

COVID 19 Vulnerable groups report 2

How Ealing schools have worked to overcome the challenges facing vulnerable groups of pupils during the C19 pandemic and prepare for their return to school in September 2020

Report compiled by the Safeguarding and Wellbeing recovery committee reporting to Schools' C19 Recovery Board

August 2020



Section 1: Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the various challenges COVID-19 is presenting education providers in Ealing, as well as an analysis of how schools are trying to overcome these issues to support vulnerable children in their settings. This analysis is focused on preparing for expansion to full opening in September 2020. This report is intended to build upon the first report issued by the committee on 11 June 2020.

Since the first report, officers have conducted telephone call interviews with 47 out of a pre-selected sample of 56 (84%) of schools (of all types) where agreed thematic lines of enquiry were explored.

Breakdown of schools contacted

Primary Schools: 30 out of 35 telephone interviews took place

Secondary/ High Schools: 13 out of 16 telephone interviews took place

Specialist SEND schools: 4 out of 5 telephone interviews took place
4 schools declined an interview

This report culminates in a set of recommendations for how schools and Ealing can work together to boost support for vulnerable learners, so that they attend and engage fully in school in September 2020.

1.1 Terms of reference

- *The significance of non-attendance during the pandemic;*
- *An overview of what schools have done well in engaging with vulnerable pupils and families - practices that will enhance the experience of our vulnerable pupils from September 2020 onwards;*
- *An overview of issues, discrepancies and inconsistencies that will help schools to focus on improving practices;*
- *Recommendations for schools;*
- *How social care are planning to support schools to tackle expected challenges and recommendations for social care to increase support for schools;*
- *Recommendations to support our existing networks in developing strong, consistent, and inclusive approaches to the return in September.*

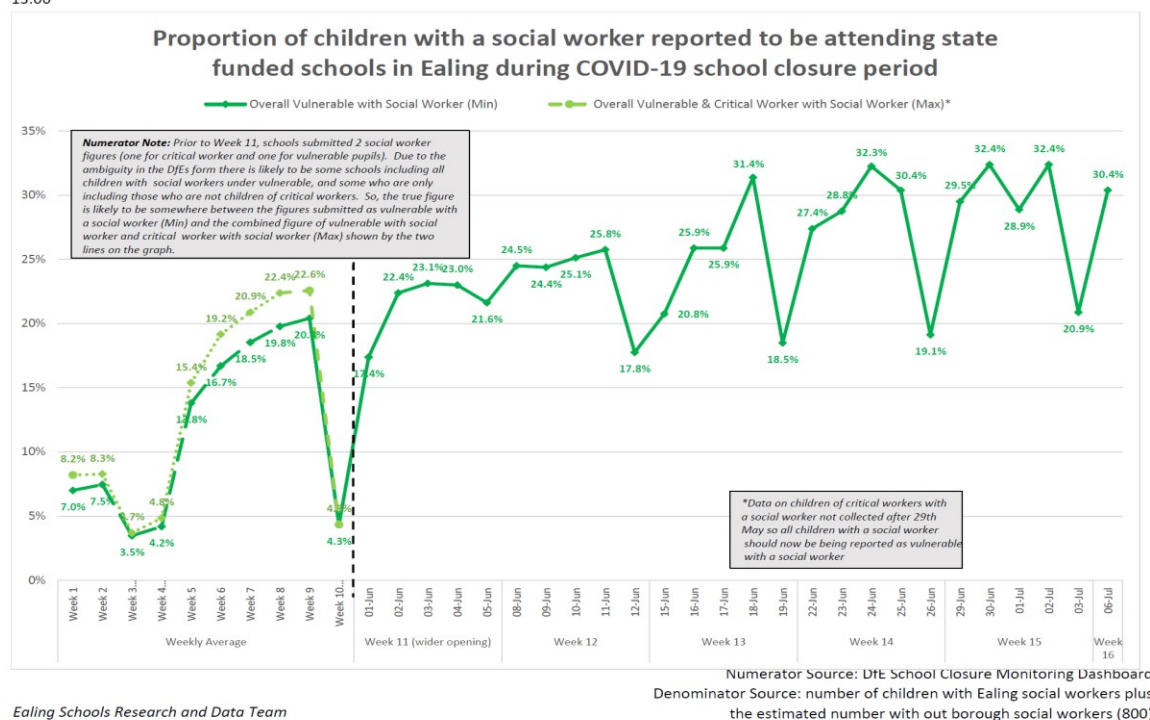
Section 2: The significance of non-attendance during the pandemic

