



All Early Years and Childcare Settings

**Children, Young People and  
Education Directorate**

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Date: 18 March 2020

Dear Colleague

Can I begin by saying thank you to you all, as early years and childcare leaders, for your response so far to this fast developing Covid-19 pandemic. I realise that schools and early years and childcare settings have been at the forefront of the national and scientific debate on the right tactics to respond. I know that has put you and your staff under great pressure, and you have responded magnificently thus far – thank you.

Policy on schools and early years and childcare settings and their closure, or not, is being led nationally by the Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE). We have been told that new guidance will be issued today or tomorrow, including clarifying issues about which staff might be vulnerable and should self-isolate and in what circumstances. It is clear that, at present, the Government position is that there are greater risks associated with closing schools and settings wholesale than with keeping them open

As the UK moves from the containment phase to the delay phase in line with its national CoVID-19 pandemic action plan, I feel it is an appropriate time to clarify and reiterate a number of issues and also to advise of the planning all schools and early years and childcare providers should be undertaking in preparation for any possible impact now that social distancing measures have been introduced. You will have been in receipt of daily updates sent out by The Education People's Early Years and Childcare Service, highlighting the guidance available on-line from PHE. In line with processes already in place, any future updates will continue to be sent to you by email directly and published on Kelsi.

**Update on the National Position**

One of the more obvious features of the Covid-19 outbreak is the pace at which any written update becomes out-of-date. For that reason, I would refer you to the following sources:

*Government Coronavirus Action Plan*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>

*Government Information for the Public*

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

*What you need to know about Covid-19*

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/23/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-what-you-need-to-know/>

*PHE website*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

*World Health Organisation. General information about Covid 19*

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

## **Contacting PHE or 111**

If you have a specific concern about a suspected or confirmed case that affects your school or setting you should contact PHE on 0344 225 3861 (option 1). Additionally, there is an out of hours number, 0844 967 0085 or you could email

[KPU-Kent@phe.gov.uk](mailto:KPU-Kent@phe.gov.uk). If an individual requires advice to discuss their symptoms and best actions, they should call 111. However, calls to 111 should only be in line with latest Government guidance.

## **Emergency Planning**

The section on Influenza in the 'Emergency Planning for Kent Schools 2020-21' guidance is useful in how to prevent and if necessary, manage a flu outbreak in schools and early years and childcare settings. The Covid-19 virus appears to behave similarly to the flu virus and for this reason, I would advise all schools and early years and childcare providers to consult the Influenza section of the guide and assess what precautionary measures they could introduce. This guidance can be found here

<https://www.schoolsemergencyplanning.com/>.

## **Reporting Status to KCC and The Education People**

We are now being asked by the DfE to provide regular updates on how Covid-19 is affecting schools and early years and childcare settings in Kent and we have now moved to producing daily situation reports. Therefore, you should contact your Childcare Sufficiency Officer (group settings) or Childminding Adviser (childminders) either if your setting needs to close (as instructed by PHE and/or because of site inaccessibility) or if you think you will need to adjust your offer due to inadequate staffing ratios. We would also advise that

you keep a register based record of children who are self-isolating because they have displayed symptoms as described by the Chief Medical Officer

If you need any advice about the need to and/or ways in which you could change your offer, your Childcare Sufficiency Officer or Childminding Adviser should be your first point of contact. However, all day to day, operational decisions for your setting in response to CoVID-19, are for the owner/manager to make, in line with PHE guidance. This may be in respect of managing an absence to possibly taking the decision for full or partial closure. You should always ensure that you act in accordance with prevailing national guidance.

## **Closures**

The current advice from Government is that, notwithstanding taking additional precautions, the sector should strive for maintaining business as usual. Closing settings and schools has a massive impact on business continuity and the maintenance of essential services. It is understood that some parents and carers of children may be working in other public service sectors (including emergency services, hospitals and other essential roles). If a setting or school is closed, the parent or carer may be forced to remain away from work to look after their child(ren). This would further deplete the workforce of essential services. Therefore, Kent County Council's policy is that wherever possible, schools and settings should remain open.

However, as we move into the UK Government's delay phase there is now a possibility that PHE may instruct an individual school/setting, schools/settings in a defined area, or even all schools/settings nationally, to close for a period. If you are affected by this, you will have no choice but to follow that instruction. You should also inform Ofsted of any closure, although you may already be aware that Ofsted has temporarily suspended routine inspection activity.

## **Funding**

KCC wishes to support the Early Years and Childcare Sector in relation to business continuity for Free Entitlement places for two, three and four year olds. Please note, this local guidance will be updated as the situation continues to emerge and to reflect any which is subsequently received from the DfE or wider Government announcements to support businesses.

### Free Early Education for Three and Four-Year Olds

#### *Spring Term 2020 Payment*

There will be no recall of funding related to the Spring Term 2020 for any providers which have to temporarily close or have children absent due to Coronavirus.

