

# Home Learning During COVID-19: Guidance for Schools

April 2020

The Home Learning Audit will enable us to identify and share good practice and also target support (both peer support and also support from the Learn Sheffield team). *Please complete this if you have not done so already.*

**Home Learning Audit:** <https://forms.gle/NHEjmGGtmSUF4SQ9>

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## Executive Summary

As we move into the summer term supporting Sheffield schools and academies in their provision of a home learning offer has become one of the key education priorities for the city.

**“This document is intended to support the further development of home learning over the coming weeks and months.”**

Schools have successfully made the transition into the new arrangements and provision is in place for those vulnerable pupils who are considered to be safest at school and for those pupils whose parents and carers are key workers and are not able to make alternative arrangements. Schools have also been providing a range of opportunities and resources to support home learning for their wider cohort. This document is intended to support the further development of home learning over the coming weeks and months. Throughout this document, the term ‘home learning’, rather than ‘home schooling’ will be referred to. This is because the term ‘home schooling’ may give the impression of creating a virtual school day.

There is an obvious and important overlap between the guidance in relation to mental health and the guidance relating to home learning. It is not a coincidence that these topics are being discussed at the same time and we are encouraging schools to continue to prioritise regular contact with children and young people. This regular ‘checking in’ creates the opportunity to both guide pupils to appropriate and realistic home learning opportunities and also monitor and to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people regardless of their circumstances.

**“We are encouraging schools to continue to prioritise regular contact with children and young people.”**

**“Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing for children and their families should be at the heart of our decision making.”**

The need to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all of our children, young people and their families should be at the heart of our decision making in relation to our home learning offer. The role of ‘keeping in touch’ in achieving this should not be underestimated and this should be the aspect of our provision that we protect most carefully as our organisational resilience is tested in the weeks ahead.

In designing an effective home learning offer and a school’s approach to ‘keeping in touch’, it is important to use a range of approaches. This has organisational benefits as it spreads out the workload across staff teams and supports school resilience but also mitigates the unintended risk of causing anxiety to pupils if particular staff are unavailable at certain times. Mapping of communication also supports liaison with other colleagues in relation to additional or modified communication with our most vulnerable pupils.

**“Using a range of approaches to communicate with pupils can avoid the unintended risk of causing anxiety if particular staff are sometimes unavailable.”**

Planning the content of home learning involves some difficult decisions for schools. There is a danger that we focus on how we will deliver the learning, and how we will comply with data protection and safeguarding considerations, more than what the learning should contain. Teachers and school leaders may find that they have competing instincts when they think about home learning: to try to deliver a modified version of planned learning, to produce a super-charged version of homework or to design content that best supports families in surviving at home. If the content of home learning is overly academic it may not adequately meet the needs of families at this difficult time.

**“It is important to clearly define the guiding principles for your home learning offer.”**

An important aspect of home learning is to clearly define the guiding principles for your home learning offer. Hopefully this document should help with this. It may be useful to consider the importance of developing and securing key skills and the value of using this learning time to revisit and consolidate learning. Clearly, schools should not be afraid to plan non-academic activities that will support their families at this difficult time even though this does not naturally align with our instincts as educators. This may include activities that provide entertainment for children that enable adults to work from home.

Schools need to carefully consider how accessible home learning is for pupils in all contexts. The challenge of making an inclusive offer that all pupils can access is considerable. As many professionals are discovering working online requires a combination of sustained internet connectivity, sufficient devices and space for everyone in the household who needs it, and any available additional resources required by the task! There is a significant danger that one of the outcomes of this period is considerably wider gaps for disadvantaged pupils and other vulnerable children and young people if our home learning offer is not sufficiently inclusive.

**“There is a significant danger of widening gaps for disadvantaged pupils and other vulnerable children and young people if our home learning offer isn’t sufficiently inclusive.”**

**“We need to see home learning as something that will develop and improve over time – as we would with any new approach we were implementing.”**

COVID-19 is an unprecedented emergency that is impacting greatly on schools. Leaders and staff in schools have responded with extraordinary speed to establish routines and approaches as quickly as possible to support pupils while the majority of staff are well and available for work. In an emergency, there is a tendency, and often a need, to solve problems quickly.

