

Written evidence submitted by Ofsted

The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

Introduction to the organisation

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. We also inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people. Ofsted is a non-ministerial department.

We have a wide-ranging view of education, training and care. Through our work, we look at the full breadth and depth of young people's experiences. In responding to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) crisis, we have had direct feedback from many of those working on the front line. We have also adapted our own work in the short term and are considering the longer-term consequences of COVID-19 on education and children's services.

Summary

This is a hugely challenging time for everyone working across education and social care. There is remarkable work being done to keep children as safe as possible and to provide learning as far as possible, for millions of children and young people. Despite this, COVID-19 will have a significant and potentially lasting impact on education and children's services and the children and young people they support. The situation is moving quickly and so we have included in this submission some feedback from the sector about what they think the impact will be, although we cannot be certain this will materialise.

Our work with the education and social care sectors has identified three main areas of concern:

- **Impact on vulnerable children.** Children who were already identified as vulnerable to abuse or neglect, or otherwise at risk, may now be facing an increased risk of harm due to social isolation, while they are out of view of teachers and social workers. More children may become vulnerable, including to abuse, as families are affected by increased poverty, social isolation and psycho-social distress. There is pressure on the capacity of the care system because of the virus, and this may become greater as referrals are made following the crisis.
- **Impact on education.** No matter how good remote learning is, it is not a substitute for attending nursery, school, college or learning on the job. Our evidence is clear: these settings have huge benefits for children and young people academically, technically and socially, as well as for their physical and mental health. There is wider evidence to suggest that the impact of missing face-to-face education will be greatest for the least well-off children, the lowest achieving (especially those who cannot read well and so are least able to learn independently), early stage EAL children, and the least motivated, who do little work even when good remote learning is on offer. Children's loss of motivation is widely reported by parents and is affecting many who are not in typical disadvantaged categories.
- **Impact on provider market.** Some parts of the system rely on non-government funding – particularly early years and apprenticeships. The economic downturn that looks certain to follow the crisis could hit them hard. In addition, we have previously

reported a range of pressures on children's services including increasing demand, funding pressures, insufficient supply of places for children and recruitment and retention challenges in the social work and care workforce. COVID-19 has increased these challenges.

Below we provide evidence against the terms of reference the committee set out.

The capacity of children's services to support vulnerable children and young people

Initially there was a reduction in the number of referrals to children's social services, largely due to early years and school closures. However, there is widespread concern that referrals will rise and capacity may be inadequate as lock-down continues to be lifted. Many local authorities are taking action now to try and flatten the 'spike' in referrals they expect in September - working directly with schools and school leaders. We are concerned about: the children who have become 'hidden'; those that have been increasingly exposed to abuse and neglect; and those whose family circumstances have become more challenging during this period. We are concerned about the capacity of the wider sector to respond to children and families that may need help and support as universal services and voluntary sector organisations will be equally stretched and challenged.

Most pupils with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans are not attending school, although the proportion of special schools (including residential special schools (RSS)) that are open has increased through the period of the pandemic. Many of these children will find it difficult to understand and process COVID-19 and lockdown which could mean additional stress on parents. Stays in RSS or short breaks help families manage the challenge of caring for children who need a lot of personal care and supervision. Without this support there is potential for family breakdown. Furthermore, disabled children's families are already more likely to be living in poverty and the impact of COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate this.

We have seen considerable pressure on secure children's homes due to staff sickness and shielding. Despite hard work by providers, there are large numbers of young people needing accommodation for every available place. The insufficiency of both children's homes and secure children's homes means that young people continue to be placed far from home and in placements which may not best be suited to meet their needs. The President of the Family Courts has raised concerns about the lack of secure welfare provision.

A significant proportion of voluntary adoption agencies are reporting serious financial problems, exacerbated by the difficulties in generating income through fundraising during COVID-19. The government has provided some support for salary costs of frontline staff¹, and while this means agencies are currently coping, there is some concern about the amount of time it will take for income to return to a level that will cover costs.

