



Virtual School

Guidance for Children's Social Care regarding school attendance during COVID 19

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Please read this alongside the DfE guidance for schools and settings:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>

How are vulnerable children defined?

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker, and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan, and those who are looked after by the local authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need, or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Read the [guidance on how schools should continue to support vulnerable children](#).

Those with an EHC plan should be risk-assessed by their school/college in consultation with the local authority and parents, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a school/college place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. This could include, if necessary, carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services. Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

We know that schools may also want to support other children who are vulnerable where they are able to do so. Eligibility for free school meals in and of itself should not be the determining factor in assessing vulnerability.

The DfE expects that social workers will work with settings, schools and colleges to help identify the children who most need support at this time. Looking after these children will enable schools to support the country during challenging times.

Is it compulsory for parents of vulnerable children to accept their place offer?

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend provision, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk. In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an education setting, and



their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker and education provider should explore the reasons for this directly with the parent.

What should schools do if vulnerable children do not attend school?

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend an education setting, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk. In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an education setting, and their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker and education setting should explore the reasons for this directly with the parent.

Where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting the virus, the school or social worker should talk through these anxieties with the parent following the [advice set out by Public Health England](#).

Providers may also want to consider how to encourage children and young people to attend an education setting. Social workers will remain in contact with vulnerable children and families, including remotely if needed.

Local authorities and education settings do not need to complete their usual day-to-day attendance processes to follow up on non-attendance. Schools/education providers and social workers should be agreeing with families whether children in need should be attending education provision – and the education provider should then follow up on any pupil that they were expecting to attend, who does not.

Education settings should also follow up with any parent or carer who has arranged care for their child(ren) and the child(ren) subsequently do not attend. To support the above, education settings should take the opportunity when communicating with parents and carers to confirm emergency contact numbers are correct, and to ask for any additional emergency contact numbers where they are available.

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.

Schools and settings should NOT contact MASH to report absence of vulnerable children where there is already an allocated social worker. They should email the social worker and cc the service manager. If necessary school can phone MASH to find out the name of the social worker and manager however the attached children's social care information should help to reduce the need to contact MASH. Social workers should contact families after receiving an email from school/setting to follow up on any absence to discuss the reason for absence and agree whether the child(ren) should return to school.

If the social worker risk assessment changes at any time and a school place is required for a vulnerable child please contact the relevant school by email and cc education@york.gov.uk.