

Message from Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director, Social Care
03 April 2020

Dear colleagues,

I want to begin my third weekly update by simply thanking each and everyone of you for your sustained efforts to provide the best possible care for our most vulnerable children in these truly challenging circumstances. Children in our care really matter and we are all very proud of you at the front line of corporate parenting. I know times are difficult and we certainly do not underestimate how hard your task is. Ofsted is your regulator, but at this time we are trying as hard as we can to support you and all those providing the ongoing nurture that children need.

I wanted to share our responses to some of the questions we have been asked:

Legislation, regulations and statutory guidance

Many people are asking us whether, in the current situation, they need to meet a specific regulation or statutory guidance.

Ofsted does not have the power to disapply or waive legislation, regulation or statutory guidance. However, we fully recognise that we are in exceptional circumstances and this will require pragmatic decisions to be made in the best interests of children. Please carry out a careful risk assessment of any action you take and keep a clear record of the decisions that you make. We are in close contact with the Department for Education and we expect that they will provide guidance on a range of matters very soon that will take account of the impact of COVID-19 and the need to maximise capacity.

Foster carer recruitment

We have been asked about fostering services bringing foster carers out of retirement, rather like the NHS has with doctors and nurses.

In terms of approving recently retired or de-registered carers, we would agree that the current regulations allow for a proportionate assessment that can take account of the existing knowledge of carers. In terms of how agencies carry out that assessment, we understand that, under the current extraordinary circumstances, they will need to make pragmatic decisions in the best interests of children. We expect agencies to carry out a careful risk assessment of any action they take and keep a clear record of the decisions made.

Senior staff of providers visiting children's homes

We have been asked about senior and/or regional managers of providers visiting children's homes and whether this is a risk to children and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Providers need to take a balanced approach throughout this time. They should follow the Government guidance on social distancing where possible, but they also have responsibilities to safeguard the children they have responsibilities for. So, while phone calls and services like Skype can replace some level of safeguarding, it cannot replace it entirely and providers should retain the option to visit where necessary and follow Government guidance while they are there.

Children's guide to Coronavirus - the Children's Commissioner for England

The Officer of the Children's Commissioner has issued a helpful guide, which you may all find useful. You can be read it at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-guide-to-coronavirus/>

I hope this update has been helpful. Please continue to contact us if you have queries we can help with. As days become weeks I wish you and all the children you are caring for and supporting my best wishes.

Best wishes,
Yvette

Yvette Stanley, National Director for Social Care