The government has made some temporary changes to regulations for children's social services. We do not yet have evidence about the impact of the changes to regulations on the capacity of children's services to support children and young people. Anecdotally we have seen little if any recourse to the new flexibilities. There has been some sensible decision-making about using technology to keep in contact with children and to do some work differently. For example, adoption and fostering agencies have reported that changes

¹ <https://www.cvaa.org.uk/covid-19-resources#Govfunding>

in (adoption/fostering) panels were unnecessary due to their use of web-based video communication.

The effect of provider closure on the early years sector, including reference to:

- **children's early development**
- **the early years funded entitlement and the childcare market**

Children's early development

The research is clear: a child's early education lasts a lifetime. Put simply, by the end of Reception, the ability to decode text, write and use numbers is fundamental; they are the building blocks for all other learning. Without firm foundations in these areas, a child's life chances can be severely restricted.² The basics need to be taught well from the start. There is clearly cause for concern over children missing out on learning generally, but it's even more acute at this vital age. Some children, for example those from lower socio-economic groups, EAL children who have yet to learn English, slower developing children or those with learning difficulties, tend to start nursery already behind their peers. A range of studies highlight the extent to which there can be a vocabulary gap between children from disadvantaged families and their peers.³ Missing out on early education is likely therefore to have a bigger detrimental impact on this group.

Online education is likely to have less benefit for younger children. The early years foundation stage (EYFS) sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. Some of these areas of learning, such as literacy and mathematics can be facilitated to a limited extent through online education. Other areas such as developing fine motor skills in physical development or empathy in personal, social and emotional development do not lend themselves to remote education.

DfE statistics show that there was a steady increase in the open EY settings⁴, however they estimate that, as of 2 July, only around 23% of children who usually attend childcare in term time are attending.

The early years funded entitlement and the childcare market

Early years providers contacted us at the start of lockdown with concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their business and with questions about financial support after 1 June. Between 23 March and 26 June, we had over 370 enquiries from early years settings because they couldn't pay an invoice. We have done what we can to ease some concern: we have allowed any provider who received an annual fee invoice after 23 March until 30 September to pay their fees.

We are continuing to review new applications to join the early years register and monitor the number of providers leaving. The number has remained stable over the three successive January to March periods (2018 to 2020). Over the past few years, despite numbers of providers overall decreasing, the early years market has continued to provide the same capacity of places; mostly medium and larger sized providers have expanded to meet the

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663560/28933_Ofsted_-_Early_Years_Curriculum_Report_-_Accessible.pdf

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/813228/Research_for EIF framework 100619_16 .pdf

⁴<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-25>

need. There are now, however, early indications that some early years providers may not reopen at all after the pandemic, particularly childminders and small, independent nurseries. Between 23 March and 26 June over 30 providers contacted us directly to say they were unlikely to operate after this crisis, for a wide range of reasons.

Over 15,000 people follow our Childcare Registration page on Facebook where childminders can ask us questions directly. Most of the questions we have received are about funding. Childminders aren't eligible for the government's furlough scheme, and newer childminders are unlikely to have three years' worth of tax returns to claim support for self-employed. However, for the self-employed (including childminders), the minimum income floor is being temporarily relaxed, meaning Universal Credit is at a rate matching statutory sick pay. We will work closely with the DfE on helping the EY sector to recover from this crisis. Aside from worries about funding, childminders have been mainly concerned about how to ensure the safety of children in their care and making sure they minimise risk of cross-infection if children attend two settings.

The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment

We do not yet have any evidence about the impact of cancelling formal exams on the fairness of qualification awards or pupils' progression. In further education, the skills assessments for some vocational and technical and functional skills qualifications have gone ahead to make sure safety and employer requirements are met, in line with the extraordinary framework to be published by Ofqual. For competence-based assessment it has often been necessary to wait until these assessments can take place in person. Delays into the autumn term in being able to complete these assessments may inhibit progression to the next stage of education or employment, but measures are being taken to avoid any such delay wherever possible.

Support for pupils and families during closures, including:

- **The consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning**

Although there were no clear guidelines from the government for the summer term about what nurseries, schools or colleges should provide by way of remote education, these have been put in place for September.⁵ Many schools have made a tremendous effort from a standing start and are doing what they can. There is however great variation of provision between schools, as discussed below.

We have suspended regular inspection during this period, therefore we do not have direct evidence from inspection about the consistency of messaging from providers about remote education. However, we have been monitoring complaints that come into us. Between 23 March and 30 June 2020, we logged 1,217 complaints (compared to 3,094 for the same period in 2019), of which 18% (224) were related to COVID-19.

The complaints covered a range of issues including:

- School communications and expectations (60)
- Work and help provided by the school or college (54)

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#section-3-curriculum-behaviour-and-pastoral-support>

- Hygiene and social distancing (33)
- Eligibility of children to be given a place at school (22)
- Exam or qualification cancellations (11)
- Free school meals (10)
- Paying fees to independent schools (7)

Other complaints which did not relate directly to COVID-19 were on a range of issues including, bullying, self-harm and a small number of safeguarding concerns.

Survey data collected by Teacher Tapp also shows that there is great variation in workload between teachers. Most teachers are working fewer hours than usual, but a minority are working for much longer.⁶ School leaders are more likely than teachers to be working longer than usual.⁷

There are several surveys that have been undertaken by parent and sector bodies about support from schools and colleges for remote learning, which show significant variation in how providers have responded:

- Many teachers are assembling packages of remote learning, whether it is direct online lessons, or using some of the online resources that have been put together⁸
- Over 40% of parents reported pupils in year 11 did not receive any work from the school to do at home.⁹
- 31 percent of private schools provided four or more live online lessons daily, as compared with just 6 percent in state schools.¹⁰ 43% of learning providers are managing to train apprentices or other learners at between 80% - 100% of their pre-pandemic capacity¹¹.

How pupils and learners are engaging with the resources provided also varies:

- In virtually all schools most children are believed to have been learning less than they would have been in schools, with schools with least advantaged intakes most affected.
- Only 2% of teachers in the most deprived areas estimated all or almost all of the students they teach were learning as much or more during lockdown as they would have been at school. This is in comparison to 6% in the most affluent areas and 41% in fee paying schools¹²
- Sixty one percent of colleges reported 'some' or 'a lot' of variation in learning hours by subject¹³
- 81% of current apprentices are still actively learning after providers executed an almost overnight switch to online learning and assessment resources¹⁴

⁶ <https://teachertapp.co.uk/what-are-teachers-doing-at-home-and-where-are-you-doing-it/>

⁷ <https://teachertapp.co.uk/learning-or-not-from-afar-the-first-week-of-school-closures/>

⁸ <https://teachertapp.co.uk/to-work-or-not-to-work-would-teachers-take-a-furlough/>

⁹

https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4101/home_learning_during_covid_19_findings_from_the_understanding_society_longitudinal_study.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.llakes.ac.uk/sites/default/files/LLAKES%20Working%20Paper%2067_0.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.aelp.org.uk/news/news/press-releases/training-providers-working-miracles-to-preserve-apprenticeships-and-other-skills-programmes-but-living-on-borrowed-time-latest-aelp-covid-19-impact-survey-shows/>

¹² <https://teachertapp.co.uk/lets-talk-about-feelings-but-still-with-data/>

¹³ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20Covid19%20and%20colleges%20survey%204.5.20.pdf>

Most parents are satisfied with the way schools have responded and engaged with them, but a minority clearly are not:

- 82% of parents were satisfied with the level of home learning support given by their child's school. Although 85% of parents thought the school had communicated well with them, there are a small group of parents who haven't had this experience.¹⁵

Children's and young people's mental health and safety outside the structure and oversight of in-person education

Our evidence over time shows that the link between schools and social care helps protect children from abuse and neglect: normally schools and nurseries are in the top 3 agencies for referrals to children's social care. Without this link, local authorities are receiving far fewer notifications. We have, however, seen very worrying safeguarding notifications about significant harm to babies under 1 and to under-fives, often linked to situations with domestic violence. We have also seen worrying notifications concerning teenagers self-harming and attempting or indeed committing suicide. Taken with much lower numbers of school-age referrals, we are worried that many children have fallen from sight and that this will lead to increased pressure on the capacity of the child protection and care system when delayed referrals are made.

Local authorities and wider providers have made use of imaginative ways of keeping in-touch with children and families, but some children who have social workers have not had the usual volume of face to face contact with these trusted professionals. Without face to face contact and seeing the child alone, it is harder for professionals to identify abuse and/or take preventative steps to stop abuse happening. It may also be harder to put in place support and, in the cases where there might be significant harm, it may be difficult to gather evidence for court proceedings.

There is a range of specific concerns about safeguarding children - this list is not exhaustive but highlights some areas of concern:

- Incidents of domestic abuse – including situations where there were no previous risks of harm. This may also result in children going missing. In London alone, the Metropolitan police are arresting on average 100 people a day for domestic offences during the COVID-19 lockdown. They report charges and cautions are up by 24% from 9 March compared to last year¹⁶. Multiple helplines, including the National Helpline for victims of domestic abuse are reporting a surge in calls to helplines.
- Online abuse of children -risks include radicalisation and sexual abuse online, with some charities reporting an increase in 'sextortion', where children are forced to preform sex acts online. The National Crime Agency have predicted that it is 'highly likely' there is more online abuse during the period of lockdown.
- Continuation of criminal exploitation of children, including county lines via different means. Children may also be more vulnerable due to instability in the drug market, which could increase the level of violence and intensify the risks.

¹⁴ <https://www.aelp.org.uk/news/news/press-releases/training-providers-working-miracles-to-preserve-apprenticeships-and-other-skills-programmes-but-living-on-borrowed-time-latest-aelp-covid-19-impact-survey-shows/>

¹⁵ <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/News/Major-new-Parentkind-research---over-a-quarter-of-a-million-parents-have-a-say-on-school-closures-and-coronavirus-fears>

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/24/charges-and-cautions-for-domestic-violence-rise-by-24-in-london>

The most vulnerable groups of children during this time are:

- young carers who are carers for a family member
- care leavers who may be very socially isolated
- newborn babies with parents who are struggling as they will lack support from extended family and from health visitors no longer visiting the home
- children with special educational needs or learning disabilities may need additional support to adapt to changes in routine and to understand what is going on. Disabled children may no longer be able to get educational support and already face increased risk of abuse (disabled children are four times more likely to be abused than able bodied children)

Children's mental health

While COVID-19 will affect all children, for those with pre-existing mental health conditions the effects are likely to be particularly severe. Children are experiencing social distancing, high levels of isolation and wider dislocation. Many children are not in school and getting the support they usually provide. There have been many children who have lost motivation and are in their bedrooms playing games or on social media rather than doing school work. Many children are also exposed to endless news stories and information on social media about the virus. We know from research¹⁷ that children do worry about society and wider global issues, so many will be experiencing increased anxiety to some greater or lesser extent. The increased coronavirus risk for some black and minority ethnic groups and wide reporting of this in the media might lead to children from these groups feeling more anxious, although we do not yet have any evidence around this.

For young people with pre-existing anxiety, depression, OCD and ADHD the restrictions caused by COVID-19 may be extremely challenging. For example, those with hyperactivity conditions or ADHD may find being restricted in movement at home very difficult.

