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Guidance

Critical workers who can access schools or educational settings

Updated 14 May 2020

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This guidance is applicable to 31 May 2020 and will be reviewed before 1 June 2020.

Since 23 March, in line with the scientific advice, nurseries, schools and colleges have remained open only to a priority group of children and young people, children who have a parent who is a critical worker and vulnerable children.

Now that we have made progress in reducing the transmission of coronavirus **we are encouraging all eligible children to attend settings (where there are no shielding concerns for the child or their household), even if parents are able to keep their children at home.**

From the week commencing 1 June at the earliest, we will also be asking primary schools to welcome back children in nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6, alongside priority groups. We will ask secondary schools, sixth-form colleges and further education colleges to offer some face-to-face support for year 10 and year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year, alongside priority groups. We are also asking nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, to begin welcoming back all children from 1 June. Alternative provision settings should mirror the approach being taken for mainstream schools and also offer some face-to-face support for years 10 and 11 students (as they have no year 12). We are asking special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools to follow an equivalent phased return without a focus on specific year groups.

Children of critical workers, and vulnerable children who are already eligible, will continue to be offered a place, regardless of the year group they are in.

The definition of critical workers remains unchanged.

Our ambition is to bring all primary year groups back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if feasible, though this will be kept under review. Schools will only welcome back additional year groups if the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates it is appropriate to have larger numbers of children within schools. The safety of children and staff is our utmost priority.

Any setting that cannot achieve these increases at any point because:

- there are not enough classrooms or spaces available in the setting
- they do not have enough available teachers or staff to supervise the groups

have flexibility but must first focus on continuing to provide places for priority groups (vulnerable children and the children of critical workers).

Vulnerable children and young people

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, for the purposes of continued attendance at educational settings, vulnerable children and young people are defined as those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child

- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and it is determined, following risk assessment, that their needs can be as safely or more safely met in the educational environment
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who are therefore in need of continued education provision - this might include children on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services, adopted children, those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training'), those who are young carers and others at the provider and local authority's discretion

Critical workers

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 look after their child at home, but attendance is strongly encouraged.

Please, therefore, also follow these key principles:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Parents must do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially outside of school. They must observe the same social distancing principles as adults, as far as possible.
4. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed below, then your children will be prioritised for education provision and are strongly encouraged to attend.

Health and social care

This includes, but is not limited to, doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

Education and childcare

This includes:

- childcare
- support and teaching staff
- social workers
- specialist education professionals who must remain active during the COVID-19 response to deliver this approach

Key public services

This includes:

- those essential to the running of the justice system
- religious staff
- charities and workers delivering key frontline services
- those responsible for the management of the deceased
- journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting

Local and national government

This only includes:

- those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response
- or delivering essential public services, such as the payment of benefits, including in government agencies and arms length bodies

Food and other necessary goods

This includes those involved in food:

- production
- processing
- distribution
- sale and delivery
- as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines)

Public safety and national security

This includes:

- police and support staff
- Ministry of Defence civilians
- contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 outbreak)
- fire and rescue service employees (including support staff)
- National Crime Agency staff
- those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas

Transport

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

Utilities, communication and financial services

This includes:

- staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure)
- the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)
- information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response
- key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services)
- postal services and delivery
- payments providers
- waste disposal sectors

If your school is closed, then please contact your local authority (<https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>), who will seek to redirect you to a local school in your area that your child, or children, can attend.

We are grateful for the work of teachers and workers in educational settings for continuing to provide for the children of the other critical workers of our country. It is an essential part of our national effort to combat this disease.