2.1 Attendance of vulnerable children

On 6th July 2020 (week 16) the proportion of vulnerable children (with social workers) attending Ealing schools was **30.4%**. Attendance rates for this group of vulnerable children in Ealing have been on an upward trend since the beginning of the pandemic, increasing from a low of **7%** in week one. It is not possible at this stage to make comparisons with statistical neighbours or areas with similar income deprivation bands, so the figure should be viewed with caution. **However, it can be concluded that the overall attendance levels of vulnerable children are low. As a result, many vulnerable children have failed to meet regularly with school staff in person since March.**

There is a significant difference between the attendance rates of vulnerable children in primary and secondary schools. On the 6th July 2020 (week 16) attendance of vulnerable children was **28% higher** in Ealing primary schools compared with secondary providers. This can be explained, in part, by the different national expectations placed on primary and secondary school attendance from 1st June onwards.

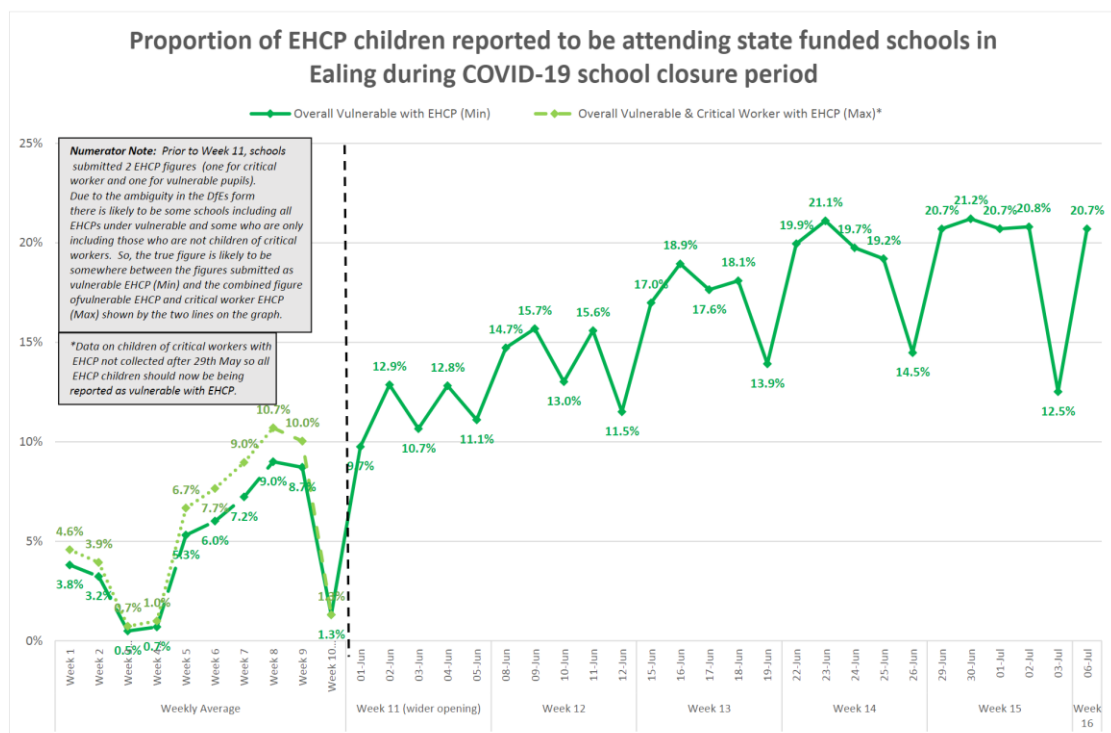
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Ealing Schools Research and Data Team

Fig 1: Proportion of vulnerable children reported to be attending state funded schools in Ealing during COVID-19 school closure period

On 6th July 2020, **20%** of children who have an Education and Health and Care Plan (EHCP) attended Ealing state schools, this has increased from 3% in week 1 of the pandemic closures. Attendance of children who have EHCPs in Ealing primary schools is higher than in secondary schools. **27%** of children in primary schools were attending school on the 6th July 2020, compared to only **11%** in secondary schools.



Ealing Schools Research and Data Team
 Numerator Source: DfE School Closure Monitoring Dashboard
 Denominator Source: Total number of children with EHCPs recorded in January 2020 school census (1990)

Fig 2: Proportion of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) reported to be attending schools in Ealing during COVID-19 school closure period.

It is important to recognise the diversity of Ealing's school population when considering attendance rates. Parents are anxious about Covid-19 transmission, and for many families, this anxiety is exacerbated due to being in a BAME group, where the mortality rate has been disproportionately higher than non-BAME groups.

2.2 Proportion of open establishments

Ninety-nine percent of Ealing state-funded schools opened at least once during the crisis. On average 80% of settings were open daily during term time during the full lockdown period, this compares with an average of 86% nationally. The highest proportion of settings known to be open on any given day was 91% (on three occasions in the first two weeks of May), which compared with a national figure of 79-81% on those dates, and a highest daily rate of 96% nationally.

Section 3: An overview of what schools have done well in engaging with vulnerable pupils and families- practices that will enhance the experience of our vulnerable pupils from September 2020 onwards

This section of the report provides an overview of what schools have been doing to engage with vulnerable pupils and their families. This contains examples gathered by officers undertaking telephone calls with the majority of Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in the borough. Other examples of strategies that schools adopted earlier on in the pandemic can be found in the first version of this report (June 2020) available from:

<https://www.egfl.org.uk/sites/default/files/COVID%2019%20Vulnerable%20groups%20report%20June%202020.pdf>

3.1 Strategies that schools have used to improve attendance

- Some schools have worked to alleviate parental anxieties about sending their children to school by generating **visual fliers and video footage** to illustrate the social distancing and additional safety measures being put in place in school.
- Most schools **categorised their learners by risk**, using a RAG rating to focus on the most vulnerable. Staff have been regularly updating these risks as new concerns emerge, with DSLs contacting the most vulnerable. One school had a **code word** that students could use in conversations with schools to alert staff, but not the parent at home, that they were vulnerable.
- EGfL signposts useful information related to improving the attendance of vulnerable children. Available from: www.egfl.org.uk/news/2020/05/support-improve-attendance-most-vulnerable-children-during-covid-19
- Many schools continue to use the **Child Missing in Education service if a child is missing in education**. A flow chart is available in **Appendix 1**.

3.2 Identifying newly vulnerable learners

The pandemic has made it difficult for school staff to identify newly vulnerable children, and many more have become vulnerable due to the impacts of Covid-19.

- Several schools have undertaken **wellbeing return meetings with Year 10/12 children as they come back to school**. They have used the outcomes of these meetings to ensure welfare support is in place.
- Schools are continuing to use the **DSL toolkit on Ealing Grid for Learning**.
- Some schools have **built in escalation in response led by intelligence gathered and shared**, for example social care and safer school's officers carrying out doorstep welfare checks before referring children to the Ealing CME (Children Missing in Education) team.
- Some **schools have undertaken doorstep welfare visits for the most vulnerable children** who are not engaging. Schools have used the delivery of food parcels or packs of work to conceal the real reason for a visit.

3.3 Mental health support for children

Schools are acutely aware that the anxiety of the pandemic will be placing a strain on children's mental health. They have been implementing a range of innovative practices in order to prepare for the expansion to all children returning to school in September.

- Many schools have taken advantage of the **training being delivered by many of the mental health services locally, including bereavement; understanding and managing anxiety and managing transitions, social distancing, and its impact; psycho-education workshops, school avoidance, support for BAME families; and training on transition, recovery, and bereavement.**
- **In one school, they have developed a relationship with specialist charities to provide expertise and assistance** for student's wider return to school i.e. bereavement support
- In one school, the full senior leadership team undertook a **20-hour online Level 2 qualification in Child Mental Health.**
- A group of primary schools worked with Ealing Learning Partnership to develop **COVID-19 related PSHE resources** to support pupils as part of a 'recovery curriculum'.

3.4 Staff wellbeing and support

School leaders are concerned that the generalised anxiety associated with the pandemic will continue to affect staff wellbeing. Leaders are mindful of the particular impacts felt by BAME staff and those who may have increased risk of infection.

- **In most schools, considerable work is going into explaining to staff the strategies being put in place to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission and provide reassurance**
- **Most schools have developed appropriate strategies to help alleviate anxieties alongside HR guidance and individual risk assessments. Some schools have arranged recovery training with staff, including detailed information about the steps the school has taken to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission.**
- One school is offering whole school **trauma /attachment** awareness to support staff with managing these issues as they emerge during expanded school opening.

3.5 Year 6 to Year 7 transition strategies

Schools are continuing to face unique challenges in relation to managing Year 6 to Year 7 transition. This is due to the inability of Year 6 children and their families to visit their new school and meet key staff.

- **Some secondary schools are recording and publishing virtual welcome assemblies for children and parents.**
- Some secondary schools are considering putting in place **extra capacity to support their new Year 7 cohorts** in September.
- The majority of schools are **adapting to meet the changing operational challenges** when managing Year 6-7 transition. These adaptations include: Individual calls to families; video tours of the school and key departments; information booklets for parents; information booklets for children; sending out administrative forms and learning agreements electronically, asking for digital signatures or using survey monkey.
- Many schools are continuing to **access the ELP transition guide** and other resources on the Ealing Grid for Learning: www.egfl.org.uk/transition-high-schools

3.6 Disclosure of safeguarding concerns

Schools are concerned that there will be a considerable increase in children disclosing concerns of a safeguarding nature when they return to school and are planning to increase capacity.

- Most schools are using their **online safeguarding reporting systems** (CPOMS, MyConcern, SIMS etc) to allow school staff to upload concerns for DSLs to follow up.

- Most schools have been making use of **up-to- date lists issued by social care** of all children on child protection/ children in need plans. **Some schools have asked for these to remain in place after the pandemic.**
- Some schools are **expanding their Deputy DSL team to increase capacity in light of expected surges in concerns being raised in the autumn term 2020/2021**, for example, using trained members of the senior leadership team as safeguarding officers, as well as recruiting new DSLs.
- Many schools have provided staff with **trauma and/or bereavement training** as well as practical training to deal with the return of students in September.

3.7 Children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and children attending specialist SEND schools

Most schools are adapting their practices to ensure that children with special educational needs and disabilities and those who are receipt of Education and Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are fully supported to attend school. Most specialist SEND schools are considering a phased approach to September expansion.

- Most schools are having face-to-face conversations with both children and parents/guardians once a week. In many schools, **the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCO) or teaching assistant who knows the learner best will telephone each child with an EHCP, or those who access support regularly.** This combines a welfare conversation, with a focus on additional support required for online and remote learning tasks.
- SENDCOs undertaking **annual reviews are identifying numerous benefits of using virtual platforms to host these.** In some cases, online reviews have halved the length of meeting times as well as reducing the non-attendance of key professionals. Some schools have said that they will **continue to use this online approach to the review system** after the pandemic.
- In specialist SEND schools, DSLs have reported having very **useful conversations early on in the pandemic with public health** about risk assessing children at an individual level.
- Schools have been using **speech and language therapists (SALT) and other external specialists to work with families where children have previously accessed additional support.** These specialists have been keeping Designated Safeguarding Leads aware about how well children and their families have been coping during the pandemic.
- For children in Year 6, **the majority of primary SENDCOs have been liaising with the SENDCO at the secondary transfer school** through online platforms.

3.8 Year 11 and Year 13 Progression

Secondary schools are concerned about Year 11 and Year 13 pupils who do not have agreed progression plans for September 2020. There is a considerable risk that these young people may become disengaged at the end of the school year.

- Some schools have continued learning for Year 11 until late in the academic year. For example, using enrichment as a **bridge to Year 12 content** in a range of Advanced Level subjects.
- Some schools are being **more flexible and open minded to sixth form entry** (attainment and conduct).
- Most schools are asking **connexions/ careers advisors to follow up** those who are at risk of becoming NEET, with plans to continue this tracking and monitoring into the autumn term of the new academic year.

Section 4: An overview of issues, discrepancies and inconsistencies that will help schools to focus on improving practices

4.1 Variability of access to high-quality online learning and support

A significant proportion of children have been unable to access online education due to a lack of connectivity and ICT resource at home. As we approach September 2020, some schools are preparing for more robust blended and virtual learning systems in case of future local or national lockdowns. **There is still a degree of inconsistency in Ealing schools' approaches towards online learning**, as seen across the country. Some primary schools have fewer resources than larger secondary providers and those in Multi Academy Trusts who benefit from economies of scale. This may present barriers in terms of IT and device availability and the development of home and online learning resources.

4.1.1 Successful online and virtual learning approaches that schools in Ealing have adopted

- **Many secondary and some primary schools are using online platforms to track engagement and online learning completion.** Some schools have been using 'showmyhomework.com' to track that work activities are being completed at home. In most schools, heads of department and heads of year have been monitoring work completion across the areas they manage.
- **A few schools are making more use of 'low stakes' assessment, disguising this amongst other activities.** Use of software in maths (*MyMaths*) and science that gives students instant feedback, as well as providing topic level breakdowns of learner understanding to assessors. Other schools have been using *Kahoot!*
- **One secondary school has provided internet dongles** and realised it can check internet activity. As a result they have been able to flag worrying internet safety practice with parents.
- **A minority of secondary schools have progressed their online learning offer into online 'live delivery'** carefully ensuring that this meets stringent safeguarding requirements, such as more than one member of staff being present in the sessions, and staff using electronic backdrops.
- **Some schools have been pre-recording lessons, using voice recordings over rolling PowerPoint presentations.**
- **Some secondary schools are offering extensive staff development in the areas of online teaching, learning and assessment**, as well as carefully evaluating the appropriateness of the online learning platforms used in case of a future local/ national lockdown.
- **557 laptops have been delivered to Ealing schools for distribution to families.**

4.2 Variability of attendance of vulnerable learners

Attendance levels of vulnerable children has been very low, and the level of attendance in secondary schools has been a particular concern. In a minority of schools, vulnerable children have had no face to face contact with staff and this presents a number of challenges for re-integration. Ealing Grid for Learning signposts useful information related to improving the attendance of vulnerable children. Available from: www.egfl.org.uk/news/2020/05/support-improve-attendance-most-vulnerable-children-during-covid-19.

4.3 Expected increase in behavioural issues

Some DSLs have identified that they expect to see an increase in behavioural problems as children return to schools and re-adapt to routines, although planning for this is not yet consistent across all schools. Some secondary school DSLs are anxious that some children have fallen out of their routines, with some older children going to bed excessively late. The Times (2020) points to research from Oxford University that suggests that during the pandemic “parents of primary school age children ...reported an increase in their children struggling with emotional and behavioural problems and lacking focus.” The Mental Health Foundation (2020) suggests that schools must have effective systems for pastoral support, safeguarding and wellbeing services, as the need for these will be high given the very varied experiences that children may have faced during lockdown.

4.4 School access to network groups

Due to competing time constraints, staffing and other challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, several Schools have been **unable to access the regular network groups** hosted by the Ealing Learning Partnership. As a result, these schools may not have access to the extensive examples of effective practices being shared between schools.

4.5 Transition from primary to secondary school

Some schools have reported **challenges and inconsistencies of working across borough boundaries with non-Ealing schools**. Some schools have been unable to identify DSLs or SENCOs or have found them difficult to contact. Consequently, some primary schools have concerns about the needs of vulnerable children being met as they transition to their new secondary school.

4.6 Children missing in education

A few Designated Safeguarding Leads are less clear about the next steps they should be taking where **pupils are not engaging with school, particularly as from September 2020 there will be an expectation that all children are attending school as normal**. The attendance team at Ealing have created an offer to primary and secondary schools and new guidance will be issued for September.

4.7 Sharing of effective practice

Schools are producing useful and innovative policies, templates, forms, and processes, and would like an opportunity to share these with other schools, as well as explore resources produced by others. Schools welcome the level of support they can access through the Ealing Grid for Learning, but they are unable to upload resources and rely on co-ordination by the authority.

Some schools feel as though DSLs in network groups could work together more effectively to explore case studies as a reflective activity.

4.8 Referrals

Ealing social care has recorded a significant reduction in safeguarding referrals from education during the lockdown. Referrals have started to increase, although there is some concern that schools are yet to identify many outstanding concerns from the lockdown period.

Furthermore, most school DSLs believe that there will be a significant increase in disclosures of concerns when children return to full provision in September, with DSLs anticipating an increase in 'newly vulnerable' and a subsequent increase in cases in schools to deal with. As a result, referrals into ECIRS are likely to surge, which is a cause for concern for many schools.

There is also a lack of consistency of awareness in some schools about:

- *How to escalate social care concerns;*
- *How to support, and when to refer newly vulnerable children to ECIRS;*
- *Other services to assist in safeguarding decision making and referrals – CME, Safer schools' officers, CPA.*

Some schools want to know more about the differences in classification of 'vulnerable children' – where social care use a theoretical model (within the threshold document) and school staff use their observation, intuition, or assessment. This is sometimes the cause of frustration for both groups of professionals. There is recognition that some DSLs have become 'desensitised' during the pandemic and some staff are not trusting their 'intuition'.

4.9 Recovery curriculum

Some schools have been working on a **recovery curriculum**, with a predominant PSHE focus in terms of settling children back into school and helping them process issues and anxieties associated with Covid-19. However, it has become apparent from telephone interviews with DSLs that not all schools are aware of this curriculum. Schools are keen for this curriculum programme to be shared with them.

A few schools are concerned that the **title of the 'recovery' programme could add to anxieties**, as many students are worried that they are getting behind with their school work, particularly in the upper years of secondary school.

4.11 Staffing issues as schools are approaching full opening

A high proportion of school leaders are concerned about maintaining staffing levels to meet the essential operational capacity for each school, particularly when opening the school to all year groups in September. HR guidance from Ealing local authority has supported consistent messages and expectations. The latest guidance, updated on 3rd August, can be found at <https://www.egfl.org.uk/coronavirus> as this is an ongoing and changeable situation. Schools have also raised key training needs for staff. This is particularly in relation to self-care and managing increased anxiety (both their own and others').

Section 5: How social care are planning to support schools to tackle expected challenges and recommendations for social care to improve support for schools

Most schools attending Network Groups have been positive about the contact they have had with social care.

- Schools have welcomed the responsiveness of social workers to following up vulnerable children, with many stating that they welcome the regular communication and speed of social worker response.
- Schools have welcomed the changes made to social worker e-mail signatures, so they know who to contact if a named social worker is not available.
- DSLs have found newly developed lists of children on Child Protection or Child in Need plans especially useful, enabling leaders to prioritise contact with the most vulnerable children.

Through interviews with DSLs, a number of recommendations have emerged about how schools and social care can work together more effectively to tackle expected challenges, and social care has already made progress on some of these suggestions.

Social Care might want to consider developing a breakdown of the reasons for school referral during the pandemic, and the subsequent actions taken by different services. It is hoped that this would reveal information about how capacity within the borough could be strengthened.

Social care will continue to proactively prepare across services (ECIRS, CPA, EHAP, SAFE etc) for an increase in cases, referrals, and DSL anxiety about cases. This preparation could include both logistical and wellbeing considerations associated with increased workloads. In response to school feedback, social care are adding a Deputy Team Manager (DTM) to the Ealing Children's Integrated Response service as an advisor to schools as part of an advice line. This will provide schools with a service whereby they could get advice from an experienced professional who could also gain experience and expertise in applying the threshold to live cases.

Social care may wish to explore how they use safeguarding data. Does social care report on (or have the means to) origin of referral and meeting threshold? If this is available, could this be shared with schools? This data could be used more intelligently and can therefore lead to more targeted support and professional development.

Social Care could consider sharing the threshold document with DSLs annually, but in a practical and responsive way.

Through Network Groups and other mediums, schools should be made aware of:

- Using existing guidance to escalate social care concerns (see the newly developed diagram to support schools in appendix 2);
- Other services to assist in safeguarding decision making and referrals, including the safer schools' officers and CPA.

Social care are planning to update the list of children on 'Child in Need' and 'Child Protection Plans' in all schools so it is up-to-date and as 'live' as possible in the format of a report and ensure that lists are available to all schools.

Section 6: Recommendations for schools to prepare for September

It is recommended that schools are in frequent and persistent contact with vulnerable children and their families, particularly in preparation for return in September. This could be via the telephone or online, using a variety of mediums. Schools should consider allocating a member of the safeguarding, leadership, or pastoral teams to become the communication link with each child at risk. Schools should ensure that allocated social workers are kept in the loop regarding home/ school communication.

Where schools are concerned about children they suspect are missing in education, they should continue to consult the school attendance flow chart in Appendix 1. The essence of this process is that schools should firstly try and communicate with parents/ carers using a range of communication methods, including home visits (where applicable). If they remain concerned, and are unsuccessful at establishing contact, the Children Missing in Education (CME) team, led by Lucinda Poole can provide additional support to schools.

DSLs may benefit from ensuring that all systems and protocols are known and understood by all staff so that schools avoid missing safeguarding issues. Schools should consider developing **simple flow charts** to remind staff who may be overwhelmed by changes and new information.

Wider school staff should be encouraged to always refer any concerns, however minor they may appear to DSLs, even if these concerns are based upon intuition or 'gut feeling'. DSLs should keep a log of any concern information, as this could help to build a bigger picture in terms of the need to make referrals to social care.

The majority of schools are planning to **bolster blended and remote approaches to learning** in September, in preparation for further virus peaks. Some are ensuring a virtual classroom system is in place, whilst others are moving towards a blended approach using the most appropriate platforms. Although there is some sharing of effective practice already taking place, it is recommended that **Ealing schools work together more closely than ever** to share in resource design, as well as harnessing joint economies of scale to ensure that the most effective resources, practices, and platforms are in place.

All **schools should prepare for an increase in behavioural issues** as children return to school after an extended period of absence. Schools might want to consider offering all staff, and in particular Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) additional training in behaviour for learning as well as establishing routines and expectations.

It is recommended that the **very few Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools, who have been unable to attend network groups during the pandemic or receive a telephone call from the central Ealing team, contact a member of the Ealing Learning Partnership** for a discussion about shared effective practice.

Section 7: Recommendations to support our existing networks in developing strong, consistent, and inclusive approaches to the return in September

The Ealing Learning Partnership is well placed to support schools to engage in reflective practice, helping them to review case studies in social care/education. Time could be attributed to this using the Network Group structure. **DSLs are encouraged to work in partnership, offering support to one another.** This is particularly important in schools where a newly appointed DSL is in post.

The Behaviour and Inclusion Network Group should consider adding behavioural issues (linked to the pandemic) as a standing agenda item, along with other mechanisms to share best practice in terms of school responses as children return to school.

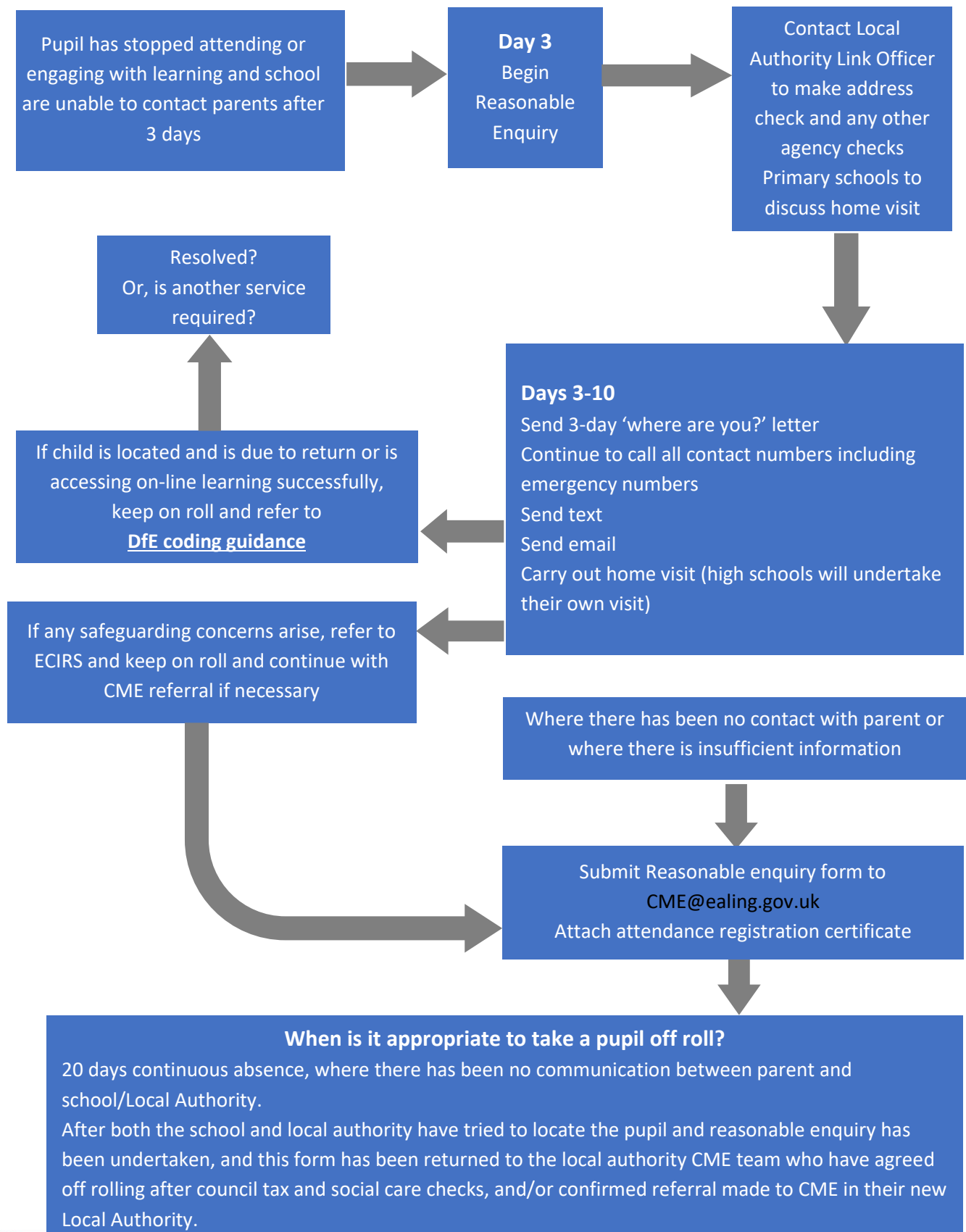
Ealing Learning Partnership should continue to investigate the feasibility of developing a 'knowledge Hub' and model this using existing technology to facilitate the two-way sharing and uploading of information for Designated Safeguarding Leads and Inclusion Leaders.

Some DSLs have suggested that schools should try and avoid terminology that creates anxiety, as children are feeling under pressure as they are getting behind in their work. Terminology, such as 'recovery' or 'intervention' could create increased levels of anxiety.

Telephone interviews with DSLs highlighted the importance of all schools knowing what social care, safeguarding and mental health support is available to schools. **Schools need to know what is available from each agency in terms of support, and how to access it.**

The Ealing Learning Partnership should ensure that the **'recovery curriculum'** is signposted again to all member schools.

Appendix 1: Flow chart for Ealing schools: children missing in education during COVID-19



Appendix 2: How Ealing schools can escalate concerns within social care if there is not a timely or satisfactory response

The process to follow when you don't receive a
*timely or **satisfactory response from social care:



* timely - within the expected 24 hours-48 hours ** satisfactory – decisions reached reducing risks/concerns for family

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