

An appeal to all schools and teachers

As families now find themselves unexpectedly educating their children at home, many have reached out to myself and others within the national home education community for support.

We are hearing families tell us, that they are currently experiencing a high level of stress around what is being asked of them with regards to their child's education.

Families cannot create 'school at home' – it is unrealistic to expect this from them, particularly in this unprecedented time of uncertainty and fear.

Families are worried about health risks to loved ones, job and financial security and may be needing to spend time supporting people around them with basic needs.

Their well-being is being put under further strain with the pressure of trying to recreate school working practices into their homes. The home environment is totally different in so many ways to a school environment and not a place where academic timetables and a compulsory curriculum is appropriate or sustainable.

Families may now have one or more adult family member working from home, juggling this with caring for their children. There may be very young children or several children in the household requiring different amounts of adult input time, types of care and support. The household may not have a computer or internet access or if they do, this may have to be shared by both the working adults and children for their education. The family home may not have the resources or space to make the accommodations that would be required to insist on many hours of sit-down bookwork or computer time at specific 'school' times of the day.

Families do not need the potential added stress of a 'fight' with their children to comply with school-based rules.

The UK Government is aware that not every child's home environment is the same and that access to resources and internet varies and have produced emergency legislation and guidelines to lift curriculum requirements for schools, giving them "flexibility to provide support, activities and education in the way they see fit".

If ever there was a time to work in partnership with parents, that time is now.

Strengthen your relationship with parents, by being as flexible as possible; sensitive to individual family situations, striving to meet parents in a place that is manageable and sustainable for them.

Families want their children to learn. Children themselves want to learn and progress, it just doesn't necessarily look like school.

Families need a range of options at this time. Children are still on the school roll, so please continue to send home learning packs and links to useful online learning resources if that feels appropriate, families want and appreciate teachers' efforts to provide that, but do not make it compulsory.

Encourage children to think about their learning at home, but please do not set lots of academic work that has to be completed within certain time frames or that requires children to 'login' to learning portals at particular times of the day – they may not be able to do this and it just creates further anxiety around being penalised for not complying.

Please instead, provide families and children ways that they can share with you the learning they have been doing at home.

I have already seen families sharing ideas and photos of their children's achievements in cooking, art projects, gardening ideas, older siblings creating activities and games for their younger siblings, family reading and story times, singing and music practice. Children have been tuning in and signing up to online PE and fitness sessions, poem and story writing competitions and older children have been working on physical projects or accessing free online study programmes in subjects they are particularly interested in and may or may not have had the opportunity to study while attending school.

And for those who felt structure was important or appropriate for them, particularly for those families supporting children with Special Educational Needs, families have been sharing timetable ideas that fit around their home situation and their child's need.

So, I appeal to you again, at this unprecedented time, please be as flexible as possible; sensitive to individual family situations, working with your families to meet them in a place that is manageable and sustainable for them. Please do not set large amounts of compulsory school work, but instead value and provide a way for children to share with you their learning achievements, whatever they may look like, however big or small.