

COVID-19 (Coronavirus):

Information for Parents and Carers

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Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome to this second edition of our question and answer bulletin as we move through the next phase of the national response to COVID-19. You can view the previous edition [here](#).

This edition has been developed in response to questions received from SENDIASS and Suffolk Parent Carer Network (SPCN) and we would like to thank them both for their assistance. If you have any other questions you would like answered, you can contact us via email at localoffer@suffolk.gov.uk or via our [Local Offer Facebook Page](#).



All of us are facing challenges as a result of lockdown and we don't underestimate the toll this situation has taken on parents and carers. We continue to do our best to maintain our services, even where delivery of them has needed to look different in recent months.

If you have particular concerns about the plans that are being put in place for your child, please contact your school or setting to discuss this further in the first instance. If after this you are still worried, please contact our COVID helpline for parents on 01473 263985 to raise your concerns.

Thank you once again to all those who have taken the time to contact us with kind words and feedback during this difficult time. Our staff continue to work long hours, often with their own challenging circumstances, and your encouragement is greatly appreciated.

With thanks and best wishes on behalf of all the Suffolk SEND Partners,

Judith Mobbs

Assistant Director, Inclusion and Skills

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Q1: What will happen if my child cannot follow PPE or distancing guidelines due to their additional needs?

Under current national guidelines, children under 11 years of age are not required to wear a face mask (regardless of the setting). There are many reasons that exempt an individual of any age from wearing a face mask. These include not being able to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability, or if putting on, wearing, or removing a face covering will cause you severe distress.

In public places, some people may feel more comfortable showing something that says they do not have to wear a face covering. This could be in the form of an exemption card, badge or even a home-made sign, more information on this can be accessed here. There is no requirement however to carry an exemption card or sign and the general public are discouraged from challenging anyone who is not wearing a mask.

Children above the age of 11 without additional needs are required to wear a face mask in any shops, including food shops and supermarkets, and on public transport. Children and adults are not required to wear masks in hospitality settings, including restaurants with table service, bars, and pubs. Children with additional needs over the age of 11 who would fall into one of the exemption categories are not required to wear a face covering in any setting.

The most up-to-date guidance for educational and social care settings is available here. The following information is extracted from this guidance and provides advice on caring for children who may be unable to follow social-distancing guidelines:

How should I care for young children or children with special educational needs who do not understand why they must stay apart or who ignore distancing guidelines?

Young children and children with special educational needs may not be able to understand the need for social distancing and may also seek close interaction with their peers or adults to provide reassurance at a period of disruption to their routines. It is imperative that education, childcare and children's social care settings conduct risk assessments around managing groups of children within the setting. This should include limiting the number of children in each group and reducing this to provide more space in each classroom or learning area. As far as possible, small groups of children should be supported by consistent staffing, and groups should remain as consistent as possible throughout the outbreak.

Based on the above guidance, headteachers/setting leads should complete a risk assessment for children with additional needs to take a view of providing the most appropriate working and caring arrangements. Families should be involved in these discussions and made aware of the outcome of these risk assessments.

Specialist services in the Local Authority and other organisations have produced resources around social distancing which you may find helpful.

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Q2: Will school staff be wearing PPE?

At the time of writing, Government guidance states that the majority of staff in education, childcare and children's social care settings will not require PPE, even if they are not always able to maintain a distance of 2 metres from others, and that PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases: where an individual child, young person or other learner becomes ill with coronavirus symptoms and only then if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained, or where a child, young person or learner already has intimate care needs that involves the use of PPE, in which case the same PPE should continue to be used.

Q3: How can I help my child re-engage with learning after such a long break?

Your child's school will be focusing on helping your child to re-engage with learning. You can help by talking about the positive aspects of school (for example, getting back to a routine and seeing friends again). Having plans, making lists and thinking about what is important to us can help us feel prepared, which can make new or tricky situations easier. It will also be useful to share with the school any worries that your child might have.

You may find [these resources](#) useful to enable you and your child to plan for their return, and you can also find other resources from our specialist services [here](#).

