

# BCP Virtual School: Guidance on Maintaining Educational Provision for Children in Care.



(1<sup>st</sup> April 2020)

**This document details the salient points from current guidance and outlines the Virtual Schools current expectations and offer of support. It supersedes any previously issued communications from the Virtual School.**

The BCP Virtual School will not be maintaining a presence at Town Hall for the foreseeable future. Details of the Leadership Team duty rota with contact information will be regularly updated on the Virtual School webpages:

<https://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/childreducation/ChildrensSocialCare/LookedAfterChildren/VirtualSchoolForLookedAfterChildren.aspx>

<https://www.poole.gov.uk/children-and-families/virtual-school-for-looked-after-children/>

General enquiries can be emailed to: [virtual.school@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:virtual.school@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

Virtual School Education Officers will continue to monitor their existing caseloads whilst schools are closed. Details of current staffing arrangements can be found on the Virtual School webpages.

**The latest information and guidance from the DfE (including advice about social distancing in education settings) can be found here:**

<https://www.gov.uk/search/all?organisations%5B%5D=department-for-education&order=updated-newest&parent=department-for-education>

**The DfE's dedicated coronavirus helpline can be reached on 0800 046 8687**

**Deciding whether a Child in Care should attend education provision:**

BCP Children's Services are committed to actively **encouraging vulnerable children to attend school** in line with government expectations.

The latest DfE guidance<sup>1</sup> is clear that there is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend education provision, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk. Furthermore, the guidance is clear that eligibility for this offer extends to all children who are in Care to the Local Authority.

It has been recognised that education can be instrumental in protecting care placements and the latest guidance reflects this – the moral imperative remains with schools to support CiC, particularly if doing so will provide placement stability.

Those Children in Care with an EHC plan should be risk-assessed by their school / education setting in consultation with the local authority and parents / carers, to decide whether they can safely have their needs met at home or whether they need the additional support that a school / college place can provide. Whilst provision for those CiC with EHCPs will be made on a needs basis, **schools should not make a unilateral decision that a child is safe and can have their needs met at home.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing>

Foster carers who are over 70 or have an underlying health condition are advised to discuss the situation with their social worker to arrive at a decision **that is in the best interest of the child.**

Likewise, carers who have concerns about the health of anyone in their household should discuss these concerns with their social worker in the first instance.

In respect of Care Experienced Young People, the wider flexibility in the guidance allows schools to assess vulnerability on a case by case basis. The Virtual School will maintain its advice and guidance role with regard to those CEYP who are subject to Adoption, Child Arrangement and Special Guardianship Orders.

The Virtual School are asking that Social Workers continue to liaise with parents/carers and arrive at a decision on whether the child should be attending school in line with the most up to date guidance. Further guidance on the decision-making process will follow in due course.

Where the decision is taken that a Child in Care does not need to attend school (or other educational provision), then the social worker must notify that provision at the earliest available opportunity and then alert the Virtual School.

The Virtual School will monitor school attendance of Children in Care via its own attendance tracker, supported by Welfare Call where capacity allows.

### **Early Years Settings:**

Childcare providers continue to be responsible for caring for vulnerable children. Providers should try to remain open to support these children.

As with schools and Post-16 providers, the definition of vulnerable children extends to Children in Care and those who have EHCPs. **All Children in Care to the local authority are eligible.**

As with school age children, **there is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend their early years setting, so long as it is safe for them to do so.** In circumstances where a parent/carer does not want a vulnerable child to attend, the social worker and setting should explore the reasons for this directly with the parent/carer

Those children with an EHCP should be risk-assessed by settings in consultation with the local authority and parents/carers to decide whether they still need a childcare place, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. Further guidance on the decision-making process will follow in due course.

**Parents/carers of vulnerable children will not be penalised if their child does not attend an Early Years setting.**

The Virtual School will (as part of the Local Authority's coordinated response), work with providers to agree the provision needed locally to support identified needs.

### **Residential Settings:**

Residential children's homes, special schools and colleges, other residential, and mainstream boarding schools, are usually considered households for the purposes of the household self-isolation policy. Therefore, the setting should self-isolate if a resident displays symptoms. **The approach to self-isolation will depend on the physical layout of the setting and staffing arrangements.**

Staff ratios must be maintained at a safe level to protect children and young people. The Virtual School will (as part of the Local Authority's coordinated response) liaise with children's homes, and special schools and colleges, to regularly monitor staffing levels. This is particularly important for those pupils or students whose needs mean they are safer remaining in the setting than returning home.

The Virtual School will (as part of the Local Authority's coordinated response) work with settings to draft in staff from other settings in order to maintain safe pupil-staff ratios. This recognises that staffing should be prioritised towards the most vulnerable pupils and students, particularly those in residential provision.

If social workers or police need to visit and investigate child protection concerns, such professionals should be admitted to the home while observing appropriate infection control procedures.

### **Recording Attendance and safeguarding:**

As of Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March, educational settings should record attendance via the online forms at this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings>

The Virtual School has live school attendance tracker which is regularly updated by VSEOs and colleagues from other agencies. This is being used to supplement the ongoing arrangement with Welfare Call and will continue throughout the period of school closure, Those Children in Care who are not attending school by mutual agreement will be coded with a # by Welfare Call.

Preferably, the Local Authority should be copied into school's daily attendance returns to the DfE as this is pertinent in case of CiN and CP children as well as those who are in Care.

If a child is expected to be in school and doesn't attend, then schools should be conducting safe and well checks as they normally would.

