

Friday 20th March 2020

Corona Virus – an update on how schools are operating

Dear Parents,

I am writing to give you further guidance on the way that schools across Essex will be operating over the coming weeks. These changes cover all registered childcare providers (including nurseries and childminders), maintained and academy primary schools, maintained and academy secondary schools; special schools, further education colleges and independent schools.

Firstly, I want to be clear that following the Government directive issued on Wednesday, as from the end of today (Friday 20th March) schools across Essex will be closed. This is to limit the chance of the virus spreading. The Government have indicated that by limiting the number of children who attend schools, settings and colleges, the spread of the virus will reduce and lower the risk to vulnerable individuals in our communities.

School, settings and colleges are being directed to continue to provide care for a limited number of children - children who are deemed vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the Covid19 response and cannot be cared for safely at home.

The Government have defined vulnerable children as children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

The list of critical workers can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

Even with some limited support for parents of vulnerable children and critical workers, the advice from the Government is clear: if you can safely look after your children during this time of a national emergency, then you should do so.

Children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)

If your child has an EHCP they will be able to attend a school, college or setting. This is an offer and there is no requirement for you to send your child(ren) to school if you do not need to or wish not to do so, you must let your education provider know what you decide.

It is likely that there will be changes to the opening times for some schools in order to remain open in a safe way. Your school will provide you with details of what their plans are and what any changes will mean for you and your child(ren).

The Government are putting legislation in place to temporarily amend parts of the Children and Families Act 2014, including those relating to special educational provision and health care provision in EHCPs. It is highly unlikely that schools, settings and colleges will be able

to provide the same provision that is in your child's current plan but they will work with you around suitable arrangements for your child(ren). There will be delays in the timescales for requests for assessment and new EHCPs during this time.

The majority of children with SEND, who receive SEN Support at school but do not have an EHCP, are expected to stay at home, unless as a parent you are deemed a critical worker. For children with health needs or underlying health conditions

Schools and colleges will work with parents to make a case by case assessment of the health and safeguarding considerations of children with an EHCP. For some, they will be safer in an education provision. For others, they will be safer at home. Schools and colleges will discuss this with you.

If you are a critical worker:

Children with at least one parent or carer identified as a critical worker by the Government can send their children to a school, college or setting if required. The list of critical workers is above.

Even though you may be deemed a critical worker, it is expected that if your child(ren) can stay at home, they should do so.

Schools, settings and colleges will not be able to provide an education offer to your child(ren) but will be able to provide facilities to enable you to go to work. All normal and usual education activity has been suspended during this emergency period.

If you are not a critical worker and your child(ren) is not classified as vulnerable:

We appreciate that this is a concerning time for all parents, but we are all being urged to do what we can to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 is clear. If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

That is why the government has asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and directed schools to be open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.

Education resources for children

Schools, colleges and settings will be providing a range of resources to support you at home with your child(ren).

Schools are working closely with the Local Authority and the Headteacher Associations in order to offer a consistent and safe response to the current crisis. The health and safety of your children is everyone's first priority.

Thank you for your co-operation at this time.

Kind Regards,

Clare Kershaw Director of Education

Sent of behalf of: Essex County Council The Association of Secondary Headteachers in Essex Essex Primary Headteacher Association Essex Special Schools Education Trust.