

A protocol for education professionals' visits to schools and early years settings

Aim of Protocol

This protocol clarifies which visits may take place to schools and settings and establishes how these may take place. It aims to reduce/minimise the risk of spread of infection (Covid-19) to staff, children and professionals, whilst the pandemic continues.

Personnel covered by this protocol

The protocol covers those directly employed by Shropshire Council in Learning and Skills which would include all SEND services. The protocol should also apply to those who are either commissioned in to provide such services or those who provide such services directly to schools.

DfE view

“As schools open to accommodate more children we would hope that SEND support professionals including educational psychologists and speech and language specialists return to their usual education workplace as soon as possible alongside school teachers, so that children and young people with SEND can receive the support they need. However, this needs to be agreed in consultation with the leadership of each school and in line with the school’s own risk assessment and the plan agreed for the return of their workforce.”

The role of whole school/settings risk assessments

All schools and settings will have completed an establishment wide risk assessment that identifies the risk factors associated with COVID19 and the steps taken to mitigate the risks. The risk assessment has a key role to play in ensuring that any visit by an external professional is safe. The risk assessment has a role to play in identifying the safe conditions for visits to take place. Professionals must work with schools and settings to identify the safe conditions of any visit.

Essential versus non-essential visits

School visits should be kept to a minimum. Professionals should only seek to arrange visits which are deemed essential. Technology such as Microsoft Teams should be used where visits are non-essential and virtual meetings should be seen as the preferred communication channel. Essential visits would be ones which are most likely related to specific needs of a child eg observations of behaviours or visits related to EHCPs.

School and setting staff may have need to invite staff in (eg staff training). This would be deemed non-essential but could take place upon invitation by the school. The key difference is that in such circumstances it would be the school organising the non-essential visit not the professional.

Expectation of school/setting when professionals attends to visit:

Schools/settings should

- Make the professional aware in advance of measures in place in the school/setting to support social distancing
- Agree the purpose of the visit
- Agree and arrange rooming and furniture. This space will be cleaned in line with Department for Education guidance and seating will be arranged to allow for social distancing. All education, childcare and children's social care settings should follow the Public Health England (PHE) guidance on cleaning for non-healthcare settings.
- Ensure that the professional is escorted to any room used.
- Promote social distancing in line with Government guidance
- Ensure that the professional has access to a toilet and hand washing facilities
- Make hand sanitizer available on entry and exit
- Check identification but avoid touching any identification
- Issue a disposable visitor badge or one that has been sanitized before issue. Where possible visitors should display their own badge.
- Ask for confirmation that visitors understand all protocols and routines that are in place.

Expectation of visiting professional when attending an Early Years/Educational setting to visit

Visiting professionals are expected to:

- Plan and agree the visit to the staff member/child in advance so that safe arrangements can be put in place for the visit. This includes agreeing the specific room to be used, the duration and the staff required.
- Only visit by invitation unless meeting in person is essential.
- Ensure that the method of informing parents of the visit is agreed.
- Report to the main reception first and not enter the school via any other entrance.
- Acquaint themselves with the school's required procedures.
- Visit only the agreed areas of the school including only the agreed toilet and handwashing facilities
- Follow government guidelines on social distancing and hygiene procedures at all times.
- Where possible and appropriate work away from main bubbles of children.
- Endeavour to do only one school/setting visit in a day. If this is not possible then the professional should inform the subsequent school and seek agreement from the school.

- Use PPE provided by their employer and not the educational setting. In most cases it is unlikely that PPE is required unless close physical contact is required. Staff handling resources might need to wear gloves if advised by their line manager.
- Ensure they use hand sanitiser on arrival to the educational setting and again on departure.
- Show/display identification as normal.
- Sign into the visitor's book or sign in electronically, they will ensure they use their own pen.
- Use their own resources and not ask to borrow any resources from the school.

Informing parents of a visit to a child

Parents should be informed of all visits to a child

Pupils who demonstrate difficult or dangerous behaviour or are unable to follow protective measures in schools

The government recognises that “some children and young people with special educational needs present behaviours that are challenging to manage in the current context, such as spitting uncontrollably. It will be impossible to provide the care that some children and young people need without close hands-on contact. In these circumstances, staff should minimise close contact wherever possible, increase hand-washing and other hygiene measures and clean surfaces more regularly and maintain existing routine use of personal protective equipment.” (this refers to e.g. gloves that would normally be used when working with that child, not additional PPE).

Children with special educational needs may not be able to understand the need for social distancing and may also seek close interaction with their peers or adults to provide reassurance at a period of disruption to their routines. Schools/settings will have carried out individual risk assessments to manage this situation and visiting staff should familiarise themselves with this information.

Social worker visits

A separate protocol is in place for social worker visits that outlines the requirements of the Childrens Act 1989 in terms of statutory responsibilities.

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To be reviewed annually (or sooner if necessitated by changes to government guidance).