

COVID-19: RESPONDING TO PREVENT RISKS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR CONFERENCE

Q&A BRIEFING

The following questions were submitted by participants who attended a virtual conference hosted by the DfE and LGfL on the 27th August 2020.

Q1. PLEASE COULD YOU DISCUSS THE VULNERABILITIES, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHOSE PARENTS HAVE DECIDED TO OPT FOR HOME EDUCATION PRIOR TO OR FOLLOWING COVID-19 - INCLUDING WHERE A CHILD MAY HAVE ADDITIONAL NEEDS THAT FORM A FACTOR IN THE DECISION TO HOME EDUCATE.

In the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, some LAs may be receiving an increase in enquiries from parents about Elective Home Education (EHE). We will be issuing guidance to local authorities in the coming weeks setting out our expectations and providing material to support engagement with parents. Where a parent raises the issues, we strongly recommend that LAs work with schools, parents and carers, and other key professionals (such as social workers) to coordinate a meeting before any decision is made, in order to fully consider what is in the best interests of each individual child. This is particularly important where vulnerable children, children with a social worker, and those at greatest risk of harm are involved.

Q2. DO YOU THINK THE INCREASED SOCIAL ISOLATION HAS EFFECTED THE RISK TO THOSE VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS, WHO WERE ALREADY FEELING LONELY AND ISOLATED, AND WHAT IS BEING DONE WITH PARENTS AND CARERS TO HELP LIMIT THIS INCREASED RISK TO THIS VULNERABLE GROUP?

The return of children and young people to full-time education this autumn, together with settings devoting time to supporting wellbeing, will play a fundamental part in supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during COVID. Our [guidance](#) to schools, supports them to do this, signposting a range of training and materials, including webinars which have been accessed by thousands of staff.

To support school and college staff respond to the issues that children and young people have on returning to education this autumn, the Government is investing £8 million to launch the new Wellbeing for Education Return training and resources. This programme, run by mental health experts, aims to improve how settings respond to the emotional impact of the

coronavirus pandemic on their students and staff. This is additional to longer term work to improve support, including the new mental health support teams that we are rolling out across the country, linked to schools and colleges.

DfE has been working closely with health partners to provide resources and update guidance to support and promote CYP MH during the pandemic, including:

- PHE has published new [online guidance setting out principles to follow to help people to manage their mental health](#). PHE also published [guidance on supporting children and young people's mental health](#).

Several other resources are available for educational staff, parents and carers and children and young people, including:

- **MindEd** - a free educational resource from Health Education England on children and young people's mental health.
- **Rise Above** is a website co-created and produced by young people.
- **Every Mind Matters** includes an online tool and email journey which aims to support everyone to feel more confident in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing.
- Barnardo's **See, Hear, Respond** programme, focusing on finding and reaching out to vulnerable children around the country who are experiencing negative impacts on their health and wellbeing, as well as those at risk of harm; and are not being seen by statutory agencies.
- **Bereavement UK** and the **Childhood Bereavement Network** provide information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff.

Q3. THE WAY SCHOOLS ARE ENGAGING WITH PUPILS OVER THE PANDEMIC LOCK DOWN PERIOD HAS BEEN IN CONSISTENT AND IN SOME CASES VERY POOR AND OTHERS VERY GOOD. WHAT IS BEING DONE TO ENSURE THAT THERE IS A MINIMUM STANDARD OF PUPIL ENGAGEMENT AND A CONSISTENT APPROACH IN ORDER TO PREVENT STUDENTS DROPPING OFF THE RADAR IF LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS ARE IMPOSED AGAIN EITHER AT A LOCAL LEVEL OR NATIONALLY?

If a local area sees a spike in infection rates that is resulting in localised community spread, appropriate authorities will decide which measures to implement to help contain the spread. The Department for Education will be involved in decisions at a local and national level affecting a geographical area and will support appropriate authorities and individual settings to follow the health advice.

On 28 August, the Department for Health and Social Care published [guidance for local decision makers on the COVID-19 contain framework](#), which sets out how national and local partners

will work with the public at a local level to prevent, contain, and manage outbreaks. This guidance also provides an overview of the tiers of restrictions for education and childcare.

In the event of a school having a confirmed case or outbreak, which results in a class, group or small number of pupils needing to self-isolate, or where some level of restriction to attendance at school is required in a local area (from a national direction), which means some pupils being required to remain at home, we expect schools to have the capacity to offer immediate remote education. Schools are expected to consider how to continue to improve the quality of their existing offer and have a strong contingency plan in place for remote education provision by the end of September. This planning will be particularly important to support a scenario in which the logistical challenges of remote provision are greatest, for example where large numbers of pupils are required to remain at home.

The government will also explore making a temporary continuity direction in the autumn term, to give additional clarity to schools, pupils, and parents as to what remote education should be provided. DfE will engage with the sector before a final decision is made on this.

Q4. IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF US ELECTIONS FUELLED RIGHT WING ACTIVISM IN THIS COUNTRY?

There is little evidence to suggest the ongoing US election is ‘fuelling’ Right Wing Activism in the UK, however, some users engaging with UK based Right-Wing extremist content online have shown interest in the topic. For example, engaging with and spreading conspiracy theories associated with the election. It is possible that interest could increase following the outcome of the US election.