

## Easter Holidays – FAQs

'Easter Holidays' refers to Mon 6<sup>th</sup> – Thu 9<sup>th</sup> April and Tue 14<sup>th</sup> – Fri 17<sup>th</sup> April

- **Are we expected to be open during the Easter holidays?**

The government has clarified that they expect schools to be open over the Easter holidays wherever possible. They state:

*'Where possible, we would encourage childcare providers, schools and colleges to continue to look after critical workers' children and vulnerable children throughout the Easter holidays.'*

- **How should schools organise opening over the Easter break?**

Joint union advice on the coronavirus crisis from ASCL, NAHT and NEU states that:

*'During the Easter opening, staff should be organised so that colleagues know when they are working (either in school or at home) and when they are on holiday. Staff on holiday should not be expected to keep in touch – they need some time to switch off and physically and mentally recuperate.'*

*Staff holidays should be operated on a rota basis so that staff get two weeks off, either before, during or after the period when the school would normally be closed for Easter. Having weeks rather than days off will offer significant benefits in protecting staff health through minimising the extent of contact with different colleagues. It should not be assumed, however, that staff can change their plans, even during the current situation.'*

*We recognise that the use of rotas may pose some particular challenges in special schools where higher staff ratios are required, but leaders should still try to take a similar overall approach to the use of rotas where possible.'*

Unions have also supported other models for schools remaining open over the Easter period including seeking volunteers and paying staff extra for working beyond their contracted hours. In addition, some schools may already have holiday clubs in place over the Easter period which can be offered to those eligible to school places during this time.

- **Will we be expected to be open on the bank holidays on the 10th and 13th April?**

Joint union advice on the coronavirus crisis from ASCL, NAHT and NEU states that:

*'We do not expect schools to open on Good Friday or Easter Monday.'*

Whilst unions have stated that they do not expect schools to be open on the bank holidays we recognise that there are key workers who will need this service during the bank holidays in order to be able to continue to go to work.

If there is demand for this service, the local authority would like to be in a position to offer this to all children of key workers. The local authority would look to provide this centrally via 'hubs' if there were children without places available to them during the bank holiday.

Within North Yorkshire we also recognise that there are lots of schools who are keen to provide this service themselves and have sought volunteers in order to open their own school during the bank holidays. If schools have their own plans in place to open during the bank holiday and wish to offer this service to key workers the local authority supports this, so long as staff volunteer. Please discuss this with your SEA if you have any questions.

- **Will we be expected to be open just for key workers over the holidays or will we need to continue to offer provision for vulnerable children also?**

The government states in their guidance on the 27<sup>th</sup> March:

**'Q: What are schools responsible for?**

*Schools are responsible for providing places to **vulnerable children, and children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response** while schools are closed due to the outbreak. It may be that not all schools can remain open. Schools should work with local authorities to agree the provision needed locally to support the needs identified.'*

Some parents of vulnerable children will want to keep their children at home during the Easter holidays however we would encourage schools to risk assess if the current restrictions on movement is likely to put any of their identified vulnerable children at a greater risk than they would be during a normal school holiday. We encourage schools to

make decisions based on each child's risk assessment and through discussions with social workers and parents/carers in these cases.

- **If we need to pay staff to cover the Easter period because it is additional to their normal hours, will we be reimbursed?**

The government has recognised that the current crisis will lead to some additional costs for schools. They state:

*'We know that schools may face additional costs as a result of COVID-19. We will put in place a new process that allows us to reimburse schools for exceptional costs that they face as a result. For example, where schools are already issuing vouchers to pupils who are eligible for free school meals but cannot attend school **and additional costs for schools that remain open through the Easter holidays.***

- **Are we likely to be asked to offer weekend provision at some point?**

If there is demand for weekend provision the local authority will look to offer this to children of key workers. The local authority will look to establish local 'hubs' in order to provide this service, unless schools wish to make their own arrangements.

- **Will we be expected to maintain the same level of welfare checks for our vulnerable children who are not in school over the Easter holidays?**

The extent to which schools will need to carry out welfare checks for their vulnerable children will depend on the risk assessment that they carry out and whether or not they think these current restrictions on movement put any child at a greater risk than they would be during a normal school holiday.

- **Will transport still be provided for these children during the Easter holidays?**

We are arranging for any child who needs transport to have access to this service over the Easter holidays, where this service is provided by the local authority. We have asked our transport providers to liaise with the schools that they serve to ensure that they know whether there is a need for them to operate during the Easter Holiday. This service will not be available during the bank holidays or over the weekends.

There may be some exceptions to this if local transport providers are unable to provide this service during this time due to prior commitments that they have made to other customers, for example. In such cases, they have been asked to notify any schools affected and report this to the LA's school transport service. Schools working with their own transport providers will have to agree this with them individually. If you have any home to school transport issues that can't be resolved with the providers, please inform your SEA in the first instance.

- **Will we be expected to continue to offer free school meals for children not in school during the Easter holidays?**

The government have stated in their guidance on free school meals dated 31<sup>st</sup> March:

*'The steps you take to support pupils may be different depending on the individual circumstances of the school. Where schools are not able to provide eligible pupils with meals or food parcels through their current food provider, they can provide eligible families with supermarket vouchers in **term time weeks.***

In addition, in the same guidance, within their Q&A section they state:

**'Q: Our school is open over the Easter holidays and our food supplier is able to continue to provide food parcels to free school meals children not in school over the Easter holiday. Is that allowed?**

*A: Yes. It is for schools to decide locally how their arrangements for free school meals will operate.*

*Whilst the vouchers are for term time only, if there is a local arrangement to supply food that the school and the supplier intend to continue over this period then that can be agreed and managed locally. This would need to be manageable within schools' existing resources, **as there will not be additional funding available for this purpose.***

This clarifies that there will be no requirement for schools to provide free school meals to children who are not attending school during the Easter holidays. Where schools wish to offer this, they are able to do so but they must be aware that they will not be able to have these costs reimbursed.

- **Will catering still be available for children in school during the Easter holidays?**

The government have stated in their guidance on free school meals dated 31<sup>st</sup> March:

*'Where schools are open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, schools should continue to provide meals for pupils in attendance. Meals should be free of charge for pupils who would normally receive free school meals, and schools have discretion as to whether they charge other pupils.'*

Catering arrangements will vary dependent on catering providers. Schools should liaise with their catering contractors to confirm if they are able to provide catering for children in school during the Easter holidays. Where this is not possible, schools should look to find local solutions.

If North Yorkshire County Council is the catering provider, then schools should speak with their area manager who will be able to provide packed lunches into schools.

Schools should log any additional costs so that they can be reimbursed through the process that the government has said it will put in place in their guidance.

- **Will we still have cleaners during the Easter holidays?**

Cleaning arrangements will vary dependent on cleaning providers. If schools have term-time only contracts, they should liaise with their cleaning contractors to ensure that cleaning can be provided during the Easter holiday.

Schools should log any additional costs so that they can be reimbursed through the process that the government has said it will put in place in their guidance.