Dear colleague

I’m sure many of you will be aware that the DfE has recently published further information on financial support to schools in relation to COVID-19 and this can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools>

**The key points that I would want to raise from this are:**

1. The guidance covers support for schools up to the end of the summer term 2019-20.
2. Schools will continue to receive their normal core funding from their LA and the ESFA to enable ongoing payment of their core costs.
3. LAs will continue to receive their High Needs and Early Years funding which will continue to flow through to schools in the normal way
4. The guidance covers mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units; both maintained and academies.
5. The additional funding is intended to finance “areas where [DfE] believe it is most likely that schools may face additional costs, as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak”.
6. The financial support is available for 3 specific areas only with schools not expected to make a claim “if they are anticipating that they will be able to add to their reserves in the 2020 to 2021 financial year”.
7. The specific areas, as detailed in the note are quoted here:

a.              **“increased premises related costs** (including utilities and resources needed to keep the school open, such as hygiene services) associated with keeping schools open during the Easter and/or summer half term holidays, for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, over and above the costs that schools would have faced in other circumstances

b.              **support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school**, where those costs are not covered by the FSM [national voucher scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools) - this covers:

                                                               i.      costs to schools arising before the introduction of the national voucher scheme

                                                             ii.      costs where schools are providing free meals to children for whom the national voucher scheme is inappropriate (for example, because there are no participating supermarkets locally or schools are providing meals directly)

c.              **additional cleaning** – required due to confirmed or suspected coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, in line with [COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings), over and above the cost of existing cleaning arrangements.”

*BFC are aware that schools have identified other costs and areas of income loss arising from COVID-19 that are not included in the above DfE list. If this affects your school, the DfE have determined that “If a school faces other, extraordinary costs to deliver appropriate support to their pupils through this period that are not covered by this list and cannot be met by existing budgets, they should contact* DfE.CoronavirusHelpline@education.gov.uk*.” Schools are advised to follow this route in the first instance, copying any responses to**paul.clark@bracknell-forest.gov.uk**.*

*Please also see the note in blue below on furloughing staff which is also relevant here.*

1. Cash limits have been set on what schools can claim as follows:

| **Mainstream schools** |  |
| --- | --- |
| 250 pupils or fewer | £25,000 |
| 251 to 500 pupils | £30,000 |
| 501 to 1000 pupils | £50,000 |
| Over 1000 pupils | £75,000 |
| **Special schools and alternative provision** |   |
| All schools | £50,000 |

“In [exceptional] circumstances, schools will be able to make a case for increasing the limit when they submit a claim for additional funding.”

**The next steps are:**

1. Schools should ensure that they can readily capture eligible expenditure, taking account of:
	1. “[DfE] will not be asking for detailed information of the individual items on a claim routinely, but schools should hold a record of what has been covered, in case of individual enquiries”.

My earlier email of 26 March suggested an approach to take for this.

* 1. “The headteacher or school business manager who submits the claim should give due consideration to their financial duties when doing so, including signing their name against any claim”.
	2. “As usual, we reserve the right to audit the expenditure and claw-back money if claims have not been made in accordance with the guidance, in order to protect public spending”.
1. DfE will publish information on how schools should report additional expenditure claims to the DfE in June.
2. Payments will be made to LAs to pass on to maintained schools and directly to academy schools.
3. BFC will create a new Agresso code to identify associated income when more information on the process is published.

**Reminder on furloughing staff to access the Government Job Retention Scheme:**

The guidance on **furloughing**with reference to publicly funded organisations is:

If you’re a public sector employee

*The government expects that the scheme will not be used by many public sector organisations, as the majority of public sector employees are continuing to provide essential public services or contribute to the response to the coronavirus outbreak.*

*Where employers receive public funding for staff costs, and that funding is continuing, we expect employers to use that money to continue to pay staff in the usual fashion – and correspondingly not furlough them.*

*government.*

*HR colleagues have been attempting to get further clarification on the furloughing of staff in particular circumstances including whether or not they can furlough employees which are entirely funded by parental contributions, for example breakfast/afterschool clubs but there may be cases where a definitive answer cannot be provided at this stage.*

Further guidance on furloughing staff should be sought from your normal HR support.

**Other matters for maintained schools:**

As previously advised, the Council recognises the incredible challenges schools are facing right now and is keen to be flexible with financial requirements where this is possible. We also recognise the efforts being made and in particular, I would like to highlight:

1. **2019-20 accounts closedown**. I would like to thank the efforts of all schools in ensuring the accounts closedown process is remaining on target in what are extremely challenging circumstances. We expect all outstanding accruals and general corrections to be included on the month 13 reports which will be emailed to schools on 23 April.
2. **Submission of School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)**. Again, I would like to thank schools where they have managed to complete the SFVS including governor sign off by 31 March. If any schools have yet to complete the return and have not been in contact to agree a revised date, please contact education.finance@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
3. **2020-21 budget plan submission**. The template for schools to make their submission will be emailed to schools in the week commencing 20 April. The deadline for returning budget plans is 31 May and we will consider whether this needs to be extended nearer to the deadline. As a reminder, original budget approval requires full governing board approval and cannot be delegated to chairs’ actions. Advice on virtual governance has been shared by Governor Services.
4. **Financial support to suppliers**. A number of guidance documents have been provided to help schools consider the best approach to supporting their suppliers (see emails dated 2nd and 9th April). This can be a complex area where schools will need to work with individual suppliers to reach an agreement.
5. **Month 1 Imprest returns**. Recognising that many schools will be spending less than normal through their imprest accounts at the moment, we will not require an April imprest return. However, please be aware that there is higher risk than normal from fraudsters at the moment and is it remains necessary to reconcile your bank account to ensure any unexpected entries are promptly identified. A full reconciliation will be required for May.

Where spend will remain relatively high, or the imprest account is close to fully spending the notional maximum limit, a return should still be made. If you prefer to make a return anyway, that is perfectly acceptable.

If you do not intend to make an April imprest return, please email education.finance@bracknell-forest.gov.uk “Nil April imprest return” in the email title. No other message is required.

1. **Are there any areas of flexibility that would help schools?** If there are any changes to finance related activities or processes that would help you please contact education.finance@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
2. **Governor decision making.** A number of the above matters require some form of governor sign-off. Latest advice from the National Governance Association guidance is: “It is best for all decisions to be taken collectively by the governing board. This should be possible if appropriate plans are put in place for the board to hold virtual meetings.  There may be circumstances where an urgent decision needs to be taken but it is not possible to convene a meeting of the governing board or hold a quorate meeting.   In cases of urgency where a delay would be likely to be seriously detrimental to the interests of the school, maintained school governance procedures regulations set out the provision for the delegation of functions to the chair or vice chair (if the chair is unable to act).  Chair actions should then be reported to the governing board.  For academies it will depend on your scheme of delegation.”

Best wishes

Paul