

Email from Carolyn Terry to Essex early years and childcare and childcare providers

From: Free Entitlement Funding Queries <FEEEQueries@essex.gov.uk>
Sent: 15 July 2021 16:28
Cc: Free Entitlement Funding Queries <FEEEQueries@essex.gov.uk>
Subject: Please Read - Covid-19 Update 15 July 2021

Dear All

Well done for getting through another challenging period and the end of this summer term. We have heard from so many of you that with rising numbers of covid-19 cases, the pressures are not easing.

We continue to be so appreciative of all that you and your staff teams are all doing for your children and their families.

Thank you too for continuing to respond to the requests for information that we have continued to make on you, including the Childcare Sufficiency task on the Self Update portal, which the majority of you have now successfully completed. This is an annual requirement and hopefully will be easier to manage in the coming Summer terms.

Also included in this email is information on: -

- Food vouchers for children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium and FEEE2 Funding
- Updates to the EYFS Disapplication's
- Letter from Vicky Ford, Minister for Children and Families
- An update on the LADO service
- Updates from the DfE on: -
 - Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
 - Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
 - What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during COVID-19
 - Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Food vouchers for children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium and FEEE2 Funding - you will remember that we have previously asked for your support to distribute both *winter warmth vouchers* and food vouchers to your most disadvantaged families. Thanks to your response, between us we were able to reach over 5,000 children within the space of a couple of weeks each time. Essex Early Years have now been allocated a further pot of funding to support vulnerable families over the summer holiday period.

You are now able to apply for a **£15 food voucher** for 4 weeks for every **pre-school child** that attends your setting **who is in receipt of EYPP (Early Years Pupil Premium) or FEEE2 funding**. This is a total of £60.00 per child. Please note the change from the previous £25 per voucher to £15 per voucher this time.

Again, Essex County Council has commissioned Wonde (now called Vouchers for Schools but please note this is still relevant for early years providers) to issue these vouchers and if you registered with the Wonde system to access either the Winter Warmth or previous Food vouchers, you will already have an account set up. To access the £15 food vouchers, childcare providers with children in receipt of **EYPP and FEEE2 funding** need to submit the

number of eligible children you have registered at your setting. You will then be allocated a number of vouchers and validation codes that can be downloaded and passed directly to parents. **Please go to:** visit <https://www.evouchers.com/> and click login in the top right hand corner to log in using your email address

We recognise that this is an additional administrative task for you all and we are very appreciative of your support and commitment to your children and their families, we also apologise again for the tight timeline.

Please find see the attached FAQ document and help articles here:

<https://help.evouchers.com/hc/en-gb>

if you require any further support, please contact support@evouchers.com or your relevant Children's Community Development Lead (CCDL) who will do their best to support any queries you have and can be contacted via the following email addresses: -

- Mid Essex - Vickie Thomas Victoria.Thomas@essex.gov.uk
- North East Essex - Diane Macefield Diane.Macefield@essex.gov.uk
- South Essex - Candice McPherson Candice.Mcpherson@essex.gov.uk
- West Essex - Gill Holland Gill.Holland@essex.gov.uk

Email from Early Years Entitlements 28th June - update that has been made to the [EYFS disapplications guidance](#). This update is to:

- *Link to the current version of Ofsted's early years inspection handbook, published on 28 June 2021, for inspections taking place from 1 September 2021*
- *Clarify that the period in which the EYFS disapplications can be used ends on 31 August 2021*
- *Clarify that if government restrictions and requirements are lifted before 31 August 2021 the disapplications can no longer be used as the necessary conditions for using them will no longer be met*

The DfE are aware that some sector bodies and providers are raising concerns about ongoing challenges with recruitment in the sector, particularly around level 3 qualified staff. Due to the limited legal scope of the current disapplications and the very specific circumstances in which they can legally be used, the DfE do not think that they are the right policy response to the current recruitment challenges and they were not intended or designed to be used in this way. However, they are committed to working with the sector and LAs to fully understand the scale of the challenge over the coming weeks and months and ensure that the right response and messaging is in place.

