



Supporting children's learning during COVID-19

Advice for caseworkers working with children in out-of-home care and family preservation practitioners

The NSW Government has implemented stay at home restrictions across the state.

The latest advice from Education is that parents and carers in NSW must keep children at home unless they need to be at school.

Schools remain open for any child that needs to attend. This includes children who have other vulnerabilities meaning it is best for them to attend school in person. This may include children in out-of-home care (OOHC), children at risk of significant harm or homelessness and those connected to Family Preservation services, who can benefit from the routine, structure and extra support that schools provide. For these students, learning from home may create additional challenges and increase risk of disengagement from school.

Schools will continue to support the most vulnerable students to attend school where it is in the best interests of the child/young person. While there will be reduced numbers of staff attending school during this period, decisions about a child either attending school (and their attendance arrangement) or learning from home should be made on a case by case basis in partnership with parents and carers, with consideration for the needs of the child and the circumstances of the family.

Schools will also put in place systems to ensure they are monitoring the wellbeing and engagement of students.

In either case, parents, carers and caseworkers should speak to the school about how they can be best supported and inform the school if they do intend to send the child to school. The school can organise access to devices, if available, and printed learning packs.

Students should not attend school if unwell, even with mild symptoms of COVID-19. Any person with any COVID-19 symptoms should be sent home and should not return to school until they have received a negative test result and are symptom-free.

This advice reflects the latest advice from the NSW Department of Education. It's important to keep across this situation via updates on the [Department of Education website](#).

The NSW Government has advised that schools in NSW will be operating in line with the latest advice from NSW Health.

Advice for schools in Greater Sydney and Regional NSW

Students in Greater Sydney and Regional NSW – currently affected by stay at home orders – will be learning from home.

Schools are still open and operating for students who need to attend across Greater Sydney and Regional NSW. This includes Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs). Existing out-of-school-hours care services should continue to be available for children if they need to attend.

For those on site, all staff in all school settings and students from Year 7 upwards will be required to wear masks or face coverings in all indoor settings while at school. This is consistent with current requirements for masks to be worn in office and workplace settings and on transport services across Greater Sydney and Regional NSW. There are some [exemptions](#) for mask wearing. Masks are not required for people with physical or mental health illness or condition, or disability, that makes wearing a mask unsuitable. For example, a skin condition, an intellectual disability, autism or trauma.

What if there is a COVID-19 case at a school?

Some schools may need to close to all children temporarily due to a confirmed COVID-19 case at a school. If this happens, the school will communicate with parents and carers through its usual channels (this might be through email, SMS, websites). Children in OOHC or engaged with



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Family Preservation services may need additional support and caseworkers should contact them as soon as advised the school has been shut to find out if additional support is needed for the child, carer or family.

Considering whether a child should learn from home

A child may not be able to attend school because of their health needs or the health needs of their parent/carer or other household members. The practitioner/caseworker, carer and teacher/principal should work in partnership to decide if the child should learn from home. Children's views should be considered too. Remember to keep parents involved about what is happening with their child and why.

Children in SSPs often have moderate to high learning and support needs. These schools provide specialist and intensive support in a dedicated setting. Decisions around schooling arrangements for children in SSPs need to consider a range of factors in partnership with the principal including:

- if and how their specialised supports can be transferred to online learning
- whether they have access to ongoing educational support and the impact of being at home on their ongoing engagement in learning.

It is important you work with the school, local Delivery Support team, the child, and carer, to plan early for any changes. This ensures the child has successful learning experiences.

How to support children and carers to learn from home

If a carer, teacher and caseworker have decided that a child needs to learn from home, the school must continue to provide learning activities for the child to do at home. This includes online learning and/or written material resources.

The school should continue to communicate with parents/carers about their learning. The same applies if a school is closed for an extended period of time.

Check with the child and parent/carer that practical arrangements are in place to learn from home including IT equipment and adequate internet connection. The Department of Education is providing students in need with devices and internet connectivity to learn from home. If the child's school does not have this arranged, follow up with the principal. You may also need to check if alternative transport arrangements need to be arranged.

If the school cannot arrange access to a device, for children in OOHC:

- DCJ caseworkers should talk to their manager about purchasing devices using district contingency payments.
- NGO caseworkers should talk to their contract manager about applying for devices through the COVID-19 Emergency Action Payment. Permanency Support Program funding includes funding for minor contingencies for children and young people, and should be used in the first instance.

Check with the child and parent/carer if they understand how and when they can contact their teacher.