Children with pre-existing mental health conditions are often not be able to access their normal support, as appointments are being cancelled or disrupted, and their conditions could well worsen. As and when children return to school it may well be schools who are best placed to identify those in need of help and support with their mental health and it is vital that there are services available for these children to access the right support early.

Education can be a protective factor in children's mental health. People with high levels of education are less likely to have mental health problems. Routine, learning in normal lessons and physical and social activity are important for children's mental health. Nurseries, schools and colleges also create a safe and calm environment and children can learn to manage the normal stress of life effectively. Some schools are reporting the children who have gone back to school are reassured by the routine, keen to learn and are not displaying signs of poor mental health. It is important to be aware of issues that may arise but too early to tell how widespread they may be.

For children in care or adopted children, a mixed picture is emerging. Some carers have reported an increase in challenging behaviour, violence and aggression, and concerns about the mental wellbeing. However, there appears to have been some benefits for many children – they have enjoyed having the time at home to develop stronger relationships with the people they live with there. Many carers have reported that their children seem calmer without the stresses and demands that school and other aspects of everyday life can bring.

¹⁷ <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/the-good-childhood-report-2019>

Recent surveys of the views of care leavers, many of whom have been particularly vulnerable to feelings of isolation and loneliness during the lockdown period, don't present a consistent view of the quality or effectiveness of support that they have received. It is evident that some care leavers feel that they have been less well supported during the crisis, though some have welcomed the creative efforts that LAs and agencies have made to keep in touch and support care leavers through 'virtual' means.

The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses

We have paused regular inspections and therefore do not have direct evidence of the impact on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses. There are several provider surveys that found:

- 1 in 5 apprentices are on a break in learning, have been made redundant or have left their programme. Sectors most adversely affected appear to be health & care; early years educators; hospitality & catering; and the motor trades¹⁸.
- A quarter of providers fear that their chances of survival are less than 50%¹⁹.
- Three-fifths of employers surveyed say their apprentices have lost out on work or learning following the crisis. 36% have been furloughed, 8% made redundant and 17% have had their off-the-job learning suspended²⁰.

It is clear from Ofsted's recent review of online education during COVID-19 that while many providers have continued to deliver some of their education and training remotely or online, this can only ever be a partial solution to ensuring a good quality of education and training where education cannot happen face-to-face and, indeed, online and remote education can be and is sometimes delivered ineffectively. For this to work effectively, it needs to be well-integrated into the provider's curriculum offer as a whole and adapted to the learning needs of students and teachers need to be suitably able and trained to do so. Learners miss the face-to-face contact of the classroom, not only for social interaction but also for the instant feedback and opportunity to ask questions that it provides. Some providers say their learner engagement is good because learners have logged on to online sessions. The reality may be that the learners have logged on but are doing other things, and so are not fully engaged in the live learning. Some learners admitted to being frequently distracted. To avoid those without sufficient access to online devices and connectivity falling behind where online education is relied upon, DfE, colleges and provider need to invest in this as well as in a suitable virtual learning environment and staff training.

The longer sections of the economy are shut down or limited, the more employers and potential employers are likely to cease trading, reducing employment opportunities at least in the short term.

The financial implications of closures for providers (including higher education and independent training providers), pupils and families

¹⁸ <https://www.aelp.org.uk/news/news/press-releases/training-providers-working-miracles-to-preserve-apprenticeships-and-other-skills-programmes-but-living-on-borrowed-time-latest-aelp-covid-19-impact-survey-shows/>

¹⁹ <https://www.aelp.org.uk/news/news/press-releases/training-providers-working-miracles-to-preserve-apprenticeships-and-other-skills-programmes-but-living-on-borrowed-time-latest-aelp-covid-19-impact-survey-shows/>

²⁰ <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/up-to-three-fifths-of-apprentices-have-lost-out-on-work-experience-or-learning-as-a-result-of-the-pandemic/>

We are not aware of many providers leaving the skills market because of COVID-19 but many providers have raised concerns about the financial implications and it is still quite early to know what the overall impact is.