Q4: My child's anxiety has increased due to COVID and lockdown. Will we be penalised if they are unable to attend school due to their mental health?

As set out in their guidance to schools, the DfE expects schools to work with families and the Local Authority to secure regular school attendance for all pupils in September in line with statutory requirements. However, schools are required to take a balanced approach when dealing with attendance, and will need to be mindful of the impact that COVID-19 may have had on both the pupil and the wider family. It is our hope that all schools will offer a supportive and nurturing approach to children and families who are finding it difficult to return to school. We are asking schools to contact Suffolk Family Focus or their allocated Educational Welfare Officer before any fixed penalty notice issue requests are made, to ensure that all potential barriers have been considered and any appropriate preventative and/or supportive action has been taken before moving toward enforcement.

We understand that the mental health of many children and young people has been affected by the disruption this pandemic has caused, and we don't want families to feel alone in dealing with this. If your child is anxious about returning to school, you may find this article from Young Minds helpful in terms of starting a conversation with your school about how you can all work together to support their return. Our Specialist Education and Psychology & Therapeutic Services are supporting schools in their plans for reopening, and you can find out more about what they offer [here](#). However, if you feel your child needs further support, you may also find the following resources helpful, either to work through together as a family or to explore some additional sources of professional support.

[The Emotional Wellbeing Hub Gateway](#)
[Point 1 – support in Lowestoft and Waveney](#)
[The Source – information/advice for young people](#)
[Kooth – online mental wellbeing support](#)
[Therapeutic stories for children about coronavirus](#)

[Five tips for Families leaflets](#)
[COVID-specific resources](#)
[Free resources for families](#)
[SENDIASS Back to School resources](#)

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Q5: Will school and specialist services be able to provide all the support in my child's EHC plan, including 1:1 contact and intimate care?

It is expected that schools, with support from specialist services, will make the provision identified in the EHC Plan unless on completion of the necessary risk assessments for the context of the school and/or the specialist services involved, it is not possible to provide this within the guidance set out by the DfE. Schools and specialist services should include families in discussions about this so that they understand the outcome of any risk assessment and are clear about the support that will be possible. Further guidance on this is expected during August 2020.

Q6: My child has been calmer since lockdown and we are wondering whether to continue to home educate. What do we need to consider?

Some families have found that this enforced period of education at home has gone well, and we understand that you may be considering continuing this into the new academic year. Some things it is important for you to consider before making this decision are:

- Elective Home Education (EHE) is different from home school provided by the school. In this situation you will be taking full responsibility for your child's education, including full financial responsibility.
- If you choose EHE, your child/ren will be removed from the school roll. If you later change your mind, you can apply again for a school place but there will be no guarantee that it will be available at the same school, or at your local school.
- If your child is aiming to take examinations in the near future, the accessing of examinations as an external candidate will need planning well in advance.
- There is, of course, a 'novelty factor' in not being at school, but this is likely to wear off over the course of time. Similarly, when their peers and friends return to school this may have an impact on your child/ren - is it likely that they may then want to rejoin?
- Some families have reported that being at home has reduced their child's anxiety. If your child is able to express themselves, have you understood from them what it is that has made them calmer? It may be that you could share these observations with their school, to enable you all to support your child to re-integrate successfully. It may also be that these months have enabled your child to have a settled, calm period and that they now feel ready to access learning surrounded by their peers again.

Making the decision to EHE is a big commitment. If you are unsure, it is a good idea to discuss your thoughts with your school and the EHE Team so they can answer any queries you may have but do remember, the decision to EHE should be taken solely by parents - schools should not seek to unduly influence parents either way. You can contact the EHE Team directly on 01473 265139. In addition, you may find the following documents help you to make the right choice for your child/ren:

[Information on Elective Home Education](#)
[Government Guidance for Parents on EHE](#)
[Sendiass 'Back to School' Advice](#)

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Q7: Is there Local Authority guidance on involving parents with transition plans?

Transition should be carefully planned, and parents should always be involved in talking about transition with their child's school. Schools will have transition plans for children who need additional support or for those who are moving to new settings, and the Psychology & Therapeutic Service and the Specialist Education Service also work with schools to support transition.

