



16th April 2020

Dear Parents / Carers,

I hope everyone is keeping well and trying to make the most of the sunshine we have had.

It was announced on the 14th April 2020 that **SCHOOLS ARE NOT REOPENING AFTER EASTER.**

It is a myth that schools are opening – news sources have been intimating that schools will be fully open again after Easter.

We continue to be in Lockdown and the government guidance is clear.



During this pandemic schools have been requested to ‘where possible’ remain open for two groups of children.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

Group 1

Children of key workers e.g. NHS workers, delivery services, food services, teachers, support staff etc. Only to provide childcare when the parent has no means of working from home due to their role in supporting the response to the pandemic. (**PEOPLE WHO ARE KEEPING THE COUNTRY GOING AND CAN NOT WORK AT HOME SO NEED CHILDCARE**)

Group 2

Children who are categorised in the Vulnerable Group.

This group of children all have to be risk assessed and a decision which is in their best interests should be made.

Where children can remain at home they should to prevent the spread, protect the NHS and save lives. Therefore there is not an entitlement to this provision and should only be used if it is required and agreed by the Senior Leaders of the school.

We are wanting to provide the provision for those who most need it whilst keeping your child, family and our staff and their families safe.

Every school is taking all the advice seriously. We want to protect our families, our pupils and communities and prevent the spread. Due to the nature of Stepping Stones School, many of our children would fit into category 2. However, following the risk assessments carried out, the VAST MAJORITY OF CHILDREN CAN AND SHOULD REMAIN AT HOME.

You are doing an amazing job! The feedback from staff is great; we recognise how hard this is, how stressful it is and how exhausted you all must be! Four weeks of non-stop mummy / daddy etc. I know from my experience I have become much more grateful for those moments of silence and peace.

We are all doing our bit to protect our loved ones, protect the NHS and save lives AND WE THANK YOU FOR THAT!

Stepping Stones is a specialist setting and the risk of the children returning to school is far too high and is not what is been advised. In fact all the guidance states:

Where a child can remain safely at home with their family home they should. Therefore, unless you are contacted by a Senior Leader to discuss the offer of childcare you will not be offered it. If you feel we have this wrong, we welcome discussions and an open conversation to why these decisions have been made.

As I mention, the vast majority of your children can be at home and are safer there, this is the guidance and this is what we must adhere to, no matter how hard this is we have to do it.

The support calls home will continue to be made by the same staff.

New learning will be set on the different platforms. If you require sheets / work books let your key adult know and we will get it to you. (Contactless deliveries)

Q: I need to work at home but can't because of my child. Can I have childcare?

If you are someone that is supposed to be working from home, it is particularly difficult to manage work and occupying, working with your child. However, childcare provision at Stepping Stones cannot be offered on this basis. It goes against the guidance. Many parents are having to work at home and balance educating their child, occupying their child and working at the same time. The childcare that is offered to frontline / key workers is in order for them to be able to leave the house to do their job e.g. NHS, delivery driving, shop work. If there are family members at home then the child should be at home. Unless there are other circumstances around this e.g. medical needs, high level of vulnerability e.g. The child is in foster care placement that could breakdown etc.

The Provision at Stepping Stones

As I mention, we have risk assessed each child and there are very few children that provision will be available to. However, you do not have to take it! It is your decision, unless we are directed by the Special Educational Needs Officer and/ or a social worker to provide the provision because they deem it would be safer for the child to be in school.

What will the provision be like?

As an Alternative Provision Provider the risk of pupil behavioural issues is high risk, therefore we will not be providing a normal school day. We have to lower the risk and therefore we have to lower our expectations, pupil numbers and protect staff.

Therefore, the provision we will be offering is Childcare. The children that have had an agreed place (agreed following risk assessment and discussion with parent via Senior Leaders) will not be educational. The children will complete thematic learning tasks, and the same tasks that have been set on Purple Mash, education packs, Activ Learn platforms etc. Staff will not be teaching phonics, they will not be listening to children read or changing reading books etc.

Staff will be on a 3 week rota system. So we are running 1/3rd of the staff team for safety, precautionary measures. This will be reviewed weekly based on guidance. Therefore, your child's teacher may not be on shift or their key adults.

I have copied in the guidance below. A senior leader will contact the parents where they may be eligible for provision this week and discuss requirements. If you have not been offered this but feel you should be etc. Please discuss with your key worker and they will contact a Senior Manager to call you back and explain further.



Finally, we want to say thank you for all you are doing. Thank you for completion of the surveys, talking to staff, educating your child and just getting through these challenging times. We are still here for every family. We are still working and doing everything we can to work towards that day where life returns to some form of normality.

Please take care, stay safe, follow the guidance (as I know you are) and remember even if the doors are not open we are still at the end of a phone for you!

Kindest Regards

Mrs Dodd and the whole team at Stepping Stones

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR INFORMATION

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL DISTANCING IN EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS – DFE 7TH APRIL 2020 STATES

“A risk assessment may need to be undertaken, if it is deemed that a child may not be able to follow social distancing instructions, to determine what mitigations need to be put in place and whether, in rare circumstances, they should stay at home. For those children with a social worker, our expectation is that they should be in school unless a risk assessment concludes they will be safer at home”

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): GUIDANCE ON VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 1ST APRIL 2020 STATES

Children with education health and care (EHC) plans

21. Do all children and young people with an EHC plan need to continue at school?

Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home. Schools, colleges, other training providers and local authorities will need to consider the needs of all children and young people with an EHC plan, alongside the views of their parents, and make a risk assessment for each child or young person. Local authorities and education settings should decide together who is best placed to undertake the risk assessment, noting that the duty to ensure provision remains with the local authority.

They will need to consider a number of different risks to each individual, including:

- the potential health risks to the individual from COVID-19, bearing in mind any underlying health conditions. This must be on an individual basis with advice from an appropriate health professional where required
- the risk to the individual if some or all elements of their EHC plan cannot be delivered at all, and the risk if they cannot be delivered in the normal manner or in the usual setting
- the ability of the individual’s parents or home to ensure their health and care needs can be met safely
- the potential impact to the individual’s wellbeing of changes to routine or the way in which provision is delivered

We expect most children and young people with EHC plans will fall into the following categories:

- children and young people who would be at significant risk if their education, health and care provision and placement did not continue, namely those who could not safely be supported at home. This may include those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and those receiving significant levels of personal care support. Local authorities will need to work with the individual’s educational setting – especially residential special schools and specialist colleges – as well as

local health partners, to ensure they are able to remain open wherever possible. This may mean deploying staff from other education settings, to keep staffing ratios safe

- children and young people whose needs can be met at home, namely those who are not receiving personal care from their educational setting, or whose limited need for personal care can be met in their family home.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 allows the Secretary of State, where appropriate, to temporarily lift the statutory duty on local authorities to maintain the precise provision in EHC plans; with local authorities needing instead to apply 'reasonable endeavours' to support these children and their families. As such, where the Secretary of State has issued a temporary notice and a local authority is unable to secure the full range of provision stated in a plan, as long as they use their 'reasonable endeavours' to do this, they won't be penalised for failing to meet the existing duty in section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014.