

Being prepared to meet the differing needs of children

When considering how best to manage your school environment, the best interests of children must always continue to come first. Many children will not have been in a school environment for several weeks when they return. The environment when they last attended will also look and feel very different to what they are used to. Children may also have conflicting feelings around their return, including being anxious at leaving their parents/carers whilst welcoming the opportunity to see their friends and teachers.

Identifying children who need additional support

Although schools have had continuing communication with parents/carers and pupils over the past weeks, for some pupils this may have been minimal and focussed on school work rather than pupil wellbeing or their lived experience of lockdown.

- All parents/carers should be asked for an overview of their child's experiences since lockdown. They should be encouraged to share information such as their relationships with family and peers, any key events in the child's life such as bereavement, illness or the birth of a sibling and specific anxieties they may have about returning to school.
- Appropriate to their age and level of understanding, children and young people should be asked to share any particular issues they wish the school to be made aware of. For younger children, this could be in the form of a pictorial 'story' of their time away from school.
- Designated Safeguarding Leads and Pastoral teams will need to have mechanisms in place to have an oversight of the issues for both individual children and wider themes and respond accordingly, using existing procedures.
- Staff should be especially alert to the fact that children may not have been able to share abusive and/or neglectful experiences during lockdown. Together with reminding all staff of how to respond appropriately (using TED and open questions), all pupils should be able to identify a trusted adult with whom they can talk.
- Staff should be familiar with available resources to respond to any emotional wellbeing issues, both immediate and longer term. Updated resources can be found in the Emotional Wellbeing section of the full opening guidance and can also be found on the <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/>
- Schools should have a 'safe space' for pupils to explore any feelings they may have. Although it may not be possible for this to be a physical space, pastoral teams should explore the use of online platforms to aid this, adhering to online safety guidance.
- If children are using wraparound care, mechanisms should be in place to liaise with staff in those settings to discuss their specific needs.

Vulnerable pupils

Designated Safeguarding Leads and pastoral staff should:

- Liaise with multiagency colleagues to identify how best to meet the needs of pupils who are particularly vulnerable, including those identified as vulnerable since March 2020.
- Consider how best to integrate the children who have attended school for some or most of the lockdown period with the return of all pupils, whilst maintaining the confidentiality of the vulnerable pupils.
- Ensure all contact details of multiagency colleagues are up to date and accurate.
- Ensure DSL trained staff are available to attend and contribute to multiagency meetings.

Safeguarding Records

Staff may need to be reminded of the school's existing record keeping mechanisms and, if using a paper-based method, the location and availability of blank records and how they should be shared with the DSL.

DSLs will need to review any concerns about vulnerable children during lockdown period and ensure that safeguarding records are updated to hold the most up to date information, including any multiagency and emergency contacts. A chronology of events should also be present in every file.

Transition, including file transfer

Designated Safeguarding Leads need to have an overview of all children who are due to join the school, as well as ensuring they share any relevant information about children who are leaving their school.

Prior to transition, DSLs need to:

- Review any concerns about vulnerable children during the lockdown period and ensure that safeguarding records are updated
- Check all safeguarding files to ensure they contain all known information and that it is presented in the correct way and on the correct form
- Ensure safeguarding chronology is present in each file, listing key events and identifying where they can be found in the file
- Liaise with the relevant school or pre-school and make arrangements to discuss any children about whom there are welfare concerns
- Be clear who retains responsibility of the child during the transition phase, including liaison with multiagency colleagues and attendance at multiagency meetings.
- Ensure safeguarding files are transferred to/received by new school before the pupil starts at the school.

For further advice on any of the issues can be sought from [The Education Safeguarding Service](#)