

24 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Following the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday evening, I would like to once again acknowledge the tremendous work of our school governors, leaders, and all staff during this challenging and uncertain time. The continued dedication and commitment shown by everyone is exceptional.

I appreciate your frustrations and recognise that advice and support has been limited and often not timely enough. I would therefore like to highlight the situation as it currently stands and outline how we can move forward more effectively, given the complexity and changing nature of this crisis.

1. We expect that a smaller number of children will attend school as the week progresses.
2. We are continuing to work with the Department of Education (DE) to better coordinate communication, advice and guidance. Daily briefings have now been established to provide up-to-date advice to schools.
3. The provision for free school meals (FSM) is a high priority and we are working hard to finalise and implement arrangements as quickly as possible.
4. We are working to establish locality cluster schools to meet demand and minimise risk. We are working with DE and all other arm's length bodies to find a cross sectoral approach. In the interim, schools who can safely open and provide this support are asked to do so. Moving forward, locality cluster schools will be established as soon as possible and we will work with groups of locality principals to find regional solutions.
5. We are working to ensure those who need cleaning materials and protective equipment get them as quickly as possible. For regular updates, visit the [EA Website](#).
6. We recognise that social distancing is more difficult in school settings. The health and safety of staff and pupils is a priority and we ask that all reasonable action be taken,

for example placing desks at an appropriate level from each other and creating a rota for staff attendance to keep footfall to a minimum. Many of you have already put effective measures in place.

7. We will closely monitor the situation as it unfolds this week and will make every effort to provide timely and appropriate support and advice. Daily data collection continues to inform the decision making process. We thank you for your continued co-operation in this matter.

EA officers continue to provide support directly to schools through our Operations Centre and our school improvement officers remain in regular contact. The Operations Centre is extremely busy right now and we ask for your patience and understanding as we work to support you as best we can. You can email Covid-19@eani.org.uk or telephone 028 3836 8186 from 8am – 8pm every day including weekends.

The situation continues to evolve rapidly, however we are making every effort to improve our communications and support. Again, I wish to acknowledge the exceptional work of school leaders at both a local level and in the wider community. You have shown extra-ordinary leadership in planning collectively across regions to meet the needs of the children and young people in your care.

We appreciate your support in continuing to audit numbers coming into school each day as this will help to establish the baseline and ascertain what tangible support we can give you.

Finally, I recognise the need for collective decision making at all levels and trust that we can work together more effectively as time progresses. The education sector has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to supporting our communities during this challenging and unprecedented time and for this, I thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Long', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Sara Long