

Essex County Council  
**Education**  
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22 July 2020

Dear Childcare Provider

At last the end of term is here, and my goodness what a term and year it has been – for those of you who are closing for the summer, I hope your last day is as happy and bright as it can be for you, your staff and children; for those of you who will be remaining open through the holidays, I hope you and your staff will also be able to enjoy the summer and to get some rest and respite from the stresses of this pandemic.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, my team and I have rightly praised your courage, determination and leadership, which we will continue to do, but I also wanted to remind you what Essex has collectively and successfully navigated for our children, families and staff during this unprecedented time and you and your staff have been a critical part of this.

The school and setting closure announcements sparked a massive spike in workload for everyone, with an endless list of questions and queries we all had due to gaping holes in the guidance and dealing with something none of us were expert to deal with – a health crisis – with limited guidance.

I also know that the early years sector have had the additional stresses of trying to remain solvent during this crisis, making decisions on whether it was financially viable to open and at the same time trying to provide the right levels of support to your families whilst trying to navigate the financial support that was made available by central government.

But we have got through the closure period; some of you have been able to stay open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, and open more widely from June, whilst also working hard to ensure the welfare of all children at home rather than in your setting and also support those children and their parents making the transition into school in September. We have had to understand how social distancing in schools and settings can and can't work, increase cleaning regimes, talk endlessly about 'rota's' and 'bubbles', complete risk assessment after risk assessment and plan for all children to return in September – it is exhausting just reflecting on all we have been through - let alone experiencing it, maintaining throughout the safety and best interests of the children, families and staff at the heart of all decisions made.

For those of you who are childminders, you have had additional, difficult and very individual decisions to make, yet many of you have continued to open your homes to care for the children of critical workers throughout this crisis.

I have often said throughout this, that the LA will always be there to provide as much guidance and support as we can, we have tried to provide answers and guidance where there were none, to try to ease your workload, but what we cannot do is make the decisions about how you respond to the directives from the DfE taking your context into account... that has had to lie with you and I know many of you have had sleepless nights over these decisions.

The fact that we have got to today, is down to the strength of the individual, collective and system leadership across Essex and beyond. There are many positives to take from our individual and collective experiences over the past 5 months or so, and lessons to be learned later down the line. You should all be very proud of your own strength of leadership during this time and that of your wider leadership teams and staff – as a result children and families and the education system will recover from this historical moment. I am so very proud of your bravery, determination and dedication to your children and staff.

September will bring another new set of challenges for us all; which I know we will tackle head on as a result of the strength we have built up together over these past months.

We will continue to email with any updates that you need to be aware of and continue to be here to try and answer any queries you have or support you need.

Thank you for all you have given to the children of Essex and to the Essex education system as a whole.

We will see you all in September and hopefully as the term unfolds, in person rather than by email or phone.

I wish you and your staff all the very best.

Kind regards,

*Clare Kershaw*

Clare Kershaw  
Director of Education