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Guidance

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for schools about temporarily closing

Updated 7 April 2020

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We have asked parents to keep their children at home wherever possible, and for schools to remain open only for children who are vulnerable and for those children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response who absolutely need to attend.

It is important to underline that schools, all childcare settings (including early years settings, childminders and providers of childcare for school-age children), colleges and other educational establishments, remain safe places for children. But the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, will protect the NHS and save lives by reducing the risks of spreading the virus.

Schools, and all childcare providers, 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.

While as many schools as possible should try to stay open for eligible pupils, this will not be possible for all settings, and the local authority should coordinate pooling of resources so pupils are able to access provision elsewhere.

The following guidance should be read alongside:

- guidance on implementing social distancing in education and childcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>)
- guidance on critical workers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>)
- guidance on vulnerable children and young people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>)

## Vital role of schools

Those who work in and with our schools rightly take their place next to our NHS staff, and other critical workers, as central to our efforts in battling this virus.

School leaders around the country are taking the lead in supporting families through this difficult time, and we are keenly aware that the extraordinary measures that have been taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 present an unprecedented challenge for schools, trusts, and local authorities, as well as the communities they serve.

We appreciate the selfless dedication that school, trust, and local authority staff demonstrate in their work every single day. During this difficult time, we are asking you to go further still so that we can collectively address the challenges we face. You are vital to the country's response to this crisis, and we offer our full support and gratitude during this difficult time. As this crisis progresses, we will aim to provide you with as much certainty and flexibility as possible, and will do all we can to support the vital service you are providing.

We expect schools and local authorities should work together to ensure that different settings are supported to stay open wherever possible, taking into account their circumstances and cohort (for example, special settings and alternative provision). And, we want local authorities to help coordinate what this means, working with education settings to deliver the services required. That includes academies, the independent sector, and boarding schools.

Throughout the rest of this document, by 'school' we mean those that are either maintained by the local authority or are run by a single or multi academy trust.

## Responsibilities

### What are schools responsible for?

Schools are responsible for providing places to vulnerable children, and children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response, while schools are closed due to the outbreak. It may be that not all schools can remain open. Schools should work with local authorities to agree the provision needed locally to support the needs identified.

### What are local authorities responsible for?

Local authorities are responsible for co-ordinating a response to the new arrangements. Working with education settings (including academies and the independent sector), they should use the critical worker list, and the definition of vulnerable children, to support schools and trusts to ensure that there is sufficiency of places for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

Local authorities are also responsible for monitoring demand and capacity. This may involve working with schools to provide places in alternative settings if necessary, and supporting residential special schools, alternative provision, and other special settings to remain open, wherever possible.

They are also responsible for supporting trusts and schools to assess the risks for children and young people whose education, health and care (EHC) plans they maintain, and ensuring those children are safely cared for whether at school/college or at home.

### Are schools expected to share resources?

If some schools are experiencing high demand for places, or severe staff shortages, local authorities will coordinate support from other schools in the area. Schools are expected to be flexible and work together where required.

### Can provision be shared across local authority areas?

If a school is unable to open, local authorities should try to co-ordinate provision for pupils in other schools in their area. If this is not possible, local authorities should consider working with neighboring local authorities, while keeping in mind the impact on children. Regional school commissioners (RSCs) can support conversations between local authorities where necessary.

Some multi-academy trusts operate across different local authorities, and can assist in making arrangements between their schools if appropriate.

## Prioritising pupils

### Why do we have to prioritise children?

The first aim of the partial school closure measures, set out by the Secretary of State for Education, is to reduce the overall population of children moving around local areas as far as possible, in order to further reduce the number of social interactions, and thus flatten the upward curve of the COVID-19 outbreak.

However, the second aim is to continue to care for children who are vulnerable, or whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response, so that they can continue to work where alternative childcare arrangements cannot be made.

### How are critical workers defined?

## Children with a parent or carer who is listed as a critical worker

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>) should be considered for a school place, so long as their job cannot be done from home.

Many parents working in these sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

We will monitor closely the experience of schools in identifying critical workers and their capacity to respond to the needs of critical workers. Government is working with representatives of school leaders to ensure they have the clarity they need in identifying critical workers. We will publish updates to guidance should it prove necessary to provide further points of clarification over the identification of critical workers.

We can confirm that:

- researchers are included if their work is critical to the COVID-19 response
- pharmacists are included in the list of health and social care staff that are essential to the COVID-19 response
- staff who work for the embassies of other countries, and who are essential to the COVID-19 response, are included in the definition of local and national government
- parliamentarians and essential parliamentary staff are also included in this list

## How are vulnerable children defined?

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker, and those children and young people up to the age of 25 with education, health and care ([EHC](#)) plans.

Those who have a social worker include children who have a child protection plan, and those who are looked after by the local authority. A child may also be deemed to be vulnerable if they have been assessed as being in need, