

Early Years support during COVID-19 and in the future

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Impact of Covid-19 from 23rd March – July 2020

- As at January 2020, there were 580 PVI providers and 152 school based early years providers in NYCC – 732 in total.

First Lockdown Period: 23rd March – 31st May 2020

- Early years providers and schools were required to close to all children with the exception of children of critical worker families and children deemed to be most vulnerable.
- By April 2020, 27% of PVI settings were open or partially open.
- By May 2020, 31% of PVI settings were open or partially open.
- From 1st June 2020, early years settings and schools could re-open to more children within certain guidelines.
- By June 2020, 66% of PVI settings were open or partially open.
- By end of summer term 2020, 74% of PVI settings were open or partially open – nationally between 48% and 50% were open.
- From 20th July, restrictions were relaxed and settings were asked to prepare to welcome back all children without the need to keep them in “bubbles”.
- As at August 2020, there were 573 PVI providers and 153 school based early years providers in NYCC – 726 in total

Communications and support for the sector and families during this period

- The Families Information Service (FIS) telephone line remained open to families and providers throughout the pandemic providing individual support, advice and interpretation of the guidelines by the Families Information Service Assistant.
- The Early Years Strategy Manager and the Early Years Funding Team were available by telephone and email for advice, support and interpretation of guidelines.
- Between 4th February – 23rd March 2020, 26 separate communications were sent to providers in addition to the monthly Key Messages which continued.
- Between 24th March – 31st December 2020, a further 48 separate communications were sent to providers.
- The Early Years Funding Team issued 23 support documents with guidance.
- A dedicated website on CYPS and a dedicated COVID-19 email address were created.
- Eleven Early Years hubs were created across the county.
- Termly Engagement sessions with sector providers and LA staff took place.

Monitoring of the early years sector

- In April 2020, the DfE launched a twice-weekly data collection process with all local authorities. All early years providers were asked to complete a twice-weekly survey.
- The DfE asked Ofsted to monitor which providers on the early years register were open or closed.
- Close monitoring of early years providers to ensure childcare needs were being met.
- Greater number of childminders remained open compared to group providers.
- DfE data collection survey reduced to weekly during Autumn Term 2020.
- DfE data collection survey reduced to monthly from January 2021 and continues currently with expectation it will cease in December 2021.
- Coram Childcare Annual Survey.

Social Media Re-assurance for families

- Utilised the “Grow and Learn” and Early Help Facebook pages to promote positive messages to parents about the safety and benefits of children attending early years provision.
- This was in response to the first lockdown when parents lacked confidence in sending their children into childcare provision even if eligible and found alternative forms of childcare such as grandparents etc. Parental hesitancy and parents being confused about latest government guidance were also factors.



Financial support for the sector during this period

National Funding Support

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (known as Furlough)
- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme
- District or Borough Council Discretionary Grant Fund
- A Business Rates 'holiday' for one year
- COVID-19 Bounce Back Loan Scheme
- COVID-19 Business Interruption Loan Scheme
- VAT deferral

NYCC Funding Support

- Up-front payment to registered providers of 80% of Summer 2020 term funding payment made on 14/4/2020 with balance paid in August 2020; replacing monthly payments.
- Payments to registered providers open over Easter and May half term for key workers' children and vulnerable children when early years funding would normally stop.
- Double funding for key workers' children and vulnerable children unable to access their normal funded place and accessing funded place at alternative provision from 23/3/2020 – 31/5/2020.
- Early Years Financial Support Fund to support the sector to continue the delivery of provision.
- Disability Access Funding (DAF) paid for year even if child not attending.

Support during Autumn 2020

- The Early Years Leaders' Forums resumed on Teams during Autumn Term 2020.
- Key Messages issued and government updates continued to be issued.
- During Autumn 2020, NYCC gave providers the option of being paid 75% of their income upfront if they required the payment for cash flow reasons.
- In Autumn term 2020, 570 providers offered Government funded childcare places.
- NYCC paid 285 providers (50%) additional funding based on their Autumn 2019 headcount hours due to the number of Government funded 2, 3 and 4- year- old children attending in Autumn 2020 being lower.
- DWP Covid-19 Winter Food Grant Support. Distributed through PVI providers and schools for funded two-year-old funded children and three and four year old children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium. The value of the Grant distributed was £140,000 to early years.

January 2021 onwards

- A further national lockdown came into force on 5th January 2021. The instruction was that “Early Years provision should remain open and continue to all children attend full time or their usual timetable hours. Only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should attend on-site reception classes.” All other education settings closed.
- As part of the School Readiness “Grow and Learn” pilot, the Behavioural Insights Team identified that two-year old funding was an area where a BI approach could be used to increase take up of funding by auto-enrolment. Families on the DWP were issued with “Golden Ticket” letters to enable them to access a government funded two-year old place from January 2021 without the need for them to apply.
- Auto-enrolment into the library by registrars.

Ongoing and new support for the sector

- In January 2021, there were 556 PVI providers and 156 school providers – 712 in total. In November 2021, there are 528 PVI providers and 159 school providers – 687 in total.
- Two new posts (Early Years Advisors) established from 1st September 2021. Core work to improve standards across sector including an SLA.
- Impact of Grow and Learn pilot (January 2020 – June 2021) on sector:-
 - Two-year-old funding take up and revised process implemented using BI techniques following new data sharing agreement implemented by DfE.
 - Well Comm Assessment and Early Talk Boost Intervention Pathway - Multi agency pathways to assess early speech, language and communication needs. Possible roll out across the county.
 - Integrated Review Pilot in Craven for two-year-old checks with Early Years providers, Healthy Visiting Service and Early Help. Pilot finishes at Easter with possible roll out across the county from September 2022.
 - Small Grants Funding for eligible settings in pilot areas until September 2022.

Ongoing and new support for the sector

- Secured support from the Local Government Association to:-
 - Help develop and write an Early Years and Childcare Strategy
 - Provide free Sustainability Health Checks and Business Support Events
- Healthy Early Years Award
- Nutrition in Early Years
- MOD Grants for settings with children from Service Families
- Development of Family Hub Networks
- Safeguarding Audit Toolkits and cpd webinars/events
- Advice, support and guidance to schools considering nursery provision
- Monitoring of childcare market to ensure LA is meeting its statutory duties inc. providing information, support and guidance to sector and families
- Early Years SEND and Early Help support
- Comprehensive Spending Review – more funding available to support early years including £153m for training.
- BookTrust Early Years Storytime Pilot
- Early Years Professional Development Programme