In this context, however, we also need to see home learning as something that will develop dynamically and improve over time as schools share their practice and develop their resources. In this respect, it is no different to any other initiative that a school would implement.

We are unlikely to get everything right straight away and we need to give ourselves the time to develop our provision.

Seeking feedback from parents, carers and pupils in developing and adjusting the offer that we make will accelerate these refinements. It will also reinforce the sense of belonging and community that will support everyone in coping with this unprecedented challenge.

**“Seeking feedback from parents, carers and pupils will accelerate our improvement and reinforce our sense of school community.”**

Finally, there are perhaps some potential opportunities in this situation that we might seek to maximise when we consider our approach to home learning. This is a unique circumstance where families may sometimes be more receptive to suggestions and support. It may therefore be an opportunity to build relationships with families and young people who are sometimes hard to reach and a chance to promote the value of high quality family time.

*We hope that this document supports schools in their planning for home learning and provides a basis for the sharing of practice and resources that will be some important in the weeks ahead. The inputs below are drawn from colleagues across the Learn Sheffield, Sheffield City Council, CAMHS and others.*

## Links to Mental Health

Prioritising regular contact with children and young people provides frequent opportunities to guide and support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people. A [mental health guidance document](#) has been shared with school leaders along with a [prompt sheet to support school staff when supporting emotional wellbeing via telephone](#) for pupils.

Both of these documents have been produced by colleagues in the CAMHS Healthy Minds team and will be followed shortly by additional resources to use to support schools' work with children and young people. This will soon include 'Day Planner' guidance which seeks to support schools to enhance the emotional wellbeing of pupils at this challenging time by encouraging them to engage with a daily planner.

These resources can help structure conversations between school colleagues and pupils. The approach focusses on how children and young people are spending their day, with a focus on engagement, rather than achievement.

This will also be followed by training resources and opportunities to support staff to develop their active listening skills so that they are best placed to support pupils.

Further resources, including some strong pupil focussed resources from MAST are also available in the mental health folder on the [Sheffield Schools COVID-19 Share Site](#).

## Making Home Learning Provision Sustainable

One of the challenges for schools in developing their home learning provision is that it is difficult to plan for a period of time when their resources, especially in terms of people, are hard to predict. Prioritising contact with children and young people is a people focussed activity and it is obviously important to capitalise upon the knowledge and skills of key staff in supporting pupils. The strong relationships that teachers and other staff have with pupils will be very important in helping pupils to cope with their changed circumstances.

In designing an effective home learning offer and a school's approach to 'keeping in touch' it is also important to use a range of approaches. This has benefits in terms of sharing the workload but also, crucially mitigates the potential risk of causing anxiety to pupils if particular staff are unavailable at certain times. Many schools are also mixing in different types of communication, including virtual messages and assemblies and written communication (from school leaders and other colleagues from across the school community) to all pupils or groups of pupils.

Home learning offers the chance to reinforce key messages and build upon the important sense of school community. Where communication has been varied this will also support sustaining communication when the school has fewer resources, especially if it has already been happening and so does not feel like it is replacing personal contact if a school has to move to less frequent contact for a period of time.

The other important consideration linked to sustaining provision is the wellbeing of staff and it is worth noting that many of the mental health resources referenced in this document and others are applicable in principle for us as adults. Certainly within Learn Sheffield we have been circulating and using them! The resources produced by trade unions (found within the additional guidance and resources section of this document) and other partners are also helpful.

In further considering the wellbeing of staff, expectations of staff should be reasonable, flexible and account for personal circumstances. Some staff may need to have different expectations, for example a member of staff who is a single parent with young children may be able to accomplish very limited work.

## **Finding a Balance between Academic and Non-Academic Home Learning Activities**

Kate Atkins of Rosendale Research School describes their approach to home education in her [blog](#). She identifies the importance of clearly defining the guiding principles for each school's home learning offer and, as in many Sheffield schools, these guiding principles include a blend of academic and non-academic home learning activities.

