

Schools Forum

23 June 2020

Covid-19

Introduction

1. This report sets out the position on COVID-19 and provides details of government action to date to support schools.

Background

2. As part of the national response to the Covid-19 crisis the Government announced that Schools, Colleges and Early Years Settings would close after 20th March 2020 except for the children of key workers and vulnerable children.
3. The Covid-19 crisis has provided an unprecedented situation for the DfE, the Local Authority and schools with a requirement to rapidly develop policy to respond to events which have never been faced before. Plans have had to continually evolve in response to the many and varied challenges encountered as the situation has unfolded and as recovery arrangements are announced. This will no doubt continue over the coming months.

School Funding

4. The Department for Education (DfE) have published guidance for local authorities and schools on funding whilst they are experiencing the impact of COVID 19 on the management and delivery of education.
5. Schools will continue to receive their core funding allocation, as determined by the Local Authority for maintained schools for the 2020/21 financial year. Academies and non-maintained special schools will continue to receive their core funding allocations through the general annual grant (GAG) until August 2021. This will happen regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure and will ensure schools can continue to pay staff and meet other regular financial commitments during this time.
6. Local authorities will also continue to receive their high needs budget and should continue to pay top-up and other high needs funding to schools. This is to ensure that the employment and payment of staff supporting schools with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can continue.
7. Where schools pay top-up or other funding for pupils attending alternative provision (AP), or pay for other SEND or AP services, these

payments are expected to continue so that teachers and support staff can be paid in accordance with their existing employment contracts.

8. If placements and services for the summer term have not yet been agreed, schools should fund on the basis of previous patterns of placements and commissioning.
9. In these challenging times the Government is encouraging all schools to continue to manage their budgets in the most effective way possible, and to redirect their existing resources to best support all their pupils, particularly vulnerable children and children of critical workers, in the current circumstances.

Exceptional Costs

10. The DfE recognise that in some instances where schools have remained open, they may already have, or will over the coming weeks, face additional costs as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In some instances, schools may not be able to cover these costs from their existing resources.
11. The DfE have recognised the following areas where schools may face additional costs as a result:-
 - a. increased premises related costs (including utilities and resources needed to keep the school open, such as hygiene services) associated with keeping schools open during the Easter and/or summer half term holidays, for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, over and above the costs that schools would have faced in other circumstances
 - b. support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school, where those costs are not covered by the FSM national voucher scheme - this covers:
 - i. costs to schools arising before the introduction of the national voucher scheme
 - ii. costs where schools are providing free meals to children for whom the national voucher scheme is inappropriate (for example, because there are no participating supermarkets locally or schools are providing meals directly)
 - c. additional cleaning – required due to confirmed or suspected coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, in line with COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings, over and above the cost of existing cleaning arrangements
 - d. If a school faces other, extraordinary costs to deliver appropriate support to their pupils through this period that are not covered by the list above and cannot be met by existing budgets, they should contact DfE.CoronavirusHelpline@education.gov.uk.
12. The DfE plan to publish further guidance in June with more details of the financial support offered through this process.

13. The funding will be available to schools that are unable to meet such additional costs from their existing resources, or which they could only meet by drawing down on reserves and undermining their long-term financial sustainability. The DfE are not expecting schools to make a claim against this funding if they are anticipating that they will be able to add to their reserves in the 2020-21 financial year.
14. There are cash limits on the level of funding a school can claim:-

Mainstream schools	
250 pupils or fewer	£25,000
251 to 500 pupils	£30,000
501 to 1000 pupils	£50,000
Over 1000 pupils	£75,000
Special schools and alternative provision	
All schools	£50,000

15. There may be some exceptional instances where individual schools will face additional costs that are higher than these limits. In these circumstances, schools will be able to make a case for increasing the limit when they submit a claim for additional funding.
16. For the purposes of claims, it is important for schools to keep good financial and non-financial records of costs.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

17. Government guidance has confirmed that there are some limited circumstances where schools may be able to furlough staff and access the funding from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to support up to 80% of an employees' usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month. This support is accessible where privately generated income has either stopped or been reduced and there are staff that are typically paid from these private income streams. The DfE guidance indicates that schools should first seek to make the necessary savings from their existing budget or consider options to redeploy these staff before furloughing them and should only seek support through the CJRS after all options have been considered. No maintained schools in Stockton have furloughed staff.

High Needs

18. Covid-19 has caused delay in progressing the planned high needs savings of £0.728m set out in the approved 2020/21 Schools Budget and an update will be brought to the Schools Forum in the autumn.

Data Collection

19. To help reduce the burden on educational and care settings during COVID-19, the DfE have cancelled or paused all but the most essential data collections, services and requests from educational and care settings until the end of June 2020. Those cancelled include the Section 251 Budget 2020/21 return and School Census (summer 2020).

Procurement Policy Note

20. During the Covid-19 outbreak Schools and Academies still need to rely upon the commitment and support from their contracted suppliers to either maintain services and supplies, or to quickly to return to a business as usual supply situation in the near future.
21. It is recognised that during this challenging time that circumstances may arise where some suppliers may struggle to meet their contractual obligations, and thus the need to alter requirements, temporarily suspend some services, or change ways of working.
22. The Government has issued a Procurement Policy Note (PPN 02/20) and further additional guidance for state funded schools which sets out information with regard to potential Supplier Relief.

Laptops for Disadvantaged Children

23. Under a DfE backed scheme disadvantaged children are being given free laptops and tablets in a bid to make remote learning easier during the coronavirus lockdown. This is being facilitated through our partners at One IT.

Recommendation

24. The Schools Forum is asked to note the report.

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