### *Summer Term 2020 Payment*

The normal funding payment process will be applied for the Summer Term 2020 with a termly payment made for week commencing 16 April based on the estimate submitted by the provider. The funding for the Summer Term will be adjusted at the end of term (week commencing 18 June) to reflect the actual hours recorded on the Summer Term headcount (week commencing 27 April 2020). In the following events it is acceptable for providers to record children's attendance on headcount (based on the Parental Declaration) when absent as a result of the Coronavirus:

1. A provider having to temporarily close for 14 days (or any period that the Government dictates) as a result of the Coronavirus, at the request of the DfE, PHE, the local Health Protection Unit or because of enforced inability to access the site
2. A provision being unable to open due to inadequate staffing as a result of self-isolation or a confirmed Coronavirus diagnosis; our understanding is that PHE keep a record of where and when it has given advice in this respect
3. A child being temporarily absent from a provision as a result of the Coronavirus under the following situations:
  - The child is in isolation, as detailed here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>.
  - The child has been confirmed as having the Coronavirus and for the duration of their illness.
  - The child's primary caregiver and/or the person usually responsible for their attendance at the setting (is unable to drop off or collect the child due to either their own self-isolation or a confirmed diagnosis and/or the same for any member of their household(s).

In each of these circumstances, providers will not be expected to make up missed sessions.

### Free Early Education for Two Year Olds and Early Years Pupil Premium

The normal funding payment process will be applied with the same exceptions, as stated above, for children absent due to the coronavirus.

### **Other Relevant Information**

#### Completion of the Summer Term 2020 Headcount

If, as result of Coronavirus it is not possible for a provider to complete the Summer Term headcount within the required timescale due to the absence of staff who would normally do this, on an individual and exceptional basis an extension to the headcount period will be agreed. If agreed, the administration fee normally associated with a missed headcount appeal will be waived. If you

have an enforced closure actually in headcount week then the administration fee will also be waived but you must have contacted Management Information.

### Evidence for absence

Providers will be expected to follow their usual policies on sickness absence reporting for the Coronavirus as any other illness and ensure that this is clearly marked in the register. If you have a child who you do not believe is ill, but the parent/carer has stated that they are, or where the child is absent for longer than you would anticipate, then we would expect you to follow your own policies and contact KCC's Management Information for guidance. Due to the contagious nature of the Coronavirus we would not expect you to provide sickness certificates as evidence.

### Parents withdrawing a child from their place

It is important to note that if a parent chooses to withdraw their child from the provision under the circumstances where the child (or someone in their family) is not self-isolating or has not been confirmed as having COVID-19, we would deal with these cases in the same way as any child being withdrawn from their place. If the child was in attendance during headcount week the funding will remain with the setting for the rest of that term.

### KCC capacity to process payments in a timely manner

Payments to early years and childcare providers is a key area of focus for Coronavirus planning in the Management Information Team as we are aware that providers cannot function without these payments. We are in the process of ensuring that all staff can work fully from home should the need arise.

### Additional financial support

Currently we are not aware of any additional funding support being made available from central government specifically for early years and childcare providers although this could change. In the meantime, some help may be available for small businesses in general as detailed on the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

## **Child Attendance Matters**

PHE and Government advice on self-isolation has now changed. The latest advice is that anyone who has a new and persistent cough and/or a fever should not attend the setting for fourteen days.

If you or your staff receive such a notification from parents or staff members, you should not require that they attend the setting, but you should (as far as possible) assure yourself that they have taken appropriate actions to protect themselves and others.

## **Staff Attendance Matters**

Clearly under the circumstances you are likely to experience staff absences plus it will likely be more challenging to arrange agency or supply cover. The UK Government is considering relaxing certain legislative requirements to support schools and early years and childcare settings in relation to staff ratios and class size requirements though currently, we are still awaiting definitive guidance on this. We will update you as soon as further information is received.

### **Trips and Visits**

The situation is changing rapidly, and every trip and visit will be different. In the context of it being best practice to conduct a general risk assessment under adverse circumstances, for trips and visits you should make a risk assessment now, and then review it every time a change occurs that could impact on any trip or visit. This would include childminders meeting in groups. In reality, the current position on social distancing makes any trips or visits inadvisable.

### **Safeguarding**

If children are required to remain out of school or early years and childcare provision for a period, this will present challenges in terms of safeguarding responsibilities. Should you have any concerns or queries related to children's safety, advice should be sought from relevant services such as The Education People's Education Safeguarding Team and Integrated Children's Services (Early Help/Children's Social Work).

I hope you receive this letter in the spirit in which it is intended, to ensure we continue to work together and plan effectively through this rapidly evolving situation.

Can I thank you for your all efforts in maintaining business as usual to date.

Yours sincerely



Matt Dunkley CBE  
Corporate Director  
Children, Young People and Education