



To all Headteachers

**Children, Young People and
Education Directorate**

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Date: 2nd December 2020

Dear Colleague

As we come to the end of lockdown and enter Tier 3 restrictions, the significant challenges facing our children and young people (CYP) continues to increase. The true impact of the loss of learning, wellbeing support and wrap around care that children and young people, especially our most vulnerable, have experienced this year is yet to be realised.

Today's announcement that a vaccine has been approved for use in the UK, with rollout expected to commence next week gives us all hope that the end to the current circumstances is in sight. This will quickly usher in the next phase, trying to help all our children and young people recover the ground lost in all aspects of their lives.

We recognise the challenges schools, settings and colleges are facing now and the very difficult decisions you are having to make. We also recognise that the next phase will be hard for all of us. I would like to thank you and your staff once more for your continued efforts.

SEND Strategy Consultation

As part of our ongoing work to improve our collective provision for CYP with SEND, we are pleased to share with you our draft SEND strategy for consultation. The strategy is an important part of the improvement work we are doing with the NHS, following our [inspection](#) of services carried out by OFSTED and CQC in 2019. We have developed the strategy in partnership with children and young people, parents and carers, Kent PACT, NHS and other key stakeholders. The County Education Reference Group comprising headteachers has also been consulted.

The strategy sets out our ambitions to make sure that all children in Kent have equal access to support and education that meets their unique needs and that they and their families are supported to live their best life. It also explains how we will shape our services for children and their families in a way that improves wellbeing, resilience and learning in our communities.

The strategy and consultation documentation can be found at:
www.kent.gov.uk/sendstrategyconsultation

We are keen to hear your views about the strategy. The consultation is open from Wednesday 2nd December and will remain open until midnight, Thursday 4th February. If you would like an officer to attend one of your local collaboration meetings to discuss, please email sendstrategy@kent.gov.uk

We are keen to hear the views of the wider stakeholder group and request your help in reaching this wider group. Embedded below is a letter for your parents and carers, inviting them to respond to the consultation. We would be grateful if you would circulate the letter with your young people's parents and carers.



Letter to Parents
SEND strategy consul

We are also keen to have some focus groups, facilitated discussions with young people, likely to be in January 2021. If your school is willing to work with us on this, please also email sendstrategy@kent.gov.uk.

Workforce fund and contingency framework for education and childcare settings

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced a coronavirus workforce fund to support schools and colleges facing the greatest combined staffing and funding pressures and will cover the costs of high levels of staff absences over a minimum threshold, to help ensure schools and colleges can remain open. Full details are not available yet, but the press release linked below provides more information. In summary:

Schools will be able to reclaim costs incurred over the course of the current half term, if they meet the following conditions:

- Financial: Schools will first need to use any existing financial reserves. They will be eligible for this additional funding once they have used these down to a level at 4% of the annual income.
- Absence rates: Mainstream schools be experiencing a short-term teacher absence rate at or above 20%, and/or a lower long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10% - costs can only be claimed when incurred above this rate
- Absence rates: Special schools and Alternative Provision schools must be experiencing a short-term teacher absence rate at or above 15%, and/or a lower long-term teacher absence rate at or above 10%, to be eligible - costs can only be claimed when incurred above this rate

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-funding-to-support-schools-and-colleges-during-covid-pandemic>

The DfE also published an updated coronavirus contingency framework for education and childcare settings. This guidance sets out how the Government would manage the exceptional circumstances in which further restrictions were required on education, to help contain virus transmission within a community.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings?utm_source=27%20November%202020%20C19&utm_medium=Daily%20Email%20C19&utm_campaign=DfE%20C19

December school break – providing food for children who receive benefits-related free school meals

Please may we politely remind you that the deadline for submission is today (Wednesday 2nd December 2020) and we are grateful for your quick response in these challenging times. The data sheet needs to be submitted to the following email address: kccfreeschoolmeals@aqilisys.co.uk.

