

Supporting our children and young people – an update from Lesley Brown, Chief Operating Officer (Education)

East Lothian Council is updating parents and carers on its plans to continue supporting children and young people during the national closure of schools as a result of the Coronavirus from today (Friday, 20 March).

In a statement to the Scottish Parliament on Thursday the Education Secretary, John Swinney, confirmed that:

- Councils will be taking measures to protect vulnerable children who rely on schools for hot meals or a safe and supportive environment
- Children of key workers will have continuing access to learning or childcare
- The exam diet will not go ahead this year. The Scottish Qualifications Authority will put in place a certification model using coursework, teacher assessment of estimated grades and prior attainment.

Children's Hubs

To ensure an appropriate environment is provided for learning and childcare for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, East Lothian Council intends to operate 'Children's Hubs', located within a primary school building in each of East Lothian's cluster areas. These will be located at:

Dunbar Primary School (John Muir Campus); St Mary's Primary School/Haddington Primary School (infants building); Law Primary School, North Berwick; Preston Tower Primary School (infants building), Prestonpans; Sanderson's Wynd Primary School, Tranent; Pinkie St Peter's Primary School, Musselburgh

The council expects that the Children's Hubs would be staffed by teams including head teachers and other teaching staff, as well as other specialist and support staff where possible.

Key workers

Our expectation is that our Children's Hubs would be used to cater for children with at least one parent who is a key worker and does not have another adult at home to care for them.

In the first instance, we are writing to parents to gather identify the children of key workers who are registered in our local authority schools and/or early learning and childcare centres.

We will seek to identify key workers in accordance with definitions provided by the Scottish Government.

Vulnerable children

The Children's Hubs will provide free school meals to those eligible as well as support for learning to children with additional support needs. Free school meals will be supported through the Children's Hub and through delivery to drop off points within more remote communities. In the coming days, the Education Service and schools will be working to identify those children most at need. Further support will be provided by school staff in an outreach manner.

Remote learning

The council will be utilising digital technology as far as possible to support learning for children who are being cared for at home. There are online tools which children and teachers can use to provide learning for children at home through Google G-Suite. This will enable teachers to post learning assignment tasks for children, including active learning opportunities which they can undertake with their families.

We hope there will also be opportunities to participate in live lessons and we are working to support staff on this. These tools can be accessed through tablets, smartphones and home computers. For children without access to devices, we can lend Chromebooks. Guidance for parents on logging in and supporting children with their learning will be provided.

Challenging time

Lesley Brown, Chief Operating Officer (Education), said:

“This is an extremely challenging time for our school communities including parents, carers, children and staff. I’d like to thank everyone for the support you have given our teams in recent days.

“Clearly the unprecedented decision to close all schools in Scotland by close of play today (Friday) presents major logistical difficulties and inconvenience for families. We’re grateful to everyone for your patience and understanding as we respond to this situation.

“We have continued to work on arrangements which we intend to implement in the coming week. More details will be made available as soon as practically possible.

“Thanks to our teachers, supported by other staff, we are carrying out work to prepare online learning opportunities to maintain teaching as far as possible. Schools are in touch with parents and carers about this.

“We will be working with our private and voluntary nurseries and our out of school care partners to provide a holistic package of support and will be in touch with them very soon.

“We will be providing information on our support for young people in S4-6 who had been due to be sitting exams. We want to enable these students to be in a position to complete coursework with support in place from our teams so that sufficient evidence can be submitted to the SQA for certification purposes.

“The measures we are taking will protect vulnerable children who rely on schools for hot meals or a safe and supportive environment, as well as facilitating continued access to learning or childcare for the children of key workers. They will also enable children being cared for at home to access the highest possible standard of remote learning and teaching.”