

# Frequently Asked Questions for West Sussex Early Years and Childcare Providers – COVID-19 response

**25 March 2020**

These questions seek to provide additional information specific to West Sussex early years providers. In this document, where we refer to settings or providers, this includes all early years providers, groups settings and childminders.

Please make sure you continue to check the information on the government website to ensure you have the most up to date information:

[Gov.UK - COVID-19: implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings](#)(NEW)

[Gov.UK – COVID-19: early years and childcare closures](#) (NEW)

[Gov.UK – COVID-19: changes to standard and enhanced ID checking guidelines](#) (NEW)

[Gov.UK – COVID-19: guidance around 'key workers'](#)

[Gov.UK - COVID-19: guidance for educational settings](#)

[Gov.UK - COVID-19: guidance on vulnerable children and young people](#)

[Gov.UK - COVID-19: closure of educational settings information for parents and carers](#)

[Gov.UK - COVID-19: free-childcare-offers-to-continue-during-coronavirus-closures](#)

[Gov.UK - COVID 19: support for businesses](#)

[NHS111](#)

[Public Health England](#)

[Public Health England](#) (blog)

[West Sussex County Council](#)

## **Department for Education coronavirus telephone helpline:**

Queries about coronavirus (COVID-19), relating to schools and other educational establishments in England:

- 0800 0468687 (0800-1800 Monday-Friday)
- [DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk](mailto:DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk)

## **1. Does the Prime Minister's announcement on 23 March and the guidance provided on 24 March change the offer of childcare for children?**

The promise to provide childcare for vulnerable children and the children of key workers has not changed. However, the new announcements may mean that families review the amount of childcare that they need to access, but this will be a parental decision.

The first aim of the partial closure measures set out by the Secretary of State for Education is to reduce the overall population of children and families moving around local areas as far as possible, in order to further reduce the number of social interactions and thus flatten the upward curve of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The second aim is to continue to care for children who are vulnerable, or whose parents are critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response so that they can continue to work where alternative childcare arrangements cannot be made.

This [flowchart](#) may help you have discussions with families about whether or not they should be accessing childcare.

## **2. How can we best support children over this period?**

Children will all be responding to this situation in different ways, so it is important to take the time to observe and listen to each child to try and understand how they are feeling and respond to them based on what you feel they need. This may be particularly difficult if you are working with children that you don't usually have in your setting and therefore know less well, so talking to parents to find out more can be helpful. Thinking about the emotional environment in your setting is never more important than now. There are useful resources available to support you and you can talk to your EYCA if you need more support.

Some resources you may like to look at:

[Tips: discussing difficult subjects](#)

[Helping Children Feel Safe in Stressful Times](#)

## **3. Can we merge care with other settings to share staff if we only have 1 or 2 children attending our own setting?**

Merging settings can be a positive solution and could offer more stability to children and staff over the coming weeks. If you are planning to do this, it is important that you think through the practicalities of this, ensure that you meet all statutory and safeguarding requirements and that you have insurance to cover this arrangement as well as ensuring you meet Public Health England guidance to limit the spread of the disease. Your EYCA can provide support to help you with making plans to work with another provider.

There is further information and guidance around DBS checks in the link at the top of this document.

Please ensure that you keep the FIS informed of your current status and where/how you are operating, updating this whenever anything changes. Please also use this email to request support from your EYCA.

#### **4. Is WSCC expecting term time only settings to remain open throughout the holiday periods?**

Government advice is that, where possible, we would encourage childcare providers, schools and colleges to continue to look after key workers' children and vulnerable children throughout the school holidays. There is no expectation on settings to open beyond their normal hours, but if you are able to do this to meet the needs of your community, we are happy for you to do this.

Please ensure that you keep the FIS informed by email of your current status and where/how you are operating, updating this whenever anything changes.

#### **5. If you send a child home with a temperature and or cough should the setting close for two weeks?**

The setting should continue to comply with Public Health England guidance to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the family should be asked to self-isolate in accordance with guidelines.

Public Health England has [resource materials](#) that contain public health advice about how you can help stop the spread of viruses, like those that cause coronavirus (COVID-19), by practising good respiratory and hand hygiene. To access, download and share this information, you will need to register for an account which only takes a couple of minutes.

Settings should endeavour to implement higher hygiene standards than normal in order to help minimise the risk of infection.

- clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces more often than usual using your standard cleaning products
- supervise young children to ensure they wash their hands for 20 seconds more often than usual with soap and water or hand sanitiser
- catch coughs and sneezes in tissues.

