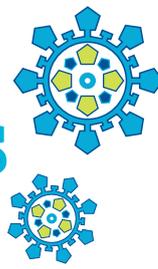


Coronavirus crisis

What you need to know: Vulnerable students

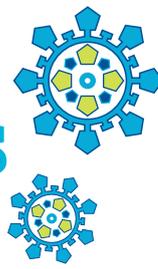


10 points on supporting vulnerable children who are at home

- 1** We know that schools are facing lots of questions about the best way to support vulnerable students who are at home. Each school is different, with varying levels of need in their community. But every school is a vital community space which in normal times provides support to their families in countless ways. The widespread closure and reduced provision will impact on vulnerable children and families in unique and complex ways. We think each school needs to make a plan about how it will support vulnerable children. The plan should be relevant to your local context, realistic and negotiated with the staff.
- 2** The DfE has defined vulnerable children as those with an EHC plan, children with a social worker and those whom head teachers additionally deem vulnerable. The NEU believes that children should be kept at home wherever possible to reduce the spread of the virus, including vulnerable children. To determine whether on-site attendance is necessary, risk assessments for vulnerable students should be completed by the head teachers, in conjunction with social workers, SENCOs and designated safeguarding leads, where relevant. This should be done in conjunction with parents/carers and students themselves and individual plans agreed.
- 3** The local authority is responsible for local co-ordination and ensuring that the social care needs of all vulnerable children continue to met. Assessing home environments is not something which heads or teachers should be asked to do – the expertise of social workers is required. The NEU should be consulted by the local authority (LA) in relation to the development of local plans for meeting the social care needs of vulnerable children. The Government has indicated that it will repay all extra costs which LAs need to spend to respond to this public health emergency.
- 4** Many vulnerable children are not able to attend on-site provision due to, for example, lack of transport, self-isolating, shielding family members, usually low attendance rate, parents/carers/siblings at home, going missing. Social workers will need to implement additional support in the home/community for vulnerable children who are not attending on-site provision and their families. The support from social services may include access to online therapeutic and support services for children/ family members, call rotas agreed in advance with appropriate local authority staff, respite care for small numbers of families and additional support from LA staff that could enhance safety and wellbeing at home. If LAs are re-deploying staff, this should be negotiated.
- 5** Where vulnerable students are not attending on-site (planned or unplanned), we think each school needs to set up a Communication with Vulnerable Families policy. This should set out how the school will continue contact between the school and the parent/carer, or where necessary, the student and how regular this contact will need to be. This policy should be negotiated with staff.

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- 6** The NEU thinks that regular telephone or online contact should be maintained directly with vulnerable students, by the designated safeguarding lead, head teachers, SENCOs, pastoral leads or learning mentors, where they have been given appropriate training. The NEU does not think teachers or support staff should be expected or required to use personal phones. Work phones or online calling facilities like Call Hub must be provided to support safe contact. The NEU thinks it is not appropriate or reasonable, for heads, teachers or support staff to be asked to visit children at or in their homes. If an immediate risk is identified, other agencies should be alerted.
- 7** Your school must complete the attendance recording form for all pupils. Whether or not your school is open, the school should record attempted and successful contacts with vulnerable children not attending on-site provision. As would happen in normal times, heads or DSLs should escalate issues to social workers or others relevant in the local authority if children and families are not responsive to contact, or if new concerns emerge or are reported. Schools should continue to seek support and advice from other agencies, as usual.
- 8** This isn't education as normal. Keeping in place individual support for students' learning or pastoral needs when they are at home won't be able to be the same as the individual support possible when schools are open. Schools should discuss with their staff what is reasonable and realistic, given fluctuating staffing levels. The NEU thinks it is important to be clear that it is not appropriate or safe to expect or ask teachers or support staff to undertake the responsibilities of social care, or social workers. Teachers have not been trained to assess risk in home environments or to ask the range of questions that social workers have been trained to carry out. Where staff volunteer to undertake new roles as part of their employment during the crisis, we recommend this is negotiated through the NEU.
- 9** Many families and heads remain unsure about which children are eligible for on-site provision, especially in areas where different schools are taking different approaches. This is why the NEU believes local authority co-ordination is really important to build some consistency and share good practice that is emerging. Where hubs are being considered, and if hubs are the only option, we think individual assessments should be completed for each vulnerable student to work out whether on-site provision is the most appropriate option, and to think about what support may be possible to help support students to transition to a new site.
- 10** All children can be vulnerable to abuse and when children experience harm or face risks, they are most likely to tell a peer first. The NEU recommends that information on local support services including the national domestic violence helpline and Childline should be provided to all children, parents, carers and education staff. We think that schools should publish a secure email/phone number that parents/carers can use if they are worried about their own child or someone's child. The NEU will place national helplines on its website.