

Keeping education settings open for vulnerable children

Note for Leadership Team (19 March 2020)

This note provides an update for Leadership Team on keeping education settings open for vulnerable children. It provides:

- The final definition of what the Department means by vulnerable children, including more detailed data on numbers
- An initial assessment of the key risks facing the Department

Definition of vulnerable children

We are defining **vulnerable children as those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health & Care Plans**. Children who have a social worker include children in need, children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority.

In addition to these groups we expect educational settings will want to provide support to other vulnerable children where they are able to do so e.g. children who are currently going through a social care assessment. We are also asking LAs to continue to maintain alternative provision for vulnerable young people – many of whom will fall in the categories above – where it is possible to do so.

We estimate that **educational settings will need to offer provision for c.666,000 children**. This figure takes into account the overlap between Children in Need and those with an EHCP. It does not take into account: those in AP settings, those currently being assessed for support or those who will not need to access the provision e.g. we expect some children with an EHCP will be well-supported by their parents at home.

Children who have a social worker

Children who have a social worker means the overall group of Children in Need of help and protection. This group is made up of children who are designated under a number of different social care classifications: children on a Child in Need Plan; children on a Child Protection Plan; and Looked After Children.

There are **364,003 Children in Need between the ages of 0 and 18**. This includes 234,927 on a Child in Need Plan; 50,924 on a Child Protection Plan and 78,152 Looked After Children. The annex includes tables showing the numbers of children on different social care classifications broken down by age and region.

Children with an EHC Plan

Children with an EHC plan are those who have SEND and have been assessed to require more support than is available through special educational needs support. They have therefore received an Education, Health and Care Plan which sets out their needs and the extra help they should receive.

There are **353,995 children with an EHC plan in England between the ages of 0 and 25**. These children are educated in a range of settings: 39% in mainstream schools and nurseries; 39% in special schools; 15% in mainstream post-16 settings;

1% in special post-16 institutions; 1% in Alternative Provision and a small number in non-maintained early years settings – see *Annex for detailed breakdown*

This group covers children with a range of needs, from physical disability to social, emotional and mental health. The most common type of primary need is autistic spectrum disorder (29%) and speech, language and communication needs (15%) – see *Annex for breakdown*.

As per the guidance published today, we expect education providers and local authorities to make a judgement for each child or young person based on a number of factors, including: the complexity of the individual's needs; the ability of the individual's parents or home to ensure their needs can be met safely; and the potential health risks to the individual from Covid-19.

We therefore **do not expect all 354,000 children with EHC plans to continue attending education settings**. We expect a lower proportion of those attending mainstream schools and colleges to continue attending, approximately half of those attending maintained special schools and post-16 institutions, and a higher proportion of those at non-maintained special schools and non-maintained early years settings. Rough calculations indicate that ~80,000-120,000 children and young people with EHC plans are likely to continue attending education settings - see *Annex for breakdown*.

Key risks

We have identified the following risks that the Department will need to manage:

1. **The Department cannot deliver the provision that is needed.** This might include: frontline staff becoming unwell or needing to self-isolate, limited resources (paper, pens etc.) if delivery services are disrupted etc.
2. **The Department is able to deliver appropriate provision but there are still risks to vulnerable children.** Risk to children might arise due to: parents/carers deciding not to send their children to the available provision or being unable to travel there (due to transport links or self-isolation), lack of inspection of provision, potential reliance on less qualified staff or volunteers, high numbers of vulnerable children all together etc.
3. **Children who do not meet the definition of a vulnerable child are at greater risk.** This might include: children who are currently being assessed for social care support or for an EHCP, children whose needs would have been identified by education professionals in the coming weeks/ months, siblings of vulnerable children who aren't themselves defined as vulnerable etc.
4. **Providers and local areas do not co-ordinate effectively around children.** This might include: providers competing for resources, LA boundary issues e.g. when a child lives in one LA but attends an educational setting in another, challenges sharing information across organisations etc.