

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

Dear colleagues

I am writing to you mid-week to make sure you receive updates on PPE ahead of the bank holiday weekend, although I know most of us will continue to work on. We have continued to work closely with DfE and DHSC to play our part in getting information and guidance out to you as swiftly as possible.

Like everyone, we all stood on our doorstep again on Thursday evening to applaud those working at the front-line of the NHS. My applause and I'm sure of all my colleagues here at Ofsted, were also applauding you – care and support workers, social workers, family support workers, carers, managers and everyone striving to keep children in need and children in care as safe as possible – thank you.

I wanted to update you on the following:

PPE Update from the DfE

New guidance on implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings has been issued which gives an update on the previous guidance along with commonly asked Q&A: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

The guidance highlights that the vast majority of education and care settings, including day special schools, will not need PPE. PHE guidance is that children displaying COVID-19 symptoms should be at home, i.e. PPE should not be needed in day schools and colleges as it should not be used as a precautionary measure.

If schools previously dealt with the personal care of students, they should already be equipped to continue this care. If they cannot get their regular supplies of PPE from their normal providers, they can contact their local resilience forum who have been given stocks of PPE to deliver to their local community.

Providers of residential care and social workers engaging with families in the community should also note that PPE is only recommended for staff engaging directly with symptomatic children / carers.

The local resilience fora contact details <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-resilience-forums-contact-details>.

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for local authorities on children's social care

The Department for Education (DfE) has published some [guidance](#) for local authorities on children's social care.

There are sections on children's homes and residential settings, fostering and adoption.

Notifying Ofsted

In a previous message we set out our expectation regarding notifications from children's social care providers during the pandemic. For ease this is repeated below.

'Ofsted's position remains that we cannot waive any regulatory or legislative requirements. That said, our position regarding COVID-19 is that we do not expect to be notified about children or carers who are self-isolating or who have been diagnosed. However, we do need to be notified about the hospitalisation of any children and/or carers in both foster care and children's homes. All other notification requirements continue to apply.'

The only additional request is within the recently-published DfE guidance for local authorities on children's social care (referred to above) in the 'Children's homes and residential settings section'. This includes specific guidance about children's homes closing:

You should continue to notify Ofsted if your home is going to close. Where you have an immediate or impending staffing shortage which may lead to the closure of your home, you should discuss that as a matter of urgency with the relevant placing local authorities. It would also be helpful to notify Ofsted who will share this information with DfE.

Guidance on our regulatory activities during the suspension of routine inspections

We have published further information on the regulatory activity and urgent monitoring visits we are carrying out while our routine inspections are suspended. This is found on the [Ofsted: coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rolling update](#).

Children's social care services rated inadequate and due another inspection

At the moment, while routine inspections are suspended, we are unable to inspect to make a judgement on the four-point scale under the Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF). This also applies to those currently judged inadequate and due another inspection.

Please see our [new guidance](#) explaining what alternative activity we are carrying out. Where we have carried out some regulatory activity, including that off-site without visiting, we will usually publish a monitoring report explaining what we have done, as well as our findings, but without any judgements.

Children accessing education

We understand there may be challenges in providing children with the education they need at the moment. There is an expectation in [government guidance](#) 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. These children should be able to attend their own school or, if that is currently closed, another local school.

Please follow the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on vulnerable children and young people](#).

'Virtual' fostering panels

We have been asked whether panels are able to meet virtually using video conferencing systems.

We realise that providers will need to find creative and flexible ways of operating in the current circumstances and we do not believe that there is anything in the current regulations that prevent 'virtual' panel meetings.

Recruiting and approve more foster carers in the short term

The Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for local authorities on children's social care contains a section on [fostering](#) that provides the DfE's guidance on this and similar issues.

Health forms that are part of applications to register

Proposed new managers and other applicants should still apply to their GP for a health declaration in the normal way where it is a requirement. We recognise that it is very unlikely that the GP would be able to respond. For the moment, proposed new managers and applicants will be required to make their own self-declaration of their health, which will be considered by the inspector in reaching a decision regarding their suitability.

Once the pandemic period is over, and the requested health form is returned from the GP, the inspector will cross-reference this information with the self-declaration and discuss any anomalies. If there is evidence that the applicant deliberately misled Ofsted, then this may be considered as grounds for cancellation.

DBS checks

The DfE have asked us to share this information about DBS checks with you.

No fees will be charged for criminal records checks, enhanced criminal records checks and urgent applications for checks related to people who are providing social care services in relation to Covid-19 issues (which includes people employed in children's homes).

A fast-track process for children's barred list checks, which was already possible for adults, has now also been enabled for the purposes of the children's barred list – it will now be possible for urgent checks to be carried out if related to Covid-19 issues. This means that a preliminary response can be requested which will inform the applicant whether the person is not included on the barred list or that an enhanced criminal records check will be issued in due course.

There is DBS-issued guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-of-charge-dbs-applications-and-fast-track-barred-list-check-service>

Variations

Providers should [contact Ofsted](#) if they wish to vary their conditions of registration, in the usual way. They will be advised that the payment of fees has been suspended and sent the form to complete.

Sending us documents

Due to COVID-19, there are likely to be delays in reviewing incoming post to Ofsted. We ask that you do not post documents to us if possible.

You can submit [serious incident notifications](#), [independent visitor/monthly monitoring reports](#), and [new applications to register](#) online.

If we have previously asked you to post documents to us, please either scan or photograph them and send with your unique reference number (URN) to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

I hope this update has been helpful. Please continue to contact us if you have queries we can help with. Finally, this week we have started to deploy numbers of our staff out to the front-line and to support other government departments. We will continue to do our core regulatory work in Early Years and Social Care and continue, albeit exceptionally, to undertake urgent inspection when we absolutely need to. Let's continue to work together in everything we do.

Best wishes,
Yvette

Yvette Stanley, National Director for Social Care