At Rosendale these principles include a focus on promoting positive mental health and wellbeing, positive family relationships and the community of the school. On the academic side they are seeking to provide opportunities for children to revisit and consolidate knowledge already taught to achieve fluency and continue to develop children's thinking and reasoning skills.

Schools should not be afraid to plan non-academic activities that will support their families at this difficult time and this may, as it does at Rosendale, include activities and suggestions that provide entertainment for children that allow adults to work.

The DfE has published a [list of online education resources for home education](#) which includes a number of free subject and sector specific resources in English, maths, science and PE plus resources that support wellbeing and SEND. These resources are intended to support and supplement schools' own offers.

This has been supplemented over recent days with the announcement of the launch of the Oak National Academy (<https://www.thenational.academy/>). This will provide 180 video lessons each week, across a broad range of subjects from maths to art to languages, for every year group from Reception through to Year 10. No login is required, and the site is easy to access. Lessons are provided for each day of the week and for each year group. Daily lessons are also being provided as part of a new offer from the BBC (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>). The BBC package will be across TV and online, helping to keep children learning and supporting parents.

In addition to this, the Education Secretary has also announced the government will provide free laptops, tablets and 4G routers to disadvantaged children to make remote learning more accessible for a greater number of children and young people. As well as disadvantaged pupils, those pupils who receive support from a social worker, or who are care leavers, will receive the free equipment. Devices will be ordered for 'those at the most vital stages of their education'. Precise details of who will be eligible for what equipment, or further details of the scheme have not been published at the time of writing this guide. When schools reopen, they will be allowed to keep the laptops and tablets.

The next section of the document will talk about the challenges in enabling home learning which is inclusive and takes account of the digital divide that many colleagues have described. As this unfolds we should maintain a keen focus on both academic and non-academic home learning activities. The non-academic learning is included because it is a crucial part of meeting the needs of pupils and their families at this time. This should not diminish if the challenges associated with inclusive academic online learning are reduced.

## **Enabling Inclusive Home Based Learning**

The '[Enabling Home Based Learning](#)' document (which was shared last month) contains advice for schools in planning and implementing home-based learning for both staff and pupils.

It identifies a number of considerations for schools in developing their capacity and includes information and advice in relation to learning platforms and different technologies that may support a range of home learning approaches.

The eLearning team are continuing to support schools to successfully implement their home learning plans. They stress the need to consider the purpose first; to identify the learning aims and then consider which application or approach fulfils those needs best. This often involves:

- Providing content in short sessions and repeating over time.
- Using worked examples where possible for pupils to refer to and enabling pupils to check their understanding so that they know they are making progress.
- Using self-marking quizzes (e.g. Google Forms)
- Using platforms such as Seesaw, Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom for submission of work or to provide feedback.

Whilst technology offers considerable opportunities for home learning there obviously remains a significant question in relation to the equity of access to those opportunities for many pupils. Schools need to carefully consider how accessible home learning is for pupils in their contexts.

Effective online learning often requires a combination of several factors in order to be successful. The first is sustained internet connectivity (i.e. connectivity that enables extended and repeated access to the internet) along with a suitable device (for example a smartphone is often not sufficient). The second relates to the home situation of the pupil, i.e. access to a suitable device and an appropriate space in which to work. Finally, some tasks require additional resources (including people).

Many families will find it difficult to enable all of these things to happen. This will include families who have the resources but where, in the current circumstances, adults are also using them to work from home.

This does not necessarily mean that school should not use technology based solutions but does mean that these approaches need to be considered carefully in order to mitigate the issues where possible and ensure that those with less or no access do not find themselves routinely excluded from learning.

There is a significant danger that one of the outcomes of this period is considerably wider gaps for disadvantaged pupils and other vulnerable children and young people if our home learning offer is not sufficiently inclusive. This will also have important implications for the transition back into school life, when that comes, as well as the way that schools approach the curriculum beyond that point. This will be part of the focus for the next planned guidance document which will relate to transition (see next steps section).

