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Guidance

Ofsted: coronavirus (COVID-19) rolling update

Ofsted guidance and information relating to coronavirus (COVID-19) for schools, early years, children's social care and further education and skills providers.

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Sending us documents

If we have previously asked you to post documents to us, please either scan or photograph them and send with your unique reference number (URN) to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You can find your URN on your registration, your inspection report(s), and on your Ofsted reports page (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>).

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), there are likely to be delays in reviewing incoming post.

Forms for early years and social care providers

Please use our online forms if possible. Instructions on how best to complete a form are on each form's individual page. If you need to use a printable form, please send this to us by email.

We are designing a simpler digital service for the social care forms SC1, SC2 and SC3.

To use the replacement versions of these forms, email SocialCare.RegistrationPilot@ofsted.gov.uk.

All routine inspections suspended

We have suspended all routine inspections of schools, further education, early years and social care providers. The Secretary of State has allowed (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-suspends-all-routine-inspections>) Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to do this.

Urgent inspections where specific concerns have been raised are still going ahead. This allows us to prioritise the immediate safety of children where necessary.

As far as we are able, we are continuing our important regulatory work.

We are in daily contact with the Department for Education (DfE) to discuss the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact across education and social care.

Inspection reports and management information

A number of schools, further education providers and early years providers have contacted us, asking us to publish the report of their recent inspection. We had said that we would publish those reports only when providers reopen as normal for all children/students. We are now writing to all providers with reports in the pipeline to ask whether they would like their report published as soon as possible. If they say yes, we will publish their report shortly.

We continue to publish as normal a small number of reports from recent social care inspections.

We also continue to publish statistics and transparency information. We will publish management information on inspections carried out up to the suspension, then we will pause.

Regulatory activity and urgent monitoring visits

This section applies only to:

- early years and childcare providers
- children's social care providers that we inspect under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif>)

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), we have suspended all routine inspections. We continue our important regulatory work to help maintain social care (SC) provision for the most vulnerable children, and the registration of vital early years (EY) services. This includes reviewing notifications from providers and other information we receive.

We have temporarily adjusted our regulatory and inspection activity to focus on:

- provision that causes us concern
- the need to register new provision
- expansion to existing provision

We will act proportionately as an intelligent, focused and responsible regulator and inspectorate, consciously working to minimise the burdens on providers. We are focusing our work on the safeguarding and welfare of children and on identifying and addressing any major failures of leadership and management.

Although routine inspections are suspended, there may still be specific circumstances when we need to visit a children's home or other children's social care or childcare provider to be assured that children are not at risk of harm. We are calling these 'urgent monitoring visits' during this time.

You should read this guidance alongside our usual registration and compliance procedures and policies. We will follow them as far as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances.

Deciding whether an on-site visit or regulatory action is needed

We want to ensure that decisions are made consistently and as safely as possible. Therefore, we are reviewing certain decisions through a central panel that covers both children's social care and early years.

This applies to regional decisions about:

- the need for any on-site visit to a provider for urgent monitoring purposes
- the need for any regulatory action against an early years or social care provider that may reduce capacity in the system (for example, restrictions of accommodation, refusals to register, the cancellation or suspension of any registration, and the refusal to lift a suspension)

Off-site activity

We will decide what needs to be done on or off site on a case-by-case basis, considering the lines of enquiry and the apparent level of risk.

We will carry out as much of our activity as possible off site, including when we:

- have identified a service as high risk or of concern based on information available to us
- are monitoring services that were judged inadequate
- are deciding whether to take enforcement action, such as issuing compliance or enforcement notices, suspending or cancelling a registration or restricting accommodation at a children's home
- are checking provider's compliance with welfare requirement notices (EY) or compliance notices (SC)
- are monitoring compliance with suspension (EY and SC) or restrictions of accommodation (SC only)
- are considering a variation request (SC only)
- are deciding whether we can lift, or should renew, suspensions (EY and SC) and restrictions of accommodation (SC only)

To carry out off-site activity, the inspector will usually contact the provider by telephone but may use email or letter.

