2Fcovid-19-important-information-and-faqs.html&data=02%7C01%7C%7Cd8041b7e5b22417af35508d7cf095560%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637205511315868711&sdata=mXL3cW9pJ5bDDIcQpAokQpEFOBbFnPZuT8gYnbcHKO0%3D&reserved=0)

We will continue to update the FAQ’s these will be placed with all documents on the dedicated Covid-19 early years webpage [https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/covid19-coronavirus/](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Feycp.essex.gov.uk%2Fcovid19-coronavirus%2F&data=02%7C01%7C%7C6981144b63314d33970d08d7cf17c93d%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C0%7C637205573404844472&sdata=M%2F1U8SLXgwS2GSMv0I06LMw%2FUmfRUnLQtQyPNoWion8%3D&reserved=0)

If there is anything that you need this week that we haven’t thought of, then please do not hesitate to ask and we will do our best to provide this

Kind regards