## **Additional Support for Vulnerable Pupils**

Vulnerable pupils are likely to need additional support beyond the regular contact that is being prioritised for all pupils. This additional support will be specific according to the needs of the individual pupil but may, for example, take the form of additional or extended contact or come through the provision of additional resources or materials.

For those vulnerable pupils (those with a social worker and those with an Education Health Care Plan) who are considered to be safer in school this additional support includes access to school based provision. Sheffield City Council colleagues involved in both SEND and Social Care are reviewing and updating their assessments of pupils to seek to ensure that all children and young people have the most appropriate provision. These assessments are balancing the risks and engagement. Feedback and support from schools is essential in order to make this effective.

Resources continue to be developed in relation to these processes and all updates will be shared through the regular school bulletins produced by Andrew Jones. In particular, we would like to draw the attention of schools to the ['vulnerable and SEND child checker'](#) spreadsheet that was shared alongside the SEND

guidance in the bulletin – reproduced below. These resources can also be found on the [share site](#) in both the section containing updates from SCC and the vulnerable pupils folder.

### **Supporting children with SEND**

We know that many schools already have in place a process for contacting families of children with SEND. Children with SEND are likely to need more support than other children. Schools should adopt a common sense approach to risk assessing the level of support to be put in place for all children with SEND (not just those with EHC Plans) and should include a higher level of contact with families than for those without SEND.

It is important that schools work with other agencies involved with children with SEND to ensure that the family is not inundated by different agencies contacting them and potentially offering conflicting advice. If necessary, a keyworker should be identified to lead on contact.

When contacting a family schools should be considering the following areas:

1. **Checking in with the family.** Are they ok? Is their child coping? Do they need more support? It may be that a brief chat is enough to encourage the family and give them the help they need.
2. **How can home learning be differentiated to meet the needs of a child with SEND?** This may include a SENCO liaising with school staff on how to ensure appropriate resources are available or a class teacher talking through an activity with a family in line with a child's needs. It is important to note that many children with SEN may struggle to differentiate home from school and will not understand why they are doing schoolwork at home.
3. **Creating a dynamic risk assessment.** Schools should have risk assessed all children with an EHC Plan and be considering the needs of other vulnerable children, including those at SEND Support. Regular contact will enable the school to identify where risks are increasing and extra support may be needed.

We would recommend that schools keep a record of how they are contacting vulnerable children, including who is making contact and when, whilst ensuring that no single person is responsible for all contact in case that person becomes ill. A [template spreadsheet](#) is being shared alongside this guidance that schools could adapt and use to record and monitor the support in place for the most vulnerable children (please note this is not a requirement).

We would suggest that the family of a child with an EHC Plan should be contacted at least once a week and that the family of a child with a My Plan / at SEN Support should be contacted at least once a fortnight. The schools risk assessment and discussion with the family will identify the best way to contact the family and best frequency. Many children with SEND will require more contact than this, some may even need daily contact.

It is important that schools share with parents of children with SEND the provision being put in place, either if a child is in school or at home, so that they can share any concerns they might have. Where a child has a particular SEND need that means that they will struggle to access the resources school has provided, for example due to a visual or hearing impairment, please do work with those services to get support and advice on how to create appropriately differentiated resources.

Ensure that materials you share are as accessible as possible. The Dyslexia style guide (<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide>) provides advice that will also benefit a wider range of pupils. Providing material in a range of formats (text, with image support, audio and video) will also make your offer more inclusive. We have produced a [guide for parents of children with SEND](#). It has a range of helpful websites, information about how services are operating and helpful guidance and support for parents of children with SEND. Please can schools send this electronically to all parents of children with SEND if they have not already done so. You may wish to put this on the school website.

## Working with Parents

Seeking feedback from parents, carers and pupils will help schools to develop and adjust their home learning offer. This will be particularly important in relation to less academic content, especially those which promote the value of high quality family time.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) guidance report [‘Working with Parents to Support Children’s Learning’](#) was obviously written in different circumstances but remains a good starting point when thinking about working with parents to support learning. The [summary poster](#) here includes the four recommendations.

