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Guidance

Closure of educational settings: information for parents and carers

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Information for parents and carers about the closure of schools and other educational settings following the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19). This will be updated as we have further information available.

1. Closures of schools, childcare and other educational settings

1.1 What age groups does this cover?

The changes cover children at registered childcare providers (including nurseries and childminders), primary and secondary schools and further education colleges. This is for both state-funded and independent schools.

1.2 Will it be mandatory for all schools, colleges and registered childcare providers to remain open in some form?

We 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.

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

1.3 How long will schools and colleges be closed for?

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, schools, colleges and childcare providers will be closed to the majority of pupils until further notice.

1.4 Will this apply to independent schools and boarding schools?

Yes. We are asking independent schools and boarding schools to do the same as state schools and remain open for critical workers and vulnerable children.

1.5 Will registered childcare providers, schools and colleges be open over Easter holidays for holiday clubs and childcare?

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

1.6 I am a critical worker or have a vulnerable child - can you guarantee that my child will attend their usual school or childcare provider?

We are expecting the majority of settings to stay open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children so they can continue to attend their usual provider, but we acknowledge this will be impossible for some - such as small rural schools.

Where a setting is unable to stay open, we will work with the local educational authority, regional school commissioners and neighbouring providers to find an alternative setting for their pupils.

1.7 I am a critical worker or have a vulnerable child - how will my child get to school if the only school open is not nearby?

We are working closely with local authorities to ensure that children can attend the best setting for them, and will provide transport arrangements to support them.

1.8 I am a critical worker or have a vulnerable child but I don't want to send my child in to school or childcare, do I have to?

Many parents working in these critical sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.

This is an offer to parents and carers and there is no requirement for parents and carers to send their children to school if they do not need or wish to do so.

For vulnerable children, your child's social worker will work with you to assess the best option for your child.

1.9 Does this affect universities and other higher education institutions?

Universities and other higher education providers should make their own judgements based on latest Public Health England guidance. Vice chancellors are well placed to make decisions about their own institution, and many have already moved all their teaching online. The government is supporting them with these decisions.

Advice continues to be that all student accommodation should remain open unless advised otherwise by Public Health England. Many universities provide homes to international students, estranged students and care leavers who might not have anywhere else to go.

The Department is working with the Home Office to avoid individuals and institutions being penalised if online provision inadvertently leads to non-compliance with Tier 4 visa rules (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-immigration-guidance-if-youre-unable-to-return-to-china-from-the-uk#licensed-tier-2-tier-4-or-tier-5-sponsors-absences-due-to-coronavirus).

1.10 Does this apply to special schools?

We recognise that children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and their parents and carers are facing numerous challenges as a result of coronavirus. We are encouraging local authorities to keep open both residential special schools and residential specialist colleges wherever possible. In addition, we want to keep the majority of day special schools and colleges open, including moving staff into these settings to avoid closure.

Special schools, colleges and local authorities are advised to make case by case basis assessments of the health and safeguarding considerations of pupils and students on an education, health and care (EHC) plan. For some, they will be safer in an education provision. For others, they will be safer at home. We trust leaders and parents to make these decisions and will support them as required.

1.11 Why is my nursery telling me that they will continue to charge me during corona virus-related closures?

The government acknowledges that in many cases, the insurance that early years providers have will not cover them for income lost during COVID-19-related closures.

That is one of the reasons why it announced on 17 March that government would not claw back early years entitlements funding from local authorities during closures, or where children are withdrawn because of COVID-19. This protects a significant proportion of early years providers' income.

In addition, the government has set out a range of support for businesses to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on them. This includes a business rate holiday for all private childcare providers for one year from 1 April. Local authorities will be fully compensated for the cost of this.

In light of these steps taken already, we are asking providers to be reasonable and balanced in their dealings with parents. The government is urgently keeping what further support businesses may require under close review.

2. Exams

2.1 What will happen to exams?

Primary assessments, including SATs, and exams including GCSEs, AS levels and A levels will not go ahead this summer.

We are working with the sector and Ofqual to ensure young people get the qualifications they need. Further details will be provided shortly.

3. Vulnerable children

3.1 Is my child counted as vulnerable?

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Children who have a social worker include children in need, children who have a child protection plan and those who are looked after by the local authority. We will work with schools, early years, FE providers and local authorities to help identify the children who most need support at this time.

We know that schools will also want to look to support other children who are vulnerable where they are able to do so.

3.2 What will happen with free school meals for those not in school and colleges?

We know that free school meals are important for many families.

To make sure eligible children can continue to be supported, we will give schools and colleges the flexibility to provide meals or vouchers to children eligible for free school meals. They will be reimbursed by the Department. As soon as possible, we will put in place a national voucher system.

More information on support for pupils eligible for school meals (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-set-out-to-support-pupils-eligible-for-free-school-meals) is available.

4. Critical workers

4.1 Will I be counted as a critical worker?

Critical workers include NHS staff, police, farmers and food retail workers, who need to be able to go out to work.

In order to continue to offer critical services as part of the country's ongoing response to the virus, children of workers who form a central part of effort - such as NHS workers, police and delivery drivers - will also continue to attend school, college or childcare provider.

A full list of critical workers and further information (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision) is available.

4.2 If only one parent or carer is a critical worker, can I send my children in to school?

Children with at least one parent or carer who are identified as critical workers by the government can send their children to school if required.

5. Resources and support

What support will be available to parents to help them educate their children at home?

More information will follow about what DfE is doing to support parents. We are working with the BBC and others to provide resources for children to access while at home. For parents with children under five years old see hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk (https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/)

5.1 There is too much pressure on broadband connections in my area - how can my child do online learning?

The government is having regular calls with the major fixed and mobile operators, and with Ofcom, to monitor the situation and ensure that any problems on the networks are rapidly addressed and rectified.

We fully understand the importance of having reliable internet connectivity at this time, so that people can work from home wherever possible and access critical public services online, including health information.