

# Responding to COVID-19: issues affecting services for children and young people

## Briefing Note: 5, 29/05/20

This is the fifth in a series of briefings to share findings from our ongoing intelligence-gathering on the impact of COVID-19 on the children's sector, based on issues that professionals are seeing in the course of their work. If you would like to be involved in this activity, please contact [Hannah Chetwynd](#) at The Children's Society.

The form has been running since 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and has had a total of 170 respondents to date. What follows reflects the key themes identified over the course of two weeks, between 13/05/20 – 27/05/20. However, this briefing also reflects some of the wider themes and ideas raised throughout the time the form has been in the field. All the briefings in this series are [accessible online](#).

*We will continue to collect, collate and analyse responses through the pandemic. Please help us to collect as much evidence as possible on how COVID-19 is affecting frontline children's service providers by [completing or sharing the evidence collection form](#).*

This briefing is based on contributions from 14 individual respondents, over the course of two weeks, representing the following areas. <b>NB:</b> respondents are able to choose multiple areas.	No. of respondents	Geographical reach	No. of respondents
Education	6	West Midlands	4
Children's social care	4	London	1
Mental Health	4	National	1
Family Support	3	North East	1
Youth Services	2	Scotland	1
Child protection/safeguarding	1	South West	1
Early Years provision	1	Wales	1
Health	1	East Midlands	1
		Yorkshire & Humber	1

It has been communicated to this group by Department for Education (DfE) officials that as schools begin to reopen, they will be prioritising the following work streams- attendance, attainment, safeguarding, well-being and hidden harms. As such, this briefing indicates where issues raised by respondents relate to one or more of these areas.

Key:

- Attendance – A
- Attainment – Att
- Safeguarding - S
- Hidden harms - HH
- Well-being – WB

## Theme 1: Returning to school and children with SEND

Unsurprisingly, concerns relating to the reopening of schools featured strongly in this round of responses. One key emerging issue related to the provision of support for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). One response highlighted the concern that if schools do not return until September and respite provision remains shut, children as well

as parents and carers will be left without much needed support. The respondent further suggested that SEND schools were not doing enough to facilitate the reopening of schools and warned of long-term damage if it did not go ahead. Moreover, specialist support services for autism and ADHD were highlighted as being of critical importance for this group of children who have been made even more vulnerable by the pandemic. **S/WB/A**

On the other hand, concerns were raised regarding some children with SEND returning to school. It was suggested that being at home in recent weeks has brought relief and security - *“These children have had the difficulties of having to negotiate a school environment without proper support and parents report that they are like different children whilst being at home and having the anxiety and demand of school taken away from them.”*

One respondent voiced the concern that although there seems to be a pathway for children with SEND that have an associated learning disability or have an EHCP written for them, those that are on the SEND register but without a care plan, no such pathway is in place. It was felt that for these young people especially, transitioning back into the school environment could be difficult and they may require mental health support if they are to return. **WB/Att**

There was also a note of caution from one respondent who proposed we wait longer to observe the effects of easing lockdown before allowing schools to return.

### **Possible solutions**

- The Department for Education (DfE) should provide clear guidance and the necessary resources for SEND schools to be confident that they can re-open whilst safeguarding both their staff and their students.
- CAMHS Learning Disability teams should be funded to provide specialist support and treatment to those children with a diagnosis of autism who also have emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- The DfE should ensure that all children and young people with SEND have an assessment of their needs upon returning to school, these young people must be provided with any additional support, including for emotional wellbeing required to help facilitate a smooth transition back into the learning environment.

### **Theme 2: Reaching children in need of support**

Issues of reaching children in need of support remains a key concern – particularly with respect to home visits. The lack of PPE remains a live issue in this regard, as does guidance on when social workers should conduct home visits, and how to do them safely. One respondent in particular noted the mixed messages they had received regarding when to wear PPE and which home visits were appropriate to make. – *“Mixed messages about which visits to do...then criticised if other visits were not completed. Asked to fill in risk assessments before visits then nobody completed the risk assessments if you were called to do an emergency visit whilst out. It’s not possible to socially distance on visits i.e. with 2 parents, and 7 children, or 4 police officers, and 2 social workers whilst removing 2 children.”*

The situation was being made more difficult by ongoing staff shortages that were limiting the number of possible visits. The importance of making improvements in this area was highlighted by the fact that engaging with some young people over the phone remains difficult as some would prefer to wait for face-to-face services to start running again – *“Many children and young people do not want to access counselling/mentoring/group work by telephone/video and prefer to wait for face-to-face services”*. **S/WB/HH**

One report highlighted a child who had not seen or spoken to his CAMHS therapist for 3 months. **S**

There were also calls for more flexibility on ways of working. One local authority professional from Scotland, told of how disabled children in residential care had been allowed no contact with their families for over 8 weeks. Blanket bans, they explained, were putting families in crisis. Another respondent from a youth engagement centre in the Midlands said that although they knew anti-social behaviour had increased in their area, they were unable to contact their young clients due to the lockdown measures. **WB**

A number of responses expressed concerns around links between family poverty and the need for support, highlighting that many families who have previously not been known to local authorities will now be looking for assistance due to loss of household income.

### **Possible solutions**

- The Government must ensure that adequate PPE is available to all essential frontline staff.
- The Government should ensure that there are clear protocols in place that delineate which circumstances necessitate an in-person visit.
- The Government must provide clear and flexible guidance for all institutions and agencies working with children and young people as lockdown measures begin to be lifted. For example:
  - Considering, where safe to do so, the re-opening of youth centres to help local efforts to support vulnerable young people
  - On a case by case basis to enable families to visit children living in residential centres.
- CAMHS teams should be properly resourced so that they can provide regular ongoing support for those children and young people who are under their care. Those with SEND will be at even greater need of support by their clinician.

### **Theme 3: Geographical issues**

The need for better collaboration within and between local authorities, and other local and regional agencies ran through a number of responses. One raised concerns about the many families who live in one local area and access services in another as they were already struggling to access support before the pandemic.

Living in one area whilst using the schools in another can lead to delays in accessing services and being passed between support agencies. It was suggested that this issue is being exacerbated by COVID-19 which is putting strain on early help services. **WB/S**

Another response came from a boarding school that described the difficulty in securing mental health support for their students who under lockdown are dispersed across the country. A CAMHS team in the student's home area had no clear way of communicating and sharing information with the CAMHS team in the school's area. **WB/S**

### **Possible solutions**

- The Department for Health should have protocols in place to ensure that different CAMHS teams are able to effectively share information and provide emergency

mental health support to young people who regularly spend extended periods in two different parts of the country.