It highlights, for example, the use that many evidence-based programmes make of weekly text messages which can prompt conversations about learning at home and provide parents with tips or information about their children’s learning.

**Education Endowment Foundation**

**WORKING WITH PARENTS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING**  
Summary of recommendations

- 1 Critically review how you work with parents**

Schools should be optimistic about the potential of working with parents

  - There is an established link between the home learning environment at all ages and children's performance at school.
  - Schools and parents have a shared priority to deliver the best outcomes for their children.

However, evidence on effective strategies that schools can use to engage parents in their children's learning is mixed

  - If the aim is to improve academic outcomes, classroom interventions working directly with children currently have more evidence of effectiveness at improving learning than parenting interventions with the same aim.
  - Working effectively with parents can be challenging, and is likely to require sustained effort and support.
  - Most schools say that they do not have an explicit plan for how they work with parents, and fewer than 10% of teachers have undertaken CPD on parental engagement.

Schools should start by critically reviewing their aims and current approaches

  - Focus on areas that have better evidence (such as those summarised opposite)—different approaches are needed for different ages.
  - Talk to parents who are less involved about what support they would find helpful.
  - Plan and monitor to progress towards defined aims.
- 2 Provide practical strategies to support learning at home**
  - For young children, promoting shared book-reading should be a central component of any parental engagement approach. These learning activities, such as playing with letters and numbers, are also linked to improved outcomes.
  - Tips, support, and resources can make home activities more effective—for example, where they prompt longer and more frequent conversations during book-reading.
  - Book-gifting alone is unlikely to be effective, but carefully selected books plus advice and support can be beneficial for supporting reading.
  - Support parents to create a regular routine and encourage good homework habits, but be cautious about promoting direct parental assistance with homework (particularly for older children).
  - Parents can support their children by encouraging them to set goals, plan, and manage their time, effort, and emotions. This type of support can help children to regulate their own learning and will often be more valuable than direct help with homework tasks.
  - Consider initiatives to encourage summer reading: these have some promise but are not widely used or proven.
- 3 Tailor school communications to encourage positive dialogue about learning**
  - Well-designed school communications can be effective for improving attainment and a range of other outcomes, such as attendance.
  - Examples include weekly texts sent from school to parents, and short-term letters.
  - Impacts from such approaches may appear small but they are generally low cost, and straightforward to introduce.
  - Messages are likely to be more effective if they are personalised, linked to learning, and provide positive interactions by, for example, celebrating success.
  - Communication should be two-way: consulting with parents about how they can be involved is likely to be valuable and increase the effectiveness of home-school relationships. Currently around half of parents say that they have not been consulted.
  - School communications may be particularly important for engaging some parents who could play an important role but may have less contact with school.
- 4 Offer more sustained and intensive support where needed**
  - Start by assessing needs and talking to parents about what would help them support learning: targeting is likely to be needed to use resources effectively and avoid widening gaps.
  - Communicate carefully to avoid stigmatising, blaming, or discouraging parents. Focus on building parental efficacy—that they are equal partners and can make a difference.
  - Encourage a consistent approach to behaviour between parents and the school, for example, by sharing expectations with parents.
  - Offering more structured, evidence-based programmes can help to develop positive behaviour and consistency where needs are greater.
  - Plan carefully for group-based parenting initiatives (such as regular workshops). A consistent time and location, face-to-face recruitment, building relationships, and an informal, welcoming environment are the most important factors for parents to attend group sessions.
  - Consider offering regular home visits for younger children with greater needs. This can be an effective approach for parents that struggle to attend meetings, and for building relationships.

## Safeguarding and GDPR

The [‘Enabling Home Based Learning’](#) document also contained advice for schools in relation to online safety and data protection. Some key points relating to home learning are reproduced below but more can be found by following the link.

One of the most significant challenges in this area is the problem of staff using personal mobile or home phones to call students. There are clearly data protection risks (as outlined below) due to the potential for personal data to be shared inadvertently. Ideally calls home should be via a school communications controlled system and some schools have sourced mobile devices for staff to use for this purpose. Whilst there is clearly a balance of risks to strike given the importance of maintaining communication with pupils, schools should do everything they can to mitigate the data protection risks.