COVID-19 has potentially serious financial implications for most further education and skills providers, as unlike state-funded schools, virtually none are solely grant-funded, but are also dependent on commercial arrangements, fees and income for their cash flow and financial stability.

Colleges are, on average, around 80% grant-funded but some are only 50% grant-funded. Many colleges may be dependent on emergency funding for some time otherwise they may become insolvent. As community assets, DfE is taking steps to provide necessary emergency support for colleges. However, most FE colleges are also dependent on apprenticeships funding via the levy and this is not currently guaranteed. Further government funding initiatives around capital expenditure and the pulling forward of some of the national skills fund should also help colleges to re-balance their finances.

Most seriously, providers and provision funded through the apprenticeship levy will not have this special provider relief available and that means hundreds of independent learning providers are dependent on other schemes for cashflow and continuation. Furthermore, they are dependent for funding on employing businesses who may cease trading or go insolvent themselves. The full impact of this remains to be seen but some providers have certainly ceased trading.

A number of further government measures to boost further education and training announced in the Chancellor's summer statement should help colleges and providers financially. But will take a few months before they are likely to have a positive impact. These relate to increasing the opportunity for traineeships, work placement and apprenticeships and to complete 16 to 19 study programmes.

The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)

Although we cannot be sure exactly how much difference time out of school will have on pupils' achievement, there is widespread agreement that the gap in attainment between the lowest achieving and highest achieving is widening. The Education Endowment Foundation rapid evidence assessment estimates the disadvantage gap could widen from 11% to 75%.²¹ This is based on existing evidence of the impact of school closures on disadvantaged pupils in circumstances such as summer holidays, adverse weather and natural disasters - as well as factors which may moderate the impact.

COVID-19 has not necessarily affected all children uniformly. Below we set out the evidence about the impact on:

- Children at risk of abuse
- Looked after children
- Care leavers
- Children in secure children's homes
- Children with SEND

²¹ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-school-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/>

- Children with pre-existing mental health conditions

Children at risk of abuse

We do not know how many children might be suffering or at risk of abuse while they are hidden from the sight of teachers and other professionals. Ofsted is working with the Department for Education to consider the information that is available about child safeguarding incidents to see if this reveals any emerging patterns or trends.

Looked after children

Feedback from the sector suggests that many settled looked after children, who are either in foster care or children's homes, have benefitted from the time at home and the reduction of external pressures and existing care arrangements have been generally stable. However, early indications suggest that there is reduced availability of foster placements for children who are entering care or need to move. Those looked after children with an already disrupted education will need their personal education plans to support their continued catching up.

Contact with birth family may have been disrupted, including sibling contact. Whilst efforts to continue online contact are welcomed, the impact of this on children with already disrupted attachments may be significant.

The Fostering and Kinship Care communities include many older carers, some with a need to shield. Carers affected have reported an additional significant strain on the family due to the impact of lockdown.

Assessments of foster carers and adopters are progressing virtually but are unlikely to proceed to approval in the absence of face-to-face visits. Similarly, without face-to-face introductions to matched adopters, some delay is inevitable for children. The courts are functioning to some extent virtually but there has been a general slowing down and there have been worries raised by advocacy organisations about the possible impact of virtual hearings on parents and children going through what are already very difficult proceedings.

Care leavers

In relation to care leavers, LAs' main challenge/priority has been to identify the young people who are most vulnerable, particularly to isolation, loneliness and poor mental health. LAs are working hard to keep in touch virtually with care leavers (the DfE's offer of tablets for the young people who struggle to use online resources has been welcomed) but some home visits are made when necessary.

Children in secure children's homes

Approximately 50 highly vulnerable children have been awaiting places in secure children's homes (SCHs) since the start of the pandemic; an increase of approximately 100%. SCHs have had reduced staffing numbers, and, even though the workforce is recovering, provisions are worried about the potential for a 'second wave'. As a result, they are not able to admit as many children as they would like. As such, LAs have been under significant pressure to find alternative placements for these children, which may include unregistered or unregulated provision. This means highly vulnerable children are at risk of potential significant harm as an SCH has been deemed the only placement suitable to keep these children safe.

Special educational needs and disability

Early identification and assessment have suffered because children are not in school. For children and young people with the most severe and complex needs, the result of not receiving the support they need will be significant and could be irreversible.

Following the partial closure of education settings from 20 March, the government asked local authorities to consider the needs of all children and young people with an EHC plan and to carry out a risk assessment. Local authorities were asked to work with educational settings and parents or carers to determine whether children and young people would be able to have their needs met at home and be safer there than attending an educational setting. Most children and young people with SEND are receiving SEND support without an EHC plan. Their needs vary widely and while some have mild/moderate needs others will have been receiving significant support for SEND in their school and from health and social care services prior to the pandemic. This group of children and young people were not included in the government's Covid-19 guidance. This carries the risk that local authorities have not considered as fully how to meet the needs of this group of children and young people safely during the period of the pandemic.

Another concern is that children's learning and development in important areas such as early reading is suffering while they are not in school. The evidence is clear that those who do not learn to read well when young are far more likely to be identified as having special educational needs at a later stage.

We have received feedback that some children on the autistic spectrum have found the challenges of lockdown particularly hard to deal with. We have also had reports that the reduction in respite and support for families with children with highly complex needs impacting on families' ability to cope.

Children with pre-existing mental health conditions

For young people with pre-existing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) the restrictions of the COVID-19 regime are challenging. They may not be able to access their normal support, as appointments may be cancelled or disrupted, and their conditions could well worsen e.g. lack of speech and language therapy or physiotherapy.

What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency

We are working with the ADCS and the other inspectorates to identify the critical pillars in planning recovery in the multi-agency response to safeguarding children. This includes:

- *The right help at the right time for families – The role of all agencies:* We need to prioritise cross-departmental early intervention to protect the needs of children and to prevent risks from escalating.
- *Children and family need analysis:* Agencies will need to review the needs of local children and families in their areas. Needs will have changed significantly in the short and longer term.
- *Sufficiency across the system:* Local authorities and government will need to review the resources that are needed to make sure that there is sufficient capacity across the system.

- *Workforce strategy:* Agencies will need to review capacity, knowledge and skills of the workforce. Children's needs in relation to mental health and emotional well-being will have increased, as will educational disadvantage. The workforce will need to be effectively equipped to meet this level of increased need.
- *Building on strengths during the crisis:* The flexibility and creativity to meet children and family needs during the crisis. The strong commitment by agencies to work and respond to the crisis together. There is a stronger sense of community, altruism and volunteering; we need to build on these strengths.
- *Joined up government response:* The importance of a multi-agent system: This is an opportunity to increasingly join-up policy thinking for children and families across government
- *Flexibility and stronger engagement with families by services and agencies:* Services will need to work to ensure that vulnerable children are engaged and visible.

We are also undertaking research and gathering insights to inform our work over the next year. This includes:

- *A review of further education learners' experience of online learning:* Identify areas of strength and potential for improvement. This will support post-16 providers reviewing their online education strategies, particularly from September 2020.
- *A review of the role of governance and governors during COVID-19:* We will work in collaboration with the National Governance Association to provide an overview of the ways governors can support their schools, and the challenges they face in doing so.
- *A survey of Ofsted Inspectors (OIs):* This will gather insight from people on the frontline of responding to COVID-19.
- *A set of pulse surveys of Ofsted staff:* We will assess their working conditions and resilience over time.
- *A joint study with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass):* We will look at the impact of COVID-19 on its support for children and families, including evaluating its parent hub.
- *Working with the DfE on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the REACT programme*
- *Sharing our insights with partner inspectorates:* We will share with partners in health, police and probation to understand the pillars of an effective multi-agency system.

July 2020