



**Dear Colleagues,**

To keep you all up-to-date with the latest information on Coronavirus (COVID-19), and help protect you and others, we will be issuing regular updates.

We have also created a landing page on the Portal where all communications and updates from the Local Authority and central government relating to COVID-19 will be organised, and all schools are access this area - the link is:

<http://www.hes.org.uk/Page/16925>.

### **Key Workers**

You will be aware that the Government has published further [guidance](#) on maintaining educational provision.

**To remind you, the Government has asked parents to keep their children at home from Monday, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.**

Schools are therefore being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children and those with [education, health and care \(EHC\) plans](#).

Schools will also want to support other children facing social difficulties, and the DfE 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 in the guidance. 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.**

These key principles should be followed:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support, 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.

The guidance states that if workers think they fall within the critical categories above they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.

The guidance isn't specific as to whether both parents (in a two parent household) need to be Key Workers, and the DfE have confirmed they will not be that specific, as the guidance says that children should remain at home, but if they can't then they get education provision;

*If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed, and you cannot keep your child safe at home then your children will be prioritised for education provision.*

In order to maintain regular communication, the Local Authority will be engaging directly with all schools and early years providers on a daily basis to monitor the situation. Earlier this week we introduced a 'cluster' based communication system for primary schools, and we are adopting this model for early years providers, secondary schools, special schools and alternative provisions.

Key points of contact have been identified and they will shortly be emailing you with further information;

- Early Years – Celia Freeth and her team
- Primary – Grahame Smith and his team
- Secondary – Susan Sutton
- Special – Caroline Penfold
- Alternative Provision – Darren Purdie

**The Government has also published [guidance](#) for parents and carers about the closure of schools and other educational settings following the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19).** It is recommended that this is shared with your families, and it will be updated as further information is available.

## **Early Years Provision**

There has been some confusion in the sector following the Government announcement earlier in the week that schools would be closing from today.



However, the Government [guidance](#) for parents and carers makes it clear that the Government are asking schools, colleges, nurseries, childminders and other registered childcare settings to remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children where they can.

The DfE understand that some may be unable to do so especially if they are experiencing severe staff shortages, and the DfE will work with the Local Authority to use neighbouring schools, colleges and childcare providers to continue to support vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

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

You will also see that 'nursery' staff are included in the Key Worker list.

### **School Meals**

At this time, we are still awaiting further guidance voucher scheme announced by the government. As soon as we receive further guidance, we will forward this.

For schools that contract with HES to deliver their catering service, HES plans to offer a revised menu of 1 meat/fish and 1 vegetarian dish from the current menu to vulnerable and keyworker children, as well as any staff members. The provision for eligible FSM meals will be a packed lunch that they can collect and take home to consume.

### **School staffing and pay**

Although schools will be closed from Monday 23 March 2020 until further notice, except for children of key workers and vulnerable children, this is not a school closure period and therefore "mutuality of obligation" continues to apply. That is the school is obliged to continue to provide work and pay for it, and the employee is obliged to personally do the work.

Where a school is not able to continue to provide work, the employee is still entitled to receive pay as normal and in return will be required to work as and when the school requires.

Any work that is given needs to be commensurate with the skills, knowledge and experience of the employee.



The school retains the same responsibilities towards employees who work from home as when they are in school.

The school should establish with the employee that they are able to work from home both safely and effectively before performing their duties. Further guidance will be provided regarding working during the upcoming Easter break.

### **Further Guidance**

Please ensure that you are regularly checking the national guidance.

Guidance on 'Self-Isolation' for people with confirmed or possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>.

Please go to [NHS.UK/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus) for information about the virus and how to protect yourself, and the latest information and advice about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is also available on the [government website](https://www.gov.uk/government).

Information for educational settings is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>. However, we expect this advice to change in the coming days due to the change to the Delay phase of the response in the UK. Should new information for schools be published, this will be cascaded to all establishments.

The Department for Education has a helpline to answer questions about COVID-19 related to education. Staff, parents and young people can contact the helpline as follows:

Phone: 0800 046 8687

Email: [DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk](mailto:DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk)