



To: All Headteachers

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Ask For: Mr Matt Dunkley
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Dear Colleague

As we emerge from an Easter period unlike any other, I want to reiterate my thanks to all the school leaders, teachers and support staff who have worked tirelessly over this period to make provision available to key worker and vulnerable children. Thank you for your hard work, your commitment to your pupils and for the invaluable support you have contributed to the wider crisis.

Although the significant majority of schools have chosen to provide for their own eligible students, there is an emerging network of closed and open hubs who are playing a vital role in supporting the system. Open hubs are schools who have volunteered to provide contingency support across their area if other schools face unexpected issues and struggle to open. Given the unpredictable nature of the crisis, this is an important backup. Thank you for all the additional work that has gone into setting up these hubs.

To support those who are working in hubs, we have produced LA guidance which can be found here: https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/106787/LA-Hubs-guidance.pdf. This guidance was developed in collaboration with colleagues across KCC, TEP and with Headteachers. As always, your SIA or AEO are your first point of contact if you have questions or concerns.

Kent Test

It is understandable that families would like to have a clear idea of what is going to happen to the Kent Test in the light of the current Covid-19 lockdown, but unfortunately it is too early to confirm anything other than that provision will be made for children to be assessed so that Kent's grammar schools can determine which of their applicants can be admitted.

A selection mechanism of some type will need to be applied, however, as it is unclear when restrictions will be released, or whether schools will be back in session before September, it would be premature to fix a solution now. There is national legislation around the co-ordinated admissions process, so the action which can be taken regarding the timing of the Kent Test will also depend on advice from the DfE, which has yet to be issued.

The loss of direct teaching time is concerning but unavoidable. All schools are continuing to provide support for their Year 5 pupils and there are many National Curriculum resources available free online. Our website has also offered access to free familiarisation material for a number of years. Unlike the national exams which have been cancelled, the Kent Test does not examine a taught syllabus. The process which determines what level of test performance will constitute a “pass” is set by KCC after the test has been completed, so there is also scope for flexibility when the Council considers the impact of the lockdown on everyone taking part.

A more detailed plan will be shared as soon as it is available.

September Guarantee

During this unprecedented time, we are aware that you are working tirelessly to support your young people. One of the key groups who are at increased risk of anxiety during this time are year 11 and 12 students on a one-year course. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to collect data from all education establishments regarding offers they have made to 16 and 17 year olds for September. This is called the September Guarantee. It is an important part of our planning and transition support offer. Enabling us to identify those at risk of NEET, gaps in local provision and to work alongside you in supporting our most vulnerable young people.

The process in place to collect this data is a partnership between KCC’s Management Information, The Education People’s Skills and Employability Service and Kent schools and colleges. Despite the challenging times we find ourselves in we are endeavouring to complete this process as usual, however some of the timings have been changed, a letter setting this out is appended and can also be found here: https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/107612/Letter-to-Schools-COVID-19-September-Guarantee-Process.pdf

Alternative Flexible Post 16 Provision

As some of you may be aware, the amount of alternative flexible provision for post-16 pupils outside of schools and colleges reduced significantly over the last year. Research suggests that we have lost over 700 pupil places following the reduction in European Social Fund funding and changes to post 16 funding arrangements with many institutions ceasing or reducing the number of subcontracts they offer. These issues are further exacerbated by the current situation, leading to a significantly diminished offer for our more vulnerable learners and a rise in the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

We have been working with the ESFA to begin a process to bring more contracts into the county. Before we do that, they have asked that we contact all schools/colleges/training providers with direct ESFA contracts to see if they are willing to develop new provisions to meet this need. We intend to work with interested parties and the ESFA to meet the gaps in provision, further guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-market-entry> . If you feel you can help meet this need please contact Mike.Rayner@theeducationpeople.org

Finally, over the weekend the DfE has reorganised their collection of guidance by category. Of particular note is updated guidance relating to supporting vulnerable children and young people and newly released SEND risk assessment guidance.

It is also noticeable that existing references to maintaining provision over the Easter Holidays are slowly being replaced with maintaining provision over 'academic holidays' suggesting that there will be an expectation for provision to continue to be provided during at least the May half term.

The DfE's collection of guidance remains at the same address:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Dunkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Matt Dunkley
Corporate Director
Children, Young People and Education