

Headteachers' Update

The Daily 5 O'Clock Update For Schools

National Offers Day for Reception 2020 places

As you know, National Offers Day for Reception 2020 places is on Thursday (16th April) of this week with offers going ahead as normal.

Normally, we would have sent out your final allocation lists a few weeks ago but the process relies on cross-coordination with other LAs and they have had some COVID19 related issues which has caused a delay in us being able to complete the coordination of offers for reception places.

Apologies for the delay that this has caused but your allocation lists are now in the google folders that were shared with you by the Admissions Team. The lists are ranked in criteria order.

We have updated our website with a FAQ document which should help with any queries you receive directly:

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/School-admissions-places-appeals-1.aspx>.

To enable parents to continue to have the right to appeal any school admission decisions, the DfE will be making regulatory changes that, subject to legislation, will come into force on 24 April 2020. The new regulations will relax some of the current requirements set out in the School Admission Appeals Code 2012, giving admission authorities flexibility to manage appeals whilst ensuring families are supported and not disadvantaged by current measures to protect public health. Given this, Northumberland will wait for further guidance before developing a revised method of hearing appeals. This information will follow once the disapplication of the regulations has been approved.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/admission-appeals-for-school-places>

If you have any questions related to your allocations, or anything else linked to National Offers Day, please contact us via email: schooladmissions@northumberland.gov.uk.

Please can you also encourage your parents to contact the Schools Admissions Team via email in the first instance if they require any immediate assistance.

Reclaiming Additional Costs in Relation to FSM

We are aware that, following the difficulties with FSM Vouchers, a number of schools have made alternative arrangements and have asked for additional information in relation to how to reclaim additional costs incurred in providing FSM. While we are still awaiting some of the details from the DfE, the link below, may provide some assistance:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools/school-funding-exceptional-costs-associated-with-coronavirus-covid-19-for-the-period-march-to-july-2020?es_c=1BF841F037E5B649CBF32E8617A9D574&es_cl=6A219277CCF72C9E1EC94D8DA71C9C63&es_id=9d%C2%A3o3#additional-costs-covered-by-the-fund.

It includes the following guidance:

We are asking schools to make the necessary payments from their existing budgets and record these in line with local finance policies. In June, we will publish further guidance for schools on the process for informing us of any additional costs relating to coronavirus (COVID-19). We understand the significant challenges schools are facing at present and will therefore make the process for reporting this information as simple as possible. We will then make payments – direct to academies, or to local authorities to pass onto their schools – to reimburse schools for costs they apply for up to the limits set out below.

While it highlights FSM as one of the three likely areas where schools may incur additional costs, there is a proviso that:

While we are not asking schools to draw on existing reserves to meet these costs, we do not expect schools to make a claim against this funding if they are anticipating that they will be able to add to their reserves in the 2020 to 2021 financial year.

Clearly, given current uncertainties, the key ask of schools is that all this expenditure is recorded and tracked at this stage. To support you with this, please liaise with your usual Corporate Finance accountancy contact.

Coronavirus (COVID-19): financial support for schools

Further to the above and the guidance issued by the DfE in relation to financial support to schools to cover costs related to the Coronavirus outbreak, please note that a new detail code has been created for you to use to help capture any additional costs incurred.

Detail code for COVID-19 is **CS1001**.

The DfE is expected to issue further guidance in June on the process for informing them of any additional costs relating to COVID-19. Your accountancy contact will be able to support you in identifying all costs which have been charged to the new detail code **CS1001**.

Teaching and Support Staff Insurance Supply Schemes and Covid-19

The Teaching and Support Staff Insurance Supply Scheme is intended to offer a simple and cost-effective method for schools to insure against unexpected staff absence, when additional staffing cover is likely to be required. It was not intended to provide cover in the situation we are currently faced with due to Covid-19 where the majority of school staff are not in attendance, and schools, where open, are generally operating on a reduced staff basis.

To re-cap, when the likelihood of widespread school closure became evident, a notice was published on the e-courier on Tuesday 24 March notifying schools of the suspension of the Scheme with effect from Friday 20 March - when schools were closing to most pupils.

Given the current uncertainties, it seems appropriate to continue the suspension of the scheme for the Summer Term 2020. This will involve a pro-rata adjustment to the remaining charges given that cover has been provided for 121 days up to and including 20 March, but only approximately 111 days have been charged for to date.

The Scheme clearly cannot provide ongoing benefits without an equivalent income stream. The default position, therefore, will be that no further charges will be levied, nor benefits paid, in respect of the period from 20 March to the scheduled end of the summer term on Friday 17 July. This is the fairest and simplest solution in relation to the treatment of claims and premiums for the summer term.

Since the notification of the suspension of the Scheme was published, however, there has been enquiries from schools in relation to specific circumstances at their schools. These have mainly been about ongoing maternity leave and long-term sickness absence

Whilst it is felt that the Scheme cannot be expected to continue to fund ongoing claims if the scheme is suspended and no charges are being levied, if there are specific circumstances where a school believes it will be financially disadvantaged through the suspension of the Schemes in the above situations, they will be allowed to submit a business case to demonstrate this. This will be reviewed by the Education and Skills Business Manager and a decision made. Please note that in the assessment of any claim, payments originally due to the Scheme for the Summer term will be offset against any benefits to be paid. Evidence may also be sought from HR in respect of any claim.

Should the School concerned remain dissatisfied following the decision of the Education and Skills Business Manager, it has the right to request that the decision be reviewed by a panel chaired by the Service Director - Education and Skills, whose decision will be final.

Further details and the 'appeal' form to be completed will be emailed to headteachers tomorrow morning.

I am aware that the Northumberland Supply Insurance Schemes are very good value when compared to commercial providers and are highly regarded by schools. I do not want to lose them because we cannot afford to maintain them or to have to increase the premiums that schools pay to such a level that they become prohibitive and unattractive to schools. I am therefore appealing to you to consider your supply staffing commitments carefully before you submit the appeal form. Like you, I would like to see the Supply Insurance Schemes open for business as usual in September but this will only be possible if it remains financially viable.

Schools can express an interest in the respective 2020/21 schemes, commencing September 2020 via the SLA portal. At the present time, 50 (Teachers) and 40 (Support Staff) schools have currently expressed an interest in the Schemes. Further information in relation to this will be made available in due course.