The inspector may request that the provider shares electronically as much relevant evidence as possible to help the inspector. This evidence will vary according to the nature of the case and whether it is EY or SC, but may include:

- photographs of premises such as repairs and decoration (and/or having a tour of the building through a video call)
- safety certificates
- confirmation of building works, such as invoices
- updated policies
- updated action plans
- staffing lists to confirm that the provider has enough staff to re-open
- staff training records and/or a careful risk assessment and plan for training (including e-learning, given the current circumstances)

On-site visits to social care providers

We will usually only carry out on-site visits to social care providers when:

- off-site inspection activity has raised concerns and the provider has been unable to provide sufficient evidence that allows us to decide that children are safe
- we have received information that has raised concerns that we can only fully consider through an on-site visit
- we must visit to be able to decide whether to take, or to stop taking, regulatory action

There may be other circumstances in which we decide that an on-site visit is necessary, but we will decide on a case-by-case basis.

Urgent monitoring visits to social care providers

We will usually announce an urgent monitoring visit so that we can take account of the circumstances, such as whether any children are self-isolating.

In some cases, we may consider that the risks are so great that we need to visit unannounced. When this happens, the inspector will explain on arrival why they have come and ask the provider to take action so that they can safely enter. The inspector will usually stay outside while they do this.

Only inspectors who are not self-isolating will carry out these visits. They will plan the visit to ensure that they are on site for the minimum amount of time. In announced visits, they will agree in advance with the registered provider what activity they will carry out.

The inspector will ask the provider to try to limit the number of children and staff that they will need to see, talk to or meet with. They will ask the provider to ensure that any child who is self-isolating or unwell is able to stay in their bedroom or in a room not required for the visit. Inspectors will follow government guidance on, for example, washing hands, physical contact and social distancing.

Inspectors will be able to raise statutory requirements and recommendations where relevant. However, these will be focused on the things that are impacting directly on the safety and well-being of children. They will take account of what is, and is not, within the provider's control during this time.

On-site visits to early years and childcare providers

We will only make on-site visits after we have considered evidence from off-site activity, for example if off-site activity has raised concerns and there is insufficient evidence that allows us to decide that children are safe.

Only inspectors who are not self-isolating will carry out urgent monitoring visits. They will plan the visit to ensure that they are on site for the minimum amount of time. In announced visits, they will agree in advance with the registered provider what activity they will carry out.

After any off-site activity or on-site visits

After carrying out off- or on-site activity, we will usually arrange a case review to decide what further action to take (if any). This may include a decision to go on site.

For social care providers

Off-site activity and urgent monitoring visits will not result in a judgement based on the 4-point scale, as set out in the SCCIF (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif>). However, we will usually publish a report to help local authorities and commissioners in their decision-making. The report will include information such as:

- the off-site activity we carried out
- the findings from any on-site visit
- what the provider told us, and the evidence it shared with us
- what action we have decided to take (if any)
- whether we have evidence to suggest that children are not, or are no longer, at risk (where relevant)

We will not publish a report following a variation request from a social care provider.

For early years and childcare providers

After our on-site visits or off-site activity, we may publish an outcome summary of any action we take or ask a provider to take in order to meet legal requirements at this time, if appropriate.

We will take a proportionate approach that recognises the actions a provider may need to take to provide urgent childcare for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, while keeping children safe.

Children's social care

All routine inspections are suspended until further notice.

We continue to register social care providers and managers. We are making some temporary changes to the steps we take in completing the registration process. Most contact throughout the process will be by telephone, email or video call. We will keep any visits to a minimum and will follow the latest government

guidelines, restrictions and safety advice.

The Children's Commissioner for England has issued a children's guide to coronavirus (<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-guide-to-coronavirus>). All children's social care providers may find this useful.

Legislation, regulations and statutory guidance

We do not have the power to disapply or waive legislation, regulation or statutory guidance, for example around regulation 44 inspections. Legislative change is a matter for central government and, ultimately, parliament.