## Data Protection

*Online file share:* You should use school accounts for services such as Google Drive, Office 365 and other file sharing products. Avoid using personal accounts on these and similar services.

*Be private:* If you have a need to make a telephone call or have a conversation that will involve personal data, try to make sure you do so where you cannot be overheard or the conversation does not allow someone to be identified.

*Dispose of papers securely:* Papers with personal data must be destroyed as confidential waste, so if you do not have a shredder at home, bring the documents back to school to use the confidential waste facilities.

*Return papers and information:* All documents and information must be returned to the school at an appropriate time (depending on government advice regarding attendance at work) and saved back into its appropriate place (paper file system, e-file, confidential waste).

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has issued advice to organisations regarding Data protection and Operations during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The ICO has said:

*The ICO recognises the unprecedented challenges we are all facing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We know you might need to share information quickly or adapt the way you work. Data protection will not stop you doing that. It's about being proportionate.*

## Safeguarding: Online Safety

- The schools AUP's for staff, pupils and parents should apply unless the Headteacher decides otherwise for safeguarding purposes.
- The Online Safety Coordinator should be consulted for advice as usual.
- Staff should take every opportunity to reinforce positive online safety messages at all times.
- Staff should only use their personal devices in the last resort and with permission from the Headteacher.
- No pupil information should be downloaded and kept on personal devices.
- As a general rule, two school staff should have access to each online space e.g. each Google Classroom or Seesaw class and each blog, message board or video conference. The second person could be a parent in the case of a video conference.
- Staff must not use social media apps with pupils.
- Staff should not set up their own systems of communication with pupils. The method should be chosen by the school and approved by the Headteacher.
- If pupils are being asked to share photos of their work with their teacher, the teacher should remind them about key messages around online safety and the school's usual policy around photographs should apply.

- Video-conferencing is more suitable for secondary aged pupils. Primary pupils will require parental involvement in the conference.
- School should not use WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger etc for video calling/conferencing. These would require sharing of personal mobile numbers or Facebook accounts with pupils which may lead to safeguarding concerns.
- Staff should only use generic school-based accounts and apps to communicate with pupils. Under no circumstances should staff use their personal accounts for this work.
- If you are holding video conferencing live sessions with pupils of any age, this must be with parental permission and with the approval of the Headteacher. It is good practice to have at least two adults in the conference at any one time.
- Parental permission should take the form of a virtual hello at the start of the session and a virtual goodbye at the end of the session. There is no need for the parent to be present for the whole of the session but it should be made clear that they are invited to pop in at any point.
- When video-conferencing, teachers and pupils should be appropriately dressed and in a living space, i.e. not a bedroom.
- Background noise interference can be removed by muting microphones for all but the current speaker.

The UK Safer Internet Centre have good general information for Online Safety for COVID 19:

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/keeping-children-happy-and-safe-online-during-covid-19>

SWGfl (South West Grid for learning) have produced a comprehensive Guide for School Leaders:

<https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/safe-remote-learning/>

Sue Finnigan - [sfinnigan@sheffielddcl.net](mailto:sfinnigan@sheffielddcl.net) is the SSCP contact for Online Safety advice in relation to Home Learning. Individual concerns should be referred through the school's established safeguarding procedures.

### **Safeguarding: DfE Guidance**

The Department for Education has provided additional guidance on safeguarding during the current period. At the time of writing this (see link below) is interim guidance and is under review and will be updated.

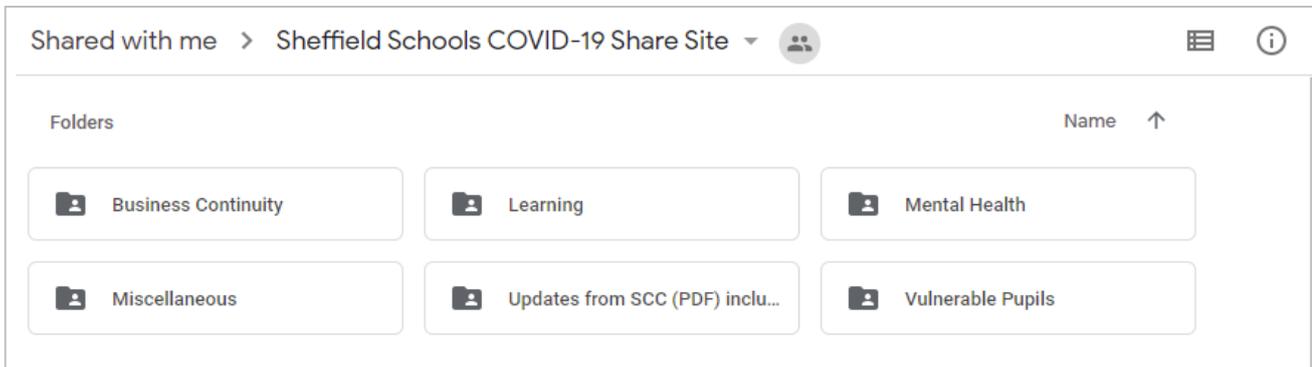
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers#children-and-online-safety-away-from-school-and-college>

### **Additional Guidance and Resources**

The Sheffield Schools COVID-19 Share Site continues to be a way to access and share resources.



[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MWd0tr\\_Pg8f8t8hZPWDDjJnkFNHhndkr](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MWd0tr_Pg8f8t8hZPWDDjJnkFNHhndkr)



Colleagues from the eLearning team are continuing to curate professional development materials and also develop short videos on how to use different tools to support home learning. These will be shared alongside resources from the sector on the share site.

Trade Unions have produced specific guidance in relation to the current situation – two examples of this are below from the NEU and the NASUWT.

- NEU section includes advice and guidance for teachers and school leaders.  
<https://neu.org.uk/coronavirus-what-you-need-know-distance-teaching>
- NASUWT section includes a FAQs section.  
<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/health-safety/coronavirus-guidance/coronavirus-faqs.html#Closures>

The Research School network is also a good source of guidance for schools. The new Chief Executive of the EEF, Professor Becky Francis, has written an open letter to schools: [School closures - the disadvantage gap may widen, but there are practical steps we can take to minimise it.](#)

Colleagues from Rosendale Research School have also written interesting blogs about home learning and the potential impact of the current situation on disadvantaged pupils.

Kate Atkins <https://researchschool.org.uk/rosendale/news/rosendale-research-school-approach-to-home-education/>

Marc Rowland <https://researchschool.org.uk/unity/news/distance-learning-through-the-lens-of-disadvantaged-pupils/>

## Next Steps

Sheffield currently has the following education priorities in response to the COVID-19 situation.

- **Free School Meals**

This will continue to be a priority until the national voucher scheme is securely in place and provision is secure for Sheffield's eligible families in both term time and holiday periods.

- **Supporting the network of provision**
- **Vulnerable Pupils**

These ongoing priorities are supported by the data collection and the resilience questionnaire.

Colleagues across Sheffield City Council are working with the schools to refine and develop the provision and support for vulnerable pupils in order to keep children and young people safe.

We believe that children and young people are best supported in their own schools and this remains our intention. Learn Sheffield is working with schools to ensure that contingency plans are in place to maintain a network of provision throughout the current situation.

- **Mental Health**
- **Home Learning**

The focus on these priorities has increased as we have moved towards the summer term.

Guidance and support in both areas have now been shared with schools and further resources will continue to be developed.

The home learning audit will facilitate sector led development and partnership working.

- **Transition**

This next priority area will increasingly become a focus over the next few weeks and we intend to co-produce a guidance document with the sector at the start of May. This work will seek to describe different strategies which schools could employ in order to support pupils in the following circumstances;

- The return of all pupils to school at whatever point this happens.
- The return of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Transition for pupils moving between schools (for example Y6-Y7).
- Transition into the final year of key stages (for example Y10-11).
- The identification and closing of gaps for pupils whose gaps have widened.