



Dear Parents / Carers,

26.3.20

Re: WEEK 2 - Emergency Support for Children of Key Workers in Primary School

WE ARE NOW IN A LOCKDOWN SITUATION

On Thursday 19th March, the Minister made a further statement outlining that schools will open with skeleton staff from Monday 23rd March to support identified Key Workers.

Schools have received very little guidance, training, support or resources and are now being expected to provide care for children as the virus spreads. We have no access to, nor have we been provided with protective clothing or medical advice. Up until this point we have been happy to plan and work to help children, but now feel vulnerable and have grave concerns about the safety of staff and their families, pupils and the wider school community. We want you to consider the message in this letter seriously before making a decision to apply for a place.

The most recent update clearly states *“the most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 is clear. If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. That is why the Executive has asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.”*

Schools will be open for vulnerable children and those who fall into the category of key worker with one or two parents carrying out a key worker role. However, we appeal to you to be creative about childcare solutions and only use school as the Minister directed as a LAST RESORT. You must look at the criteria set for vulnerable families and key workers via the link in this letter. Please remember that you should consider if your job is a critical frontline role.

Before contacting school, pay particular attention to the following points. Schools will not be able to operate a ‘normal’ school day and will be offering limited day-care provision for ONLY. Many of our schools are already operating with a significant reduction in staffing and this will probably continue to get worse over time.

Points to consider:

- Alternative childcare arrangements should be sought before deciding to send your child to school. For example, with other family members, friends etc. Please try and use schools as a last resort. This is to try and limit the number of children and adults together in a small space in line with recent social distancing guidance.
- Children in families identified as having a medical condition should NOT attend. You must also consider if a child in your family is in a medically vulnerable group you should not send siblings because of the risk of carrying the virus.
- You must be in an emergency situation where no family members, eg husband, wife, partner, older children, extended family members, friends cannot support.
- If you work part time you must only use the service for the hours you need.



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- If you are able to work from home to accommodate this situation, please do so.
- If you are able to take your children to work with you, you should do so to reduce the number of children on site.
- Check the list for vulnerable groups on the website – for example registered with Social Services.

We have been asked to communicate to parents that any decision to send a child to school must be based on trust and we appeal to parents not to abuse the service to further promote the spread of the virus and put staff and other children at risk.

If you believe you fall into the category where **a parent** meet **the criteria**, please complete the survey monkey which will be sent out via text. Once the information is received and a decision made **only children with an offer of a place should attend school**. Please ensure you respond by 4 pm on Friday. Following this, a telephone conversation will take place to identify and clarify any issues around need and places will be allocated by the telephone number you provide on Saturday afternoon.

The criteria set by the Department of Education and can be found here:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/general-guidance-covid-19-schools>

We cannot guarantee that your child will not contract the virus whilst at school. We are not medically trained and apart from basic first aid are not equipped to deal with any medical emergencies. Medically vulnerable children should not attend, nor should children attend if they have someone in their home who is medically vulnerable. More information via GOV.UK at <https://bit.ly/2Uiy3Q>

It could potentially be impossible to accept the number of families who may apply for provision, given the extensive nature of the Minister's keyworker list. If it is agreed that your child is attending, you must observe the following:

- Children attending will be required to wear their school uniform. Please be advised that schools will be performing childcare duties, rather than teaching, as not all teachers are currently available to teach specific year groups and teachers must also be available to provide online / remote learning.
- Children in year 1-3 will attend 9am-2pm and Y4-7 – 9am – 3pm.
- Bring a lunch and snacks with them as we have yet to secure lunch provision – we will inform when this changes.
- Children must bring their home learning packs with them.
- Children will be following social distancing advice and will sit at least one metre away from others. They will have outside time, but not playing in close proximity to each other.

We would ask that you pay attention to the points outlined above before deciding to send your child to school. Obviously, it goes without saying, if your only option is to send your child to school, we will look after them in order to support you in your important role.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Watson
Principal

LIST OF DEFINITION OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND KEY WORKERS COPIED FROM WEB LINK IN THIS LETTER

VULNERABLE

For the purpose of this guidance, the term vulnerable encompasses those children who are in need of protection, or in need, as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995. Children and young people in need may include those:

- Receiving support from Health & Social Services including family support, child protection and looked after children services
- On the Child Protection Register
- With statements of special education needs
- Accessing EOTAS
- Accessing Education Nurture Units
- With emerging and diagnosed mental health needs
- Who are homeless
- Who are young carers
- Subject to paramilitary threat
- Whose parents have mental health problems
- Whose parents have alcohol and drug addictions
- Affected by domestic violence

Schools and EOTAS Centres should continue to work in partnership with parents and/or legal guardians to ensure that the best interests of children take precedence.

We know that schools will also want to support other children facing social difficulties and we will support head teachers to do so.

Parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined below. Many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.

Please, therefore, follow these key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.
3. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.
4. Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.
5. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

KEY WORKER CATEGORIES

Key workers are those who are maintaining essential public services during the Covid-19 response. The definition of key worker will be flexible and dependant on the circumstance and requirements over the course of this critical period. There will be flexibility shown on the definition of key workers to ensure all those who need support receive it. The list is not prescriptive.

However, to give some guidance the following outlines the broad categories of what would be defined as a key worker;

- Health and Social Care. This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, home carers and staff required to maintain our health and social care sector
- Education and childcare. This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who will remain active during the Covid-19 response
- Public safety and national security. This includes civilians and officers in the police (including key contractors), Fire and Rescue Service, prison service and other national security roles
- Transport. This will include those keeping air, water, road and rail transport modes operating during the Covid-19 response
- Utilities and Communication. This includes staff needed for oil, gas, electricity and water (including sewage) and primary industry supplies, to continue during the Covid-19 response, as well as key staff in telecommunications, post and delivery, services and waste disposal
- Food and other necessary goods. This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution and sale, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (e.g. hygiene, medical etc.)
- Other workers essential to delivering key public services
- Key national and local government including those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the Covid-19 response