However, we recognise that we are in exceptional circumstances. You will have to make pragmatic decisions in the best interests of children. You should carry out a careful risk assessment of any action you take and keep a clear record of the decisions that you make. We are in close contact with the DfE and we expect that it will soon provide guidance to take account of the impact of COVID-19 and the need to maximise capacity.

We expect all providers to follow Public Health England's advice. We expect you to think about alternative ways to keep in contact, supervise provision and maintain oversight, such as using telephone or video conferencing, while recognising the limitations of this approach. We are, of course, sensitive to the challenges that all providers are facing. We take a balanced and proportionate approach to regulation, taking account of how people have tried to satisfy regulatory requirements in these difficult circumstances.

Notifying Ofsted

You only need to notify us (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notify-ofsted-of-an-incident-form-for-childrens-social-care-providers>) about incidents that the regulations require you to tell us about. We do not need you to tell us about anything else. However, we do expect you to risk assess and carefully record any steps you are taking in running your services.

Emergency inspections

We reserve the right to inspect in emergency situations, for example when we receive complaints or whistle-blowing information that suggests children may be at risk of harm, or when we might want to visit in order to lift a restriction on the numbers of children who can live in a children's home.

Foster carer recruitment

Fostering agencies and services may wish to bring recently retired or de-registered foster carers back, rather like the NHS has done with doctors and nurses.

The current regulations allow for a proportionate assessment that takes account of carers' existing knowledge. At this time, we understand that you will need to make pragmatic decisions in the best interests of children when carrying out this assessment. We expect you to do a careful risk assessment of any action you take and to keep a clear record of the decisions made.

Senior staff of providers visiting children's homes

Senior or regional managers of providers may need to visit children's homes in person during the current situation. They have responsibilities to safeguard children, and although online and telephone communication may be able to replace some face-to-face aspects of this, providers should retain the option to visit in person when necessary.

All providers need to take a balanced approach to this in the current circumstances. They should follow the government guidance on social distancing where possible.

Children's social care registration: temporary changes

We have made temporary changes to the process for those applying to register social care provision during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

During the application process, inspectors will help you with any questions you may have about the changes. We will take a reasonable and proportionate view of any application. When we reach a decision about registration, the safety and well-being of children remain paramount in our judgement.

We will still follow the guide to registration of children's social care services (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-registration-for-childrens-social-care-services>) as far as possible. Please note the following temporary changes below.

Contact during your application

Most contact throughout the process will be by telephone, email and/or video call. It is important that you keep us up to date with your contact details. We will keep any visits to a minimum and follow the latest government guidelines, restrictions and safety advice.

You will be asked to email the inspector any documents that they would usually consider during the premises visit. Your inspector will advise you what they need to see. These documents must be with the inspector by the following day.

Pre-interview questionnaire

We ask you to complete the pre-interview questionnaire relevant to your role. This is not usually compulsory, but at this time it will provide information that we will use for your interview. It is therefore essential that you send it to the inspector at least 2 days before your interview. You must complete it yourself and in your own words.

Banks and financial references

Some banks may not provide a financial reference at this time. In these cases, you can submit a cover note in the form of a signed and dated self-declaration along with evidence that you have tried to get a financial reference, and the reason for being unsuccessful. Ensure that you also submit all other required financial information, and we will accept your application for processing.

Referees

Some of your referees may not be available or contactable at this time. You may need to identify another individual who is able, willing and suitable to provide a prompt reference. We cannot proceed without references. If the HR department is closed, you may need to consider who could give a reference about your previous employment, and discuss these options with the inspector. We will expect you to provide evidence of why you are unable to get a reference from a past employer.

We will send reference requests by email. Please ensure that you provide the correct organisational email address rather than an individual's personal one. We will contact you after 2 weeks from the reference request being sent out if we have not had a response. You may be able to contact the referee to remind them.

Health declaration form and health self-declaration form

It may be difficult to get your health declaration form returned promptly by your GP at this time. If your GP is unable to return your health declaration form within 2 weeks, you can complete our temporary health self-declaration form (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childcare-and-childrens-social-care-health-declaration-form>) to submit with your application. That page explains all the steps you must follow.

If you complete this health self-declaration form correctly, we will accept your application and will review the GP's form when it arrives. Any unresolved concerns about your health may result in a telephone interview with our medical adviser instead of a face-to-face meeting.

Visits to the proposed accommodation

During the initial call, the inspector will agree plans for any visit to the proposed accommodation. The visit will be short and will be for the purpose of assessing the quality and suitability of the premises, and checking records of staff recruitment.

Only one person from your application should be present, preferably the responsible individual or another person who makes up the provider. They must observe social distancing and not be required under current government guidance to be in self-isolation.

The inspector will ask you to open the premises and wait outside while they complete their visit. Any follow-up discussion will take place later, by telephone.

You must arrange for all necessary recruitment information, original ID documents and qualifications to be made available. If you are already registered, you must authenticate any documents that belong to other people involved in the application, such as the manager. You should also email scanned copies of the photo ID to the inspector, or make copies available for them to take away. Interviews will not proceed without these documents.

If a visit is not arranged

The inspector will advise you how to submit the documents they need to see and what to do next. All interviews will take place by video call or telephone. The inspector will talk to you about any needs you may have to ensure that you can take part in this. The call should last approximately 1.5 hours.

Registration and individual interviews will take place on different days.

Notice of decision

If we grant registration, we will email your notice of decision and certificate to you at the email address of your organisation's office or an alternative email address that we have agreed with you. We will ask whether you agree for the certificate and notice to be sent in this way.

Early years and childcare

If your paediatric first aid certificate is due to expire, see advice from the Health and Safety Executive (<https://www.sja.org.uk/course-information/covid-19/#hse>). It has announced a 3-month extension to the validity for all certificates coming up for renewal on or after 16 March 2020.

Invoices for annual fees issued from 3 April 2020 will now have a due date of 30 September 2020, so that you have freedom to delay your payment during this time. Your annual fee date will not change.

Childminders and childcarers looking after the children of key workers on domestic premises can apply to work from non-domestic premises for up to 50% of their time. If you would like to do this, email your application form (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-providers-eya-approval-to-operate-from-non-domestic-premises>) to regulatoryteam@ofsted.gov.uk. We will review the details and contact you as quickly as possible to discuss your request.

Closing or resigning registrations

At this time, you do not need to let us know if your early years or childcare setting is closed due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), whether that's because you are not caring for any children of critical workers or vulnerable children, or because you are ill.

You should tell us if you are resigning your registration. To do this, email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk from your email address that we have on your registration and include your unique reference number (URN). You can find this on your registration, your inspection report(s), and on your setting's Ofsted reports page (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>).

The early years foundation stage statutory framework

The DfE has provided temporary flexibility (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures#early-years-foundation-stage>) in meeting some requirements of the early years foundation stage statutory framework (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>). This includes those around:

- ratios and qualifications of staff
- paediatric first aid certificates
- learning and development and the progress check at age 2

This temporary legislation has been passed in parliament. All other current requirements in the framework continue to apply.

Nannies

Nannies on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register should follow government guidance on isolation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>). We suggest you discuss this with the family you work for to see if it is appropriate for you to carry on working.

Government advice

Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) includes:

- a list of online resources for home education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education>)
- guidance for further education (FE) providers on maintaining education and skills training provision (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>)
- guidance for local authorities and their partners to help support and protect vulnerable children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services>)
- advice for employers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>) and information for employees (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others#going-to-work>)

Schools, further education and early years providers

The government's advice coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) has a section on school closures, education and childcare. This includes guidance on:

- provisions for vulnerable children and the children of key workers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>)
- free school meals (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>)

Ofsted staff

Since the crisis broke, we have been amazed but not surprised by the resourcefulness, determination and kindness shown by teachers, social workers, childminders and all those who work in education and social care.

With our routine inspections suspended, we've been matching our staff into supporting roles across education and social care, working closely with local councils to provide support where it's most needed.