Work with the parent/carer to set up a quiet learning space and a daily routine for the child at home. Also ensure there is plenty of time for play and physical activities. Break down the day into small parts to cover off:

- school subjects
- morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea
- time for play and to move their body.



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Talk to the parent/carer about their role in supporting the child to learn from home and see if they need any assistance. Help carers to support and encourage children or young people to learn in different ways – from reading, to home projects, to online learning sites.

For children attending preschool, learning at home should be fun and include play-based, child-led activities and build on everyday activities. The [Department of Education website](#) has helpful advice to support children and young people to learn from home.

It is important to ask children how they are feeling and what they are worried about. Include them in conversations about their learning and focus on how you can support them and their parent/carer to learn from home while keeping their social connections with friends.

Additional support for students including those with additional learning and support needs

If the child has additional learning and support needs, talk to the teacher and carer about whether the child needs additional educational supports. If so, find out how these supports can continue to be provided.

Resolving issues with the school

There may be times when you do not agree with the arrangements a school has put in place for a child. It is important to raise these issues with the school and resolve them as early as possible. If you are not able to resolve these issues with the principal, you may need extra help from your local OOHC teacher. If this does not resolve the issue, get in contact with the Director Educational Leadership for your school's area.

The Education Pathway and the Personalised Learning and Support Planning Process

The OOHC Education Pathway still applies during COVID-19. It aims to provide collaborative and consistent education support to each child or young person in OOHC attending school or pre-school. The [OOHC Education Pathway](#) is triggered by notifying the school (government, Catholic or independent), including a pre-school, that a child or young person has entered OOHC.

All pre-school and school-aged children and young people in OOHC should have a Personalised Learning and Support Planning (PLaSP) meeting within 30 school days of notice of the student's entry into OOHC.

Engagement during COVID-19

Caseworkers need to continue following the PLaSP process in partnership with schools. PLaSP meetings and reviews may need to be held via phone and video calls. You may need to review and revise the child's learning goals to reflect changes to their support needs. It is important you monitor how the child's learning needs are being met, including if they need additional supports for learning. Consider if anything additional needs to be included in the PLaSP. You may need to contact the school to review and update the PLaSP together if you think more needs to be done to support the child's educational needs during this period. Ensure you note these actions and recommendations in the case plan.

Continue to engage any external services recommended in the PLaSP process. Support the child to participate in appropriate online educational and social activities outside of school. It is important to support children to maintain friendships and relationships, and to exercise and be active. Continue to provide carers with educational information, including school reports to new



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carers, online educational resources, etc. Be creative and use different strategies to connect with children and young people in care, their carers, and their teachers, to support their learning.

OOHC Change Funding

OOHC Change Funding is short-term streamlined funding for students entering or in statutory OOHC. It is available for Department of Education staffing expenses only and will continue to be available for children in OOHC during the COVID-19 pandemic. Caseworkers must continue to follow the [OOHC Education Pathway](#).

Monitoring needs

Because children in OOHC and those receiving support from Family Preservation practitioners are experiencing many changes to their routines and lives, it is a good idea to check in regularly with them:

- Check in with the parent/carer about the child's engagement in learning.
- Work with the school and parent/carer to ensure they have all the resources they need and arrange additional supports if required.
- Continue to monitor the child's educational progress. Ensure strategies and supports are in place to address their needs, in line with the PLaSP.
- Review the PLaSP annually or when there is a change in the child or young person's circumstances that impacts on their learning, wellbeing or access to the curriculum.

Further information:

Education support:

- Read the latest [advice](#) from the NSW Department of Education website about sending children to school.
- The Department of Education's [Learning from Home](#) includes resources and information to support learning and wellbeing in the home.

Carer resources:

- Provide [carers with information about COVID-19](#) so they're aware of the symptoms and their responsibilities if a child or young person in their care is unwell.
- [My Forever Family NSW](#) has a range of resources and support for carers.
- [AbSec](#) provides the Aboriginal State-wide Foster Care Support Service - a free telephone advice service for carers of Aboriginal children 1800 888 698.
- Other resources:
 - [ABC for Kids website](#) has a range of creative activities, podcasts and educational videos
 - [Raising children website](#) gives helpful tips about playing with children across different ages.

Resources for children and young people:

- CREATE Foundation have prepared [frequently asked questions](#) and resources for children and young people in care.
- [Headspace](#) and [Reachout](#) have resources to help children and young people cope with stress from COVID-19.