You may find these links useful:

[P&TS and SES transition resources](#) [SENDAT transition resources](#) [Back to school checklist](#)

Q8: What support is available for Young Carers during this time?

SCC have a contract with [Suffolk Family Carers](#) (SFC) to help identify and support Young Carers throughout Suffolk.

Due to COVID and many Young Carers and their families shielding, face to face assessments have been suspended in line with government guidelines. Where the Young Carer has chosen, assessments have been carried out by video call, but some Young Carers have chosen to wait until face to face contact is advised able to resume by the government.

SFC have continued to provide additional online support for young carers and their families including a helpline, live and video chat, games, quizzes and online social groups. [You can find their online space for Young Carers \(5-13\) and Young Adult Carers \(14-25\) here](#), which includes blogs, tips and information.

Q9: Are the Local Authority providing guidance to schools about where to signpost parents for support?

As a Local Authority we are already in regular communication with schools and school leaders. As part of these existing conversations, we signpost to resources and avenues for support on a range of topics (including COVID-19 and support for families) through our normal mechanisms and discussions. [For information, advice and support around SEND, parents can also contact our confidential and impartial SENDIASS service here.](#)

Q10. I feel my child would benefit from repeating this year due to lost time.

We know that schools are working hard to put support in place for all children where learning has been affected by this pandemic. If you have concerns about your child's learning we would encourage you to talk to your child's school in the first instance.

Q11. Tuition over the holidays will not benefit my child due to their specific needs. How are the Local Authority guiding schools about this?

[The Government announced in June](#) that catch-up funding would be made available to schools. Decisions about how this will be used in each setting are made by the school leaders and so we would encourage you to talk with your child's school if you have queries about this or questions about the plan to support your child.

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Q12. What are the plans for services if there is a second wave?

The Government has asked every area to develop a local plan to manage a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases. Suffolk has developed a local outbreak plan which describes what would happen for different scales of outbreak, [and you can read it here](#) - page 29 contains information relating to schools and other education settings.

Q13: How will distancing and cleanliness be managed with school transport, and what are the rules around wearing PPE?

This Government guidance, received on 2 July 2020, states the following with regard to school transport: *"Pupils on dedicated school services do not mix with the general public on those journeys and tend to be consistent. This means that the advice for passengers on public transport to adopt a social distance of 2 metres from people outside their household or support bubble, or a 'one metre plus' approach where this is not possible, will not apply from the autumn term on dedicated transport."* This means that social distancing will not be required on any "dedicated" or "closed contract" home to school route. Cleaning of vehicles continues to be required in line with [this government guidance](#).

Passengers on public transport aged 11+ are currently required to wear face coverings (unless exempt). For drivers and passenger assistants on SEND journeys, face masks are required. For all other students travelling on home-to-school journeys, it is currently for the parent/carer to consider whether a face covering should be worn.

Any future changes or latest guidance will be updated on www.suffolkonboard.com.

Q14. Have the Local Authority considered seeking local volunteers to support schools/education services, as in the NHS volunteer scheme?

Not at present - we are awaiting detail of the government's national scheme of support for children and young people in response to the pandemic. The LA does not have a direct role in the deployment of staff or volunteers in schools, but if school leaders raise this or any other issue with us we would always consider it and discuss it with them.

Q15. The disruption to social care due to lockdown really impacted our family. How will you ensure we get the ongoing support we need?

Throughout the Covid 19 restrictions we have continued to work closely with families, partner agencies and our service providers to ensure a continuity of support where possible. We recognise that some services have been affected and that some were subsequently suspended, this has been unavoidable in the wider context of a national pandemic. Children's Social Care developed and implemented a C-19 risk assessment framework as of the 31st March 2020 to ensure that a robust system for checking in regularly with families has been in place, and colleagues have worked hard to be creative with service solutions, wherever we can.

We are also mindful and respectful of a number of families who made the decision to shield vulnerable family members by withdrawing from all support, many of whom who continue to shield. We have maintained contact with all families in receipt of support services through children's social care and remain committed to working with them as C-19 restrictions ease further.