We have spoken to more than 50 councils that have asked for help with tasks like mapping and supporting vulnerable children, developing safeguarding processes and communicating with school leaders. We have agreed for suitably qualified colleagues to work in children's homes, and others to staff advice lines for parents and schools.

Some of our people are moving to other government departments to support the wider Civil Service response and a significant number of our staff have volunteered to be emergency foster carers.

Consultations

We plan to publish the new initial teacher education (ITE) inspection framework in the summer term to give providers time to familiarise themselves with it. By then – and through discussions with the DfE – we may be able to clarify when routine inspections will resume, including those of ITE providers.

Published 19 March 2020

Last updated 5 May 2020 + show all updates

1. 5 May 2020

Updated with information on our temporary changes to the process for those applying to register children's social care provision during this time.
2. 30 April 2020

Updated to include that some schools, further education providers and early years providers have contacted us asking us to publish the report of their recent inspection. We had said that we would publish those reports only when providers reopen as normal for all children/students. We are now writing to all providers with reports in the pipeline to ask whether they would like their report published as soon as possible. If they say yes, we will publish their report shortly.
3. 27 April 2020

Updated to note that temporary legislation relating to the early years foundation stage is now passed in parliament.
4. 17 April 2020

Updated to include information from DfE on planned legislation on temporary flexibility to the EYFS.
5. 14 April 2020

Updated section on routine inspections being suspended to add information on publishing inspection reports and management information.
6. 9 April 2020

Updated to request that early years and social care providers use our online forms if possible, and if they need to use a printable form to please send this to us by email.
7. 9 April 2020

Update to include guidance for children's social care and early years and childcare providers on Ofsted's regulatory activity and urgent monitoring visits during this time.
8. 7 April 2020

Updated to add that at Ofsted, we're working with local authorities and the wider Civil Service to deploy our staff to areas where they are needed most, based on their skills and experience.
9. 7 April 2020

Added further guidance for children's social care providers on: existing regulations and legislation, new children's guide to coronavirus, recruiting foster carers, and senior staff visiting children's homes at this time.
10. 6 April 2020

Added information for childcarers on how to apply to work from non-domestic premises for up to 50% of time, and on invoices for early years annual registration fees issued from 3 April, which will now have a due date of 30 September 2020 so that settings can delay their payment during this time.
11. 2 April 2020

Updated guidance links for employers and employees.

12. 1 April 2020
Updated information for children's social care providers on registering with Ofsted and sending us notifications.
13. 31 March 2020
Updated to include information for nannies.
14. 30 March 2020
Updated to include a section on our consultation work during this period.
15. 27 March 2020
If we have previously asked you to post documents to us, please either scan or photograph them and send with your unique reference number (URN) to enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.
16. 25 March 2020
Updated to include links to DfE guidance for schools, early years and further education providers on implementing social distancing, maintaining provisions, closures and attendance.
17. 24 March 2020
Updated with information for childminders, including advice about first aid certificates.
18. 23 March 2020
Updated to include that we will not be publishing reports from our recent inspections of schools, further education and early years providers until they reopen as normal for all children/students. We will continue to publish a small number of reports from recent social care inspections.
19. 23 March 2020
Updated to include links to advice for vulnerable children and young people and guidance about cancelling GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020, free school meals and isolation in residential educational settings.
20. 20 March 2020
Updated with a reminder to use registered childcare in order to keep children safe.
21. 20 March 2020
Updated to include information from the Department for Education asking schools, colleges, nurseries, childminders and other registered childcare settings to remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children where they can. Also added links to information for parents and definitions of vulnerable children and key workers.
22. 19 March 2020
First published.

Related content

- Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>)
- Childminders and childcare providers: register with Ofsted (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>)
- What parents and carers need to know about schools and other education settings during the coronavirus outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>)

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>)

Explore the topic

- Education, training and skills (<https://www.gov.uk/education>)
- Childcare and early years (<https://www.gov.uk/childcare-parenting/childcare-and-early-years>)
- Safeguarding and social care for children (<https://www.gov.uk/childcare-parenting/safeguarding-and-social-care-for-children>)
- Corporate information (<https://www.gov.uk/corporate-information>)