

17 March 2020

Dear Designated Teachers, Designated Safeguarding Leads and Behaviour/Attendance Leads

Update on Coronavirus (COVID-19) precautions and arrangements at the Virtual School

I am writing to update you on the current situation regarding the Coronavirus as it applies to the Virtual School. The Virtual School teams are Education Support for Looked After Children (ESLAC), Education Welfare, EOTAS Health Needs and Schools' Safeguarding.

As far as possible we are trying to maintain business as usual and we are trying to ensure that any measures we do take are proportionate, align with Council and government guidance (including Public Health England), and support the welfare of our staff and the children we work with. You can see all of this guidance using the following links: · Northumberland County Council - Coronavirus · Public Health England · Department for Education

Virtual School staff: From today, when our staff aren't on visits to homes and schools or working with children, then they will be working from home and not at the team base. They will still be available by phone and email and can arrange meetings when it is essential to do so.

Meetings/conferences: Any non-essential or large meetings, training and conferences which are planned with the Virtual School between now and next half term – week beginning 25th May 2020 – will be postponed and when appropriate information sent to schools in briefings or newsletters. During that same period our staff will be sending apologies for their attendance at non-essential or large meetings, training and conferences.

Looked after children: We will prioritise continued education for looked after children who are not in school, pupils taking Year 6 SATs and Year 11 pupils who are sitting public exams this summer. We will continue to support our pupils to prepare on the assumption that national tests and public examinations are going ahead as planned. This includes supporting foster carers and liaising with children's social care.

EOTAS Health Needs: Tuition for pupils currently working with the service will continue as long as it is safe and possible to do so. Teaching venues are all being monitored to see if closure is necessary. If levels of staffing and Council and government guidance mean that the tuition cannot continue, then pupils will all have access to resources to work from home.

Registers: Where a pupil cannot attend school due to illness, as normally would happen, the pupil should be recorded as absent in the attendance register and the school will authorise the absence. Code I (Illness) should be used in this instance.

Where a pupil is in self-isolation, in accordance with latest information and advice from Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England, the pupil should be recorded as unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances in the attendance register. Code Y (Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances) should be used in this instance.

Service Level Agreement: We will try to make sure that all services delivered through the Education Welfare and Schools' Safeguarding SLAs go ahead as planned. However, it is inevitable that there will be some disruption. Any school or setting which has an SLA with us will be contact this week and alternative arrangements made where necessary.

Safeguarding: There is no change to safeguarding procedures and arrangements for children. If you have a concern about a child, you should still contact OneCall in the same way on 01670 536400. Carol Leckie's team is still available for advice about all aspects of safeguarding standards. DSL briefings and face to face meetings have been postponed until at least May, but you will still receive current issues of Safe to Learn in March and April.

Preventative measures: We are taking measures at the Virtual School to help prevent the spread of the virus. Initial precautionary measures include:

- asking our staff to regularly wash their hands and take the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach to coughs and sneezes.
- anti-bacterial sanitizers are in place at our team base and teaching bases (for EOTAS pupils)
- we have asked alternative providers to give us reassurance that they are following the Council's, government's and Public Health England's advice
- we are monitoring the absence of staff and pupils we work with and know what action to take in case of a suspected/actual case.

Contacting us: Please contact us with queries by phone or by email. Your query will be logged and you will receive a response by the end of the working day or within 24 hours. If you can not make contact with a member of staff directly then please use these generic details and someone will respond to your query as soon as possible:

- If you have a query for the Education Welfare team please email - educationwelfare@northumberland.gov.uk
- If you have a query for the looked after children's team please email - eslac.info@northumberland.gov.uk

- If you have a query for the Safeguarding team or children educated other than at school team please email - eotashealth@northumberland.gov.uk
- If you have a more urgent query or request please telephone 01670 622787.

As you know, the situation is fast changing but we are monitoring on a daily basis and I will update you appropriately as and when the information and guidance in this briefing note changes.

Thank you for your understanding and co-operation.