In the meantime, the DfE thought it would be helpful to draw your attention to the following section of the [Covid-19 guidance for early years providers](#), which covers existing flexibilities within the EYFS with regard to staffing ratios. There are no plans to change this guidance when the disapplications end in September:

Varying staff to child ratios and qualifications

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 COVID-19 to be an exceptional temporary circumstance in which the staff to child ratios set out in the EYFS can be changed if necessary. Early years settings and schools, however, remain responsible for ensuring the safety and security of children in their care.

Letter from Vicky Ford, Minister for Children and Families - please find attached a letter to all early years providers from Vicky Ford, Minister for Children and Families and Jo Churchill, Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care. The letter pulls together some important advice and guidance on support for children's health and wellbeing

LADO Update - in the next few months and likely through to October, the capacity within the LADO Team will be affected as Jacquie Wilkes has left and her replacement has yet to start.

Business will continue as usual and everyday there is a LADO on duty responding to calls and emails. However, ECC know the service will be stretched as the LADO's will each take on more duty days which gives them less time to respond to open cases.

There are a few of things that your setting could do to help the LADO team through this period and make sure that the service continues to run as smoothly as possible.

- Can you opt to email your referral into the LADO rather than phoning in and waiting for a call back to explain your concerns. This will reduce the time it takes the LADO to both record the concerns and also provide them with the fullest account of the information you have. You will get a call back as soon as the LADO is able to discuss the referral and provide further advice as to next steps.
- If the LADO is unable to talk to you straightaway, this is because they are likely dealing with other referrals. Could you please limit phone calls chasing the LADO to respond as all phone calls need to be listened to (which also takes time) so they can prioritise the order of the return phone calls. The LADO's are reporting that some professionals can call them up to 3 or 4 times a day, chasing. Please be assured a LADO will return your calls as they prioritise these.
- Can any updates you have on an internal investigation are shared with the LADO promptly, ECC are finding a lot of time is taken in chasing organisations and managers for these updates.

ECC will update you when the new LADO joins the service.

DfE Updates

- [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) Change made: 6th July
Added operational guidance for early years settings which applies at Step 4. This guidance removes restrictions such as keeping children in small consistent groups and wearing face coverings in communal areas. It also includes information about updating your outbreak management plan and what to do when an individual in your setting tests positive for COVID-19. At Step 4, close contacts will be identified by NHS Test and Trace. [By the autumn term, children under the age of 18 will no longer be required to self-isolate if they are contacted by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact.]
- [Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) Change made: 7th July
The DfE have added COVID-19: Action for Out-of-school Settings guidance which applies from Step 4. This guidance removes restrictions such as keeping children in consistent groups (bubbles), wearing face coverings in classrooms, communal areas and in community settings, limits on parental attendance, and restrictions on group sizes for residential visits. It also includes information about updating your outbreak management plan and what to do when an individual in your setting tests positive for COVID-19. From 16 August, children under the age of 18 years old will no longer be required to self-isolate if they are contacted by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact.

- [What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during COVID-19](#) Change made: 8th July
Published new guidance including updates on testing, face coverings, contact tracing, isolating and bubbles, which come into force from Step 4 of the Roadmap. The current guidance (dated May 2021) remains in place until Step 4.
- [Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) Change made 8th July
The DfE have added Out-of-school settings: COVID-19 guidance for parents and carers which applies from Step 4. This guidance outlines the removal of restrictions in these settings, such as keeping children in consistent groups (bubbles), wearing face coverings in classrooms and communal areas and in community settings, limits on parental attendance, and restrictions on group sizes for residential visits.

The following 4 documents were updated 14th July: to clarify that “From 19 July, the government is removing the requirement to wear face coverings in law but expects and recommends that they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where you may come into contact with people you don’t normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college.”

- [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
- [What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
- [Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)

Best wishes.

Carolyn

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