### **Schools should be making regular contact with all vulnerable pupils who are not in attendance.**

In all circumstances where a vulnerable child does not take up their place at school, or discontinues, the education setting should notify their social worker.

School leaders should anticipate that the cohort in attendance will remain fluid throughout the period of school closure and this should be reflected in any planning wherever possible. The Virtual School will work with commissioning teams and Children's Social Care to identify emerging cases of placement instability and endeavour to inform schools in good time so that provision to sustain care placement can be made

### **Support for Schools:**

The Virtual School will operate as a key point of contact between the education sector and Children's Social Care and maximise the autonomy afforded it by using the Pupil Premium Grant to mitigate against identified issues and concerns.

The statement that schools will not deliver National Curriculum is intended to manage expectations rather than limit aspiration. Most schools will still deliver some education and the expectation is that some learning should be taking place. The Virtual School will support provision to enhance the learning of those CiC who are attending school wherever possible.

The Virtual School will work with schools and other providers to identify those pupils who are at risk of disengaging from education altogether following the indefinite period of school closure and commission additional support as appropriate. This will include the identification of those Year 11 pupils who are now at risk of becoming NEET

The Virtual School will continue to conduct PEPs remotely during the period of school closure as required. These will be in a revised format in response to the current situation.

The Virtual School will conduct PEPs for all CiC during the summer term. This will be done remotely if restrictions on movement and school attendance are not lifted. As schools reopen, target setting will prioritise the need for successful re-engagement with education and filling any gaps in learning that have emerged.

The Virtual School will work closely with schools to monitor the attainment of those children who have missed out on statutory assessments at EYFS and Key Stages 1 and 2 and intervene early where any gaps in learning are identified.

The Virtual School will liaise with Head teachers to ensure that all CiC who are not sitting exams at the end of Key Stage 4 achieve results that are a true reflection of their ability.

The Virtual School will work with schools to closely monitor the progress and attainment of the current Year 10 cohort. It will work proactively with schools to mitigate against the impact of missed schooling on pupil achievement at the end of Key Stage 4.

Where appropriate, the Virtual School will support schools to implement additional online learning resources and direct funding from the Pupil Premium + grant towards this.

### **Support for Home Learning:**

Where a decision has been made for a Child in Care to remain at home, the Virtual School will support home learning.

The Virtual School has developed an offer of supplementary materials that has been made available to all pupils in the cohort, along with example timetables and schedules to support carers with facilitating home learning.

The Virtual School has a small number of Nimbl licenses available for those children who are identified as likely to benefit from them.

The Virtual School will also endeavour to provide printed resources for those children who have limited internet access or who would benefit from reduced screen time in the home.

From the start of the summer term, the Virtual School will be hosting weekly webinars for Foster Carers focusing on support for home learning and pupil wellbeing.

### **Post-16 Education and Training:**

#### **Apprenticeships:**

The Education and Skills Funding Agency is taking steps (including an offer of support to providers) to ensure that, wherever possible, apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeship. The provision made by the ESFA include:

- Encouraging training providers to deliver training to apprentices remotely, and via e-learning, as far as is practicable
- Modifying end-point assessment arrangements to include remote assessments wherever practicable and possible

- Rescheduling of end-point assessments for those apprentices who are ready for assessment, but who cannot be assessed due to current restrictions.
- Granting extensions to the assessment time frame for those apprentices whose gateway is delayed
- Enabling employers and training providers to report and initiate a break in learning in cases where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks
- The ambition to find alternative employment for apprentices who are made redundant so that they can continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible and within 12 weeks

### **Further Education:**

Colleges and other providers are being asked to stop classroom delivery of education and training from Monday 23 March for all ages of learners. Providers are not, however, being asked to close their doors and stop all delivery.

The exception to stopping classroom delivery apply to vulnerable learners and dependents of critical workers. **For these groups, Government is asking colleges and other providers to maintain classroom delivery.** There is an expectation that for provision for 16 to 19 local schools, colleges and providers should work together on arrangements that reflect local needs, including over the Easter holidays.

All FE providers should continue to follow their safeguarding procedures and should continue with wellbeing checks for vulnerable learners.

### **Support for Post-16 Providers:**

The Virtual School will work closely with FE providers and the Care Leavers teams to identify and support those CiC in Post-16 who are educationally vulnerable and at risk of disengaging entirely. This offer extends to those students who are likely to be hard to re-engage once provisions reopen.

The Virtual School will liaise with providers to ensure that all CiC who are not sitting end of course assessments achieve results that are a true reflection of their ability. It will, wherever possible, advocate on behalf of those CiC who are due to progress onto Higher Education to ensure that this progress is not hampered.

The Virtual School will continue to monitor and support the education of the Post-16 cohort via the Next Steps and Steps towards reviews as appropriate,

### **Contingency Planning:**

It is likely that placement breakdowns will lead to school moves, and therefore an increase in pupil mobility is seen as inevitable. Where there is a change of placement, the child should remain on roll at their current school for the time being wherever possible. However, admissions authorities should be prepared for an in-year applications and have a process to support these in a timely fashion.

The Local Authority will intervene to source a suitable education in cases where the named provision does not have the capacity to meet the needs of CiC with ECHCPs. This includes when an independent (including specialist) provision chooses to close. In these cases, the Local Authority will adopt a multi-agency approach to sourcing a suitable education.

In the event that a school place is not available (including at a school other than the one at which the child is on roll), then the Local Authority will coordinate a local offer to maintain capacity. This is not solely the role of the Virtual School and will include a multi-agency response overseen by Corporate Directors.