



Children's Commissioner for Jersey Promoting and Protecting Children's Rights

Office of the Children's Commissioner

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Sam Mézec
Minister for Children and Housing

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Dear Minister

The current outbreak of COVID-19 is providing very real challenges for the Island's children and young people, as well as for their families and caregivers. I would like to seek reassurance from Government that these challenges are being identified in a timely manner. My Office have not been included in any emergency planning meetings and are therefore no more the wiser than other citizens as to the safeguards that are in place to protect children during these difficult times.

Whilst I do not want to distract Government or yourself from the concerted efforts to protect islanders from the outbreak, I would like to seek reassurance from you as the Children's Minister that the rights of our children and young people are being upheld in a number of currently vulnerable areas.

Jersey's community is admirably strong and new practical measures and workarounds are being put in place every day. This is fantastic and heartening to see. However, it is also important that we continue to set out areas of concern and vulnerability in black and white. These are the particular concerns that I would like to share with you:

- Young Islanders pursuing their education in the UK and further afield may not be able to return or, in some cases, have contact with their families. The same thing applies to those children and young people who have been placed in care in the UK and who may not be able to see their families or siblings.
- Children and young people on child protection, children in need or with early help plans are also especially vulnerable at this time, when there is an increasingly real prospect of prolonged school closures. For these children, attending school and

youth centres may well be an important part of their care planning, as well as a necessary element of structure in their lives.

- An increasing number of families in Jersey are struggling to manage financially. There is particular concern around cases in which parents and carers on zero-hour contracts are being laid off, with no access to public funds because of residential qualifications.
- Children and young people have the right to an education. We must make certain that their rights are not being compromised, nor their futures jeopardised, if they are not able to attend public examinations or if they miss the critical few weeks of preparation before exams.
- What are the arrangements for children attending our special school should the school struggle to stay open.
- The right to good-quality healthcare is obviously key at this particular time. I would be concerned that those who cannot afford to pay to see a doctor may be afraid to identify with symptoms of COVID-19. Many of those families are not currently registered with a GP and will therefore not automatically be receiving extra support and information from local surgeries.
- Under the current law, children under the age of 12 are protected from unregistered childcare. Any relaxation of this legislation in order to tackle the inevitable practical difficulties that will arise during this difficult time must not compromise children's safety and protection.
- Food poverty is, for some families in this Island, a real and frightening issue. I will be seeking reassurance that families relying on foodbanks will be able to access food as voluntary groups begin to stop providing services.

It would be helpful to know what processes are in place to monitor and intervene to ensure that our children continue to receive care, support and protection.

Yours sincerely



Deborah McMillan
Commissioner for Children and Young People