If schools have any child who receives UIFSMs who may be eligible for benefits related FSM, there is still time for the child/family to get support from the winter grant and receive a voucher. Parents of children in YR-2 can see if they receive any qualifying benefits even if they receive the universal offer via this link <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>. Then they can apply online on the basis of income via this link <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/free-school-meals#tab-2>. The parents and school will be notified of the online outcome immediately.

Schools will be able to submit a second form containing details of any new benefits related FSM children. This form needs to be sent to us by close of play on 9th December in order for us to be able to issue these children's families their Winter Free School Meal vouchers before the holiday period. As you know, if a parent has not registered their eligible child for FSM the school will be missing out on pupil premium payments, so any support you can offer families to apply for benefits related FSM will help the school's budget moving forward. If you have already submitted a form and need to add children please complete a second data sheet with just the additional children included and return it to: kccfreeschoolmeals@aqilisys.co.uk.

Test and Trace support payment for parents

We understand that you have had questions from parents wanting to understand who is eligible and how they can apply for the Test & Trace Support Payment. This payment is only payable if the parent has been **directly asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace**. Unfortunately, where children have been sent home from school due to a positive coronavirus case in their bubble or a partial or full school closure, they are **not** able to claim this funding. Attached is a letter for you to share with parents outlining the process for this:



Test & Trace Support
Payment Information.

If the impact of children being sent home and parents having to look after them has placed the family in financial hardship, they may still be eligible for other support schemes, including the [Kent Support & Assistance Service](#).

Schools opening

You will have seen in the press the ongoing discussion nationally regarding some schools wishing to finish this term early or moving to online learning in the run up to Christmas as a “circuit breaker” for families, and the legal status of student absence during this period. We have been asked by several schools to comment on this, and I know the Regional Schools Commissioner has recently written to some Academies and Trusts in Kent in relation to this, making it very clear the position of the DfE is that Schools should not be considering such early closures .

The Government has made it a national priority to keep schools open and stressed that children and young people should be in school when they are well and not required to self-isolate. Regular attendance is imperative for both their learning and their physical and mental well-being. The vast majority of Kent schools have remained open throughout the entirety of the pandemic – for vulnerable learners and the children of key workers in the first lockdown, and for all pupils since September. School staff have done a fantastic job of managing extremely difficult circumstances effectively and safely and we have every confidence they will continue to do so. We will continue to share the latest guidance and advice from the Department for Education and Public Health England with schools, to enable them to safely stay as open as possible.

We will also support schools to work with families to achieve optimal attendance. Issuing parents and carers with a fixed penalty notice for their child’s absence has always been a last resort and we have no plans to change that. We will also need to factor in that some children and young people may have been required to self-isolate after having come into contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Ultimately, good school attendance remains vital and we will continue to focus on achieving this as we move towards the December holidays.

Winter 2020/21 Guidance

Due to COVID-19, this winter is already proving to be one of the most challenging for many years for schools and educational settings. However, there is a possibility that the issues schools are already contending with could be exacerbated by other factors, two of which could be the impact on certain areas of Kent from the end of the Brexit transition period and severe weather.

For this reason, KCC has taken the previously published Brexit and Winter Guidance documents and amalgamated them to provide a winter 2020/21 guidance and FAQ pack,

which aims to highlight any additional actions schools may need to consider over and above the work already being undertaken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The updated guidance can be found here:

https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0005/89168/Winter-2020-21-Guidance-to-Kent-Schools.docx

https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0017/115901/KCC-Winter-2020-21-FAQ.docx

If you have any queries concerning the issues highlighted in the documents, please contact your Area Education Officer.

Finally, our message to you all is to thank you all once more for continuing to manage this situation with the safety of staff and pupils as your principal consideration. We are here to support you and will continue to endeavour to keep you updated and supported as we move into the recovery phase.

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 CBE
Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education