

## **Education Protocol for Vulnerable Children during the Covid-19 virus**

**Date: 27/03/2020**

The following offers some guidance and principles in relation to children who have a designated social worker and are thus entitled to an offer from school during the Covid-19 national emergency. This protocol acknowledges that whilst the number of children requiring this support is very small, the consequence of not doing so would be significant. The Local Authority acknowledges the significant role that schools can play in keeping our most vulnerable children safe at this time.

Whilst the guidance below is about children with a social worker, the DfE recognised that heads will decide that other children are vulnerable too and may need to be treated with the same level of support.

### **First Principles:**

Where children can be safely looked after at home, they should be home, in line with guidance from government and Public Health England.

Where it is not safe, children must be offered a place at school.

Children's safety is not fixed and needs constant review. The children who require a school place will change over time.

For all vulnerable children who qualify for an offer from school, a balance needs to be struck between the risk to health and the safeguarding risks associated with not being at school.

### **Our Ambition**

Through effective joint work and clear and continuous lines of communication between the education sector and the local authority, we mitigate the risks to vulnerable children minimising placement ends for children in care and maximising the safety of children in need and children on protection plans.

### **Children in Care**

Children in care, who are at risk of their placement ending as a result of non-attendance at school must be offered a place at their school.

Children who are settled in placement, where non-attendance to school does not pose a risk to placement should stay at home. This message will be communicated to carers via their child's social worker, via their own supervising social worker and through the communications from the fostering service. Schools should not make this judgement themselves. If they have concerns they should approach the child's social worker to discuss and should not directly challenge carers. This will avoid stigmatising any carers who have to take up the offer of school in order to maintain their child's placement.

The Virtual School will work closely with our Fostering Services and the Children's Homes to identify children who are at risk of placements ending and proactively work with schools and settings to provide advice, guidance and support where it is required.

## **Children in need and on protection plans**

Children in need or on protection plans, who are at risk as a result of non-attendance at school, must be offered a place at their school.

Children should remain at home, where non-attendance to school does not pose a risk to the child. This message will be communicated to parents via their child's social worker. School leaders should not make judgements themselves. If there are concerns, school leaders should liaise with the child's social worker.

## **School Closures**

In the event that school is unable to offer a place to a vulnerable child that both qualifies for a place under the guidance and requires one in order to be kept safe, the school's headteacher will notify the Virtual School Team via this contact: [Suffolkvirtualschool@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Suffolkvirtualschool@suffolk.gov.uk)

The headteacher will work with the Virtual School Head and the Local Authority in partnership with the wider sector so that a school place can be offered. This may include the use of any local solutions that are developed during this period.