



Children First Northamptonshire

Supporting Vulnerable Children in Education: interim Strategy during COVID-19

1. Overview

During the COVID-19 Pandemic the Local Authority has produced this interim strategy for supporting vulnerable children who **are/are not** attending school.

On 20th March 2020 the Government asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, as part of the response to coronavirus (COVID-19). Schools and childcare providers were asked to remain partially open to provide ongoing care for a limited number of children:

- Those children who are assessed as vulnerable, (defined as children with a Social Worker;
- Those children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home; and
- Those children with an Education Health and Care Plan.

In Northamptonshire the education settings have worked positively with the Local Authority and as at 20 April 2020 **93%** of education settings have remained open for vulnerable children and children of key workers in the first weeks of this COVID response.

2. Number of Northamptonshire settings open

This has meant that in the first two weeks of partial school closures:-

A daily average of 426 Vulnerable Children have taken up an offer of a school place.

A daily average of 1479 Critical Worker children have taken up an offer of a school place.

3. Strategic Aims

The Local Authority's strategic aims during this period are:-

- To continue to support schools to remain open for vulnerable children and critical workers' children during the pandemic response. This will be through information, advice, support and coordination of services during this period including the co-ordinating of resources to enable schools to remain open where possible.
- To ensure vulnerable children who are not attending an education provision to have a multi-agency safeguarding response and oversight during this period out of school.
- To ensure that children who are at risk of social care involvement due to new neglect or abuse whilst not attending school have a multi-agency safeguarding response.
- To ensure that resources and information are provided to parents in order to assist them in identifying an appropriate school place for these three groups of children or support for keeping the child at home where appropriate.



- To ensure that appropriate plans are developed to maintain and potentially increase the provision available for vulnerable children and children of critical workers as the pandemic develops. It is recognised that the demand for vulnerable children to be in school may increase as the length of time subject to lockdown extends.
- To seek to ensure that appropriate provision for these children is maintained during periods of holiday such as Easter, Spring and Summer break in order to provide this important safety net as part of an emergency response.
- To enable all agencies to work together co-operatively in order to maximise resources and focus attention on the most vulnerable groups.

4. Government guidance states:-

Vulnerable Children-There is an expectation that vulnerable children and young people will continue to attend educational provision, where it is appropriate for them to do so. The Government appreciates that decisions on attendance will likely be based on finely balanced discussions between the education provider, the parent/carer, and others, including social workers, local authorities, and other relevant professionals where applicable.

Providers should make judgments with these partners about whether it is beneficial and appropriate for children and young people to continue to attend educational settings. In doing so they may need to consider the balance of risk, including health vulnerabilities, family circumstances and the child or young person's assessed special educational needs.

That where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting COVID19, professionals will talk through these worries with the parent/carer following the advice set out by Public Health England.

These decisions will be risk based and recorded by the education setting and the Local Authority Social Worker. A formal risk assessment process may be used should that be deemed appropriate.

That Children with an EHC plan will be risk-assessed in consultation with the Local Authority and parents and a decision will be made about whether they should continue to attend school.

Each vulnerable child will have an individual risk assessment undertaken by the **Social Worker and the education setting** incorporating views from Health, where relevant, and the Virtual School, where relevant.

This risk assessment will agree if the child will attend school or not, and if not the arrangements for:-

- Monitoring safeguarding contact-who and how often and by what means
- Frequency and type of communication between agencies about the monitoring and any increases in risk
- Individual support plan and contingency plan
- Timescale for review





5. Availability of School Places

The Local Authority will work with school leaders to support schools to remain open and offer places to vulnerable children and those required for critical workers. Where it is not possible for the school to remain open, the Local Authority will support schools in identifying other suitable provision to support this group of children.

The LSE Service will offer regular virtual meetings with all LA Maintained Schools on a locality basis and with all CEOs of Academies during April, these will be reviewed alongside Government announcements. The purpose of these meetings will be to ensure two way feedback of emerging/best practice, share issues of concern and activities for the wider partnership in Northamptonshire to resolve.

The Local Authority will work with all schools to identify any areas of concern e.g. coverage due to sickness and will continue to develop plans in partnership in order to ensure that vulnerable children and children of key workers are able to access a school place where needed.

The Local Authority will provide information and advice to parents of vulnerable children and critical workers about the availability of school provision in their locality.

The Local Authority will monitor the daily provision and take up of school places during the COVID pandemic.

6. Attendance Monitoring

The Local Authority will collect attendance records from all schools in Northamptonshire on a weekly basis in order to understand the attendance Vulnerable Learners. The mechanism for this will be agreed with Schools and will work alongside the national DFE data requirement so as not to duplicate where possible.

It remains the responsibility of the school to ensure that non-attendance of individual vulnerable children is communicated directly to the Social Worker and EHC Worker where relevant. The overall school attendance of vulnerable children will be shared with colleagues in Children's Services (EHC Team, Social Care and Targeted Support Services) and other relevant external agencies in order to monitor any areas of concern.

7. Safeguarding Expectations of Schools

The Local Authority will support schools to identify who their vulnerable children are and work in partnership with schools to complete risk assessments which are jointly agreed and use all available resources e.g. school, Health, Social Care, Early Help services to wrap around support where this support is assessed as needed.

The Local Authority will provide all schools with regular updated guidance regarding interim safeguarding arrangements that need to be in place during this emergency period.

The Local Authority will provide an example interim Child Protection policy addendum to cover the arrangements required during this period.



The Local Authority will seek assurance from all schools that appropriate measures are in place to safeguard their vulnerable children based on local and national guidance from the Department for Education on safeguarding.

The Local Authority will work with Schools to support their safeguarding arrangements e.g. home visits, telephone contact and seek to make the best use of available resource to safeguard our vulnerable children.

The Local Authority will support schools to be proactive in identifying Hidden Harm and children who are newly at risk of abuse or neglect whilst not attending school.

8. Information Sharing

Information which is key to safeguarding vulnerable children will need to be shared across internal local authority teams and external agencies when applicable. This information includes, but is not limited to, list of school closures, attendance data, RAG rating of vulnerable children.

9. Role of Educational Psychologists The service are providing a range of useful psychoeducational materials in their support of education staff, parents/carers and young people to cope with the current situation and the impact this may be having on emotional wellbeing. They continue to be available for education settings to contact them directly for advice and support through this period regarding organisational issues or for an individual child, whether for business-as-usual reasons or to support due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The service will also be part of the LA response to support the planning for education settings, families and young people to return to normality.

10. Communication

Communication with schools needs to be coordinated and streamlined to ensure that key messages from agencies are prioritised. All communication to schools should be coordinated through the Learning Skills and Education Service within the Local Authority. Please send all information for inclusion in regular updates to all schools in Northamptonshire to:-

LSE-admin@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk