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## Early Years Bulletin

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you have had a good week and looking forward to some rest this weekend.

The Education Incident Planning Group and Early Years Task Group both met again this week and we continue to receive feedback and discuss the challenges that settings are facing during this pandemic. Ian Morris, WCF Early Years Lead is into his second week and getting to meet colleagues and stakeholders and has written a short introduction in the bulletin today.

As a sector we appreciate you are managing multiple and complex expectations under the most recent lockdown and we value the strong voice and feedback that you and your representatives bring in sharing your experiences and feedback.

On Monday 11 January, we issued a briefing note to let you know that we've moved to a weekly online form for reporting early years attendance data. Details for submitting this week's data is contained in the bulletin.

You will also find in this week's bulletin a range of information, guidance and advice that I hope you will find of interest and support for you.

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## Message on behalf of Ian Morris, Early Years & Childcare Strategy Manager

I am thrilled to join Worcestershire Children First and proud to be leading the Early Years team.

Prior to joining I have worked in Early Years in a variety of roles including as a local authority advisor, assistant Head Teacher, and Specialist Leader of Education. Most recently I have been working in maintained Nursery Schools in three different authorities. I aim to bring this experience to the team as we develop our Early Years strategy and ensure that we continue to put the children and their families first.

I am excited at the challenges that lie ahead and very much look forward to working with you all.



Ian Morris

## Government updates

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): financial support for education, early years and children’s social care \(opens in new window\)](#) updated on 7 January 2021 to reflect the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to 30 April 2021.

[Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak \(opens in new window\)](#) updated on 7 January 2021 with additional guidance for early years education and childcare settings during the national lockdown from 5 January 2021.

[Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak \(opens in new window\)](#) updated on 8 January 2021 with ‘Who should attend after-school clubs and out-of-school settings’, ‘Children with health concerns’ and ‘Live performances’ sections to reflect national lockdown guidance.

[Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the coronavirus \(COVID19\) outbreak \(opens in new window\)](#) updated on 8 January 2021 with information on who should attend out-of-school settings in line with new national lockdown restrictions, group sizes with information on staff:bubble ratios, educational visits and trips in line with new national lockdown restrictions, staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable to reflect that shielding has been introduced nationally, and music, dance and drama provision to reflect that live performances should not take place.

[What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges \(opens in new window\)](#) updated 8 January 2021 to reflect the new national restrictions that were introduced on 5 January 2021.

[Face coverings in education \(opens in new window\)](#) updated on 8 January 2021 to become aligned with national restrictions

[Critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings \(opens in new window\)](#) updated 'Critical workers' section on 8 January 2021 to clarify that parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can.

[Ofsted: coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rolling update \(opens in new window\)](#)

- updated 11 January 2021 to included details on monitoring visits, remote learning and our work with social care and registered early years provision.
- updated 12 January 2021 the ‘Current activity’ section with details of our planned activity until the February half term (see below the article below “Social care and registered early years provision for further information).

[Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak \(opens in new window\)](#) updated 12 January 2021 attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak: 23 March 2020 to 4 January 2021.

[Ofsted inspections to be done remotely until half term \(opens in new window\)](#) created 12 January 2021 to reflect All planned inspection activity will be carried out remotely until after the February half term.

## DfE expectations for childminding provision

There is the expectation that all early years provision, including childminders remain open.

Childminders are expected to offer places to early years children for those parents who wish to continue to attend, and also to provide places to children of school age who are vulnerable and are critical worker children for wrap around care.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>

Where early years settings are also caring for children over the age of 5, they should ensure they are also following guidance on [protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) which includes guidance on group sizes.

## Social care and registered early years provision

We will pause assurance inspections to early years settings until after the February half term, [Ofsted: coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rolling update \(opens in new window\)](#)

However, we will continue with our vital regulatory work in early years and children's social care. This work will sometimes require on-site visits, which will be risk-assessed based on the nature of the premises and the urgency of the work. As always, the safety and well-being of children is our first priority and we will take urgent action where we have concerns.

We will:

- continue with on-site visits where we have urgent safeguarding concerns
- continue with assurance visits to independent fostering agencies, which we will usually be able to carry out remotely
- carry out monitoring visits, as necessary, to children's homes and other settings. Monitoring visits will continue to be a combination of on-site/off site/blended as appropriate
- continue with our social care registration work, carefully risk assessed in line with government guidance

We will keep these plans under review. As with all visits, we will put considerable measures in place to ensure the safety of all concerned.

## Early Years Weekly Attendance Data

Thank you for sending in your attendance data for the week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> January. We had a fantastic return, with 97% of funded providers submitting their information.

[The form for the week commencing Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January is now live \(opens in new window\)](#)

The form should be submitted by **9am on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January**. Please note that schools with nursery provision should also be submitting a return.

## Spring Term Actual Claim

A reminder that your Spring Term Actual Claim should be submitted on the Provider Portal by **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> January**. If you are closed due to Covid-19, your claim should be submitted for the number of weeks you are expecting to open during the term; an adjustment can be made later in the term if your circumstances change.

## Statutory Sick Pay and Furlough Scheme

As we enter into a new period of lockdown, we urge all early years providers to refresh their knowledge around Statutory Sick Pay and the Furlough scheme.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy provided information in the following guidance published on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020:

[If you need to self-isolate or cannot attend work due to coronavirus: Guidance for employers and workers on work absences due to coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(opens in new window\).](#)

If you have queries concerning specific scenario's around SSP and furlough, please contact your HR advisors to discuss in more detail.

## Specialist Nursery Assessment Units and Nursery Plus Provision

The following information has been disseminated to NAU's and Batchley Nursery Plus to highlight the DfE guidance in relation to split placements, opening of provision and funding arrangements:

There has been a raft of guidance recently released and updated and WCF and WCC felt it prudent to email all specialist providers to confirm the current position as stated by the DfE.

Please note that a separate communication will be sent to the Language Unit providers shortly highlighting any issues specific to those provisions from the commissioning team.

### [Education and childcare settings: national lockdown from 5 January 2021 \(opens in new window\)](#)

*“Early years provision should remain open and continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours. This includes early years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites.”*

In line with DfE guidance all early years provision should remain open. Gabrielle Stacey also emailed all special schools on the 5th January reiterating the expectation that full-time provision be offered to our vulnerable learners where parents want it. We recognise that some provisions may have opened only for key workers, as per school guidance – however Early Year Setting should be open for all children whose parents wish to take up a place as per the DfE guidance.

## Children attending more than one provision

### [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak \(opens in new window\)](#)

*“There may be situations where a child needs to attend more than one setting, for example, children attending a childminder before their nursery opens so that their parent or carer may go to work. Parents and carers should be encouraged to limit the number of settings their child attends, ideally ensuring their child only attends the same setting consistently. This should also be the same for staff. Where a child routinely attends more than one setting on a part time basis, settings should work through the system of controls collaboratively, enabling them to address any risks identified and allowing them to jointly deliver a broad and balanced provision for the child.”*

As with the previous lockdown WCF and WCC consider the above scenario to include placements between specialist and mainstream Early Years settings. Provisions are advised to carefully consider additional activities within their risk assessments to keep children safe from the risk of transmission such as children only attending one setting per day, attending specialist provisions with the same consistent bubble of children and staff, and continued liaison with their mainstream providers.

When parents make the decision for their child to attend one setting only, if sessions are increased the NEF funding and associated inclusion supplement will be moved to the setting offering additional hours. If the mainstream setting are able to offer additional sessions, we will fund the children at the exceptional funding rate as they will be considered as being on the waiting list for specialist nursery assessment unit. (Please note that children at Language Units will remain at their original GR levels.)

WCC and WCF recognise that the advice provided to schools in the attached Education and Early Help Bulletin CV83-7 January 2001 stated:

*Schools should also revisit risk assessments for pupils with EHCPs who are attending more than one provision (for example those who have a dual placement in a mainstream and special school). At present there is no guidance from the DfE suggesting that these placements should cease. However, given the increased risk of transmission due to the new Covid-19 variant, schools should reconsider whether it is possible to meet EHCP outcomes in in one setting only in the short term and identify any additional preventative measures which can be put in place to reduce risk where dual placements need to continue.*

However, the DfE guidance for the Early Years Sector is different and there is the expectation that dual placements within Early Years specialist provision continues where parents are happy to do so.

## Nursery Education Funding – Spring Term 2021

You should have recently received an email briefly outlining the NEF plans for the Spring Term 2021. We are now able to provide further details. Unlike in the Spring/Summer 2020 where the message from Government was to close unless you had children of critical workers or vulnerable children, the decision by Government for this Lockdown (January 2021) is that “Early years settings (including nurseries and childminders) remain open”.

There is no expectation that you limit places to children of critical workers or to those considered vulnerable. Early years workers are considered critical workers and therefore children of your staff are eligible for a school place, if required. [Guidance on critical workers \(opens in new window\) for further information](#)

The current guidance for Financial Support for Early Years states that “In the spring term 2021, local authorities’ funding to providers should return to the normal approach of funding on the number of entitlement hours delivered.” However, Worcestershire has made the decision to fund booked funded hours, rather than just those delivered. This means that if a parent/carer chooses to keep their child at home, but still wishes to retain their child’s place, you can continue to claim for the funded hours, even if the child is not in attendance.

To support families who wish to use childcare (whether they are critical workers or not), funding will be moved to an alternative setting if you are unable to meet a family’s requirements. [A copy of the financial guidance \(opens in new window\)](#)

## Closed Settings

Following the current guidance, if you choose to close your setting, you will not receive funding for the closed weeks. However, early years practitioners who are identified as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' are expected to shield, as per the Governments advice. Financial support may be available if you are:

- A childminder who is identified as clinically extremely vulnerable, or a member of your household is; or
- A setting and are unable to open in any capacity (including reduced hours/offer) due to your staff being classed as extremely clinically vulnerable.

A copy of the letter advising you/a member of your household to shield will be required to evidence your entitlement to ongoing Nursery Education Funding. Please contact the NEF Team if you wish to discuss this via [NEF@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk](mailto:NEF@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk) or 01905 844 441.

For all closed settings, please submit your Actual Claim as normal, following the deadlines provided by the Early Years Funding Team and amend your weeks to those you expect to be open during the Spring Term. If the number of weeks change, an adjustment claim can be submitted after half-term.

If you are closed, please complete the EY's Weekly Attendance Data as requested, indicating that you are closed. If you have already received your Spring Term Estimate Payment, Patrick O'Connor will contact you to discuss arrangements for the remainder of the Term. If you are not available via your normal contact details, please email [EYFunding@worcestershires.gov.uk](mailto:EYFunding@worcestershires.gov.uk) to provide alternative contact information.

Please note separate correspondence will be sent to Early Years Language Unit providers shortly.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the children of Worcestershire during this latest Covid lockdown – this is an unprecedented situation and access to specialist provision and interventions are vital for supporting the holistic development of our most complex children. Please pass on our thanks and commendations to your staffing team, who are vital key workers providing services that are greatly appreciated by ourselves and the families of Worcestershire.

## The Family Children's Champion nominations

The Family Children's Champion is our way of shining the spotlight on the unsung heroes of 2020. Family are looking for stories of Early Years workers who have gone above and beyond in their care for children. Who've inspired you through the work they do for their community. Who stand out as a champion of our nation's children.

Nominations close on 31 January 2021 and the champion will be announced at the end of March 2021, find out more by visiting the [Family website \(opens in new window\)](#)

## Forthcoming virtual early years training courses

- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Childminder, refresher – 28 January 2021, 7pm – 9.30pm](#)
- [So you want to move up to management, 05 and 12 February 2021, 9.30 – 12pm](#)
- [Training for new SENCO's, 11 and 25 February 2021, 6.30pm to 8.30pm](#)
- [Safeguarding in early years and childcare for practitioners, 12 February 2021, 9.30am – 12pm](#)
- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Settings, refresher – 13 February 2021, 9.30am – 12pm](#)
- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Settings, refresher – 23 February 2021, 7pm – 9.30pm](#)
- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Childminder, refresher – 26 February 2021, 9.30am – 12pm](#)
- [Prevent and British Values in EY, 05 March 2021, 10am to 12pm](#)
- [Supervision training, 05 March 2021, 9.30am – 11.30am](#)
- [Effective IPM Writing, 09 March 2021, 6.30pm to 8.30pm](#)
- [Childminder and Prospective Childminder DSL training, initial, 10 and 17 March 2021, 7pm to 9.30pm](#)
- [Individual Risk Assessments and Health Care Plans, 11 March 2021, 6pm to 7pm](#)
- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Childminder, refresher – 13 March 2021, 9.30am – 12pm](#)
- [How to write a Support Plan workshop, 16 March 2021, 6.30pm to 7.30pm](#)
- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Settings, refresher – 22 March 2021, 7pm – 9.30pm](#)
- [Domestic Abuse training, 22 March 2021, 6.30pm to 9.30pm](#)
- [Social, Emotional Mental Health, 25 March 2021, 6.30pm to 8.30pm](#)
- [Safeguarding for the DSL, Childminder, refresher – 29 March 2021, 7pm to 9.30pm](#)

Our full range of current courses are available in the [Early Years training directory from our website \(opens in new window\)](#)

Best regards,



Sarah Wilkins  
Director for Education and Early Help