You can find cleaning and disinfecting guidance [here](#).

#### **6. I have a parent and their boss claiming she as a dinner lady is a key worker, school support staff were not included in the key worker list. Would you agree she is providing critical work by providing meals at a school?**

The initial guidance provided does not include a definitive list of key workers, but this does appear to be critical work to support the schools to stay open. We would suggest she asks the school she is working for to confirm her status and that you offer childcare for the hours she needs to carry out her work, if you have places.

**7. We are being asked to work during the holidays - do we charge parents for this. Our hours have also increased to 8am-4pm Monday to Friday to help the parents in keyworker roles. Can I charge families accessing a place at my setting if it is over and above their FE hours?**

If you are not normally open during the school holidays, you can charge parents for hours over and above their FE hours. Consideration should be given to the child's usual pattern of FE.

In light of the steps the government has taken already to support businesses, we are asking providers to be reasonable and balanced in their dealings with parents, given the great uncertainty they will be facing too.

**8. I am a childminder who doesn't have any children claiming Free Entitlement. As my fee paying children currently are not attending I don't have any income. What financial assistance is there?**

There is new information (within [Parliament's Coronavirus Bill here](#)) for people who are self-employed which will be relevant to many in the early years and childcare sector, including childminders.

This states that the self-employed can claim either 80% of monthly net earnings averaged over the last three years, or £2,917 (whichever is lowest).

**9. For families who don't meet the criteria of a key worker or vulnerable child, where we think the disruption will cause mental health issues, could we offer to take their children once a week for relief?**

While we do understand the reasons for offering childcare, government advice is clear that children should be cared for at home where possible so you should not offer childcare to any child who does not meet the criteria. In the government update of 14 March, there was some flexibility introduced for vulnerable children:

**10. Can settings take a flexible approach to the vulnerable children definition depending on their local circumstances?**

We know that settings will have knowledge of children they consider vulnerable who have not yet been formally recognised as such, for example, children who have been referred to children's social care but do not yet have a social worker. It is reasonable for settings to decide to include such children, although they should take care to balance this with overall numbers of children attending their setting. Settings should liaise with their local authority, which will be closely

monitoring supply and demand and where their vulnerable children are attending.

Eligibility for free school meals, the early years pupil premium, or the disadvantaged 2-year-old offer should not, in and of themselves, be a determining factor in assessing vulnerability.

Settings should work with local authorities to monitor with the welfare of vulnerable children who are not accessing provision, and other pupils they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes.

Please discuss individual cases with professionals involved in supporting the child you are worried about or with an EYCA to risk assess the needs and the health factors before making a decision.

### **11. I'm already seeing people on social media offering unregistered childcare. What protection is in place to prevent this happening?**

The Government is clear that people should be staying at home and ensuring social distancing to help defeat this virus. Companies and individuals offering unregistered childcare are going against Government advice and are likely to also be breaking safeguarding laws. Ofsted already has the power to conduct triggered inspections of unregistered care and to investigate reports of unregistered care. If you are aware of this happening in your local community, you should contact Ofsted.

### **12. Please advise how after school clubs and holiday clubs will be supported as we do not receive funding like nurseries.**

On 24 March, the government has provided clarity on who is included in the childcare guidance. Their guidance covers Ofsted-registered childcare providers for children of all ages, including childminders, nurseries and wraparound childcare and clubs (before- and after- school and holiday care). Therefore, when making decisions about your provision, please refer to the government information for childcare and business.

If you need further support, please email FIS as per the instructions at the end of this document.

### **13. If a key worker is currently on maternity leave, can they access childcare for their children?**

The places for children of key workers are to enable them to carry out tasks to support the current COVID-19 work, so if a key worker is not currently working, they should stay at home with their children which is the safest place for them to be.

#### **14. If a child with an EHCP has a sibling, can their sibling attend the setting too?**

Unless that child is also vulnerable or has a parent who is a key worker, then the answer is no as the safest place for them to be is at home. This may affect the parent's decision for the child with an EHCP about accessing childcare and that is their decision to make.

#### **15. Can key staff take pupil confidential information home when working remotely?**

Children's confidential information should be managed in line with current GDPR requirements and the setting's policies. This should be stored securely on site wherever possible but, where this needs to be taken home, it is up to individuals to ensure that data remains secure at all times.

**If you have any additional questions, please email us at [family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk) and title your email "COVID-19 setting query". Please also read all FAQs already provided to see if you can adapt an answer to help you with your query. We will review any new questions and post answers regularly over the coming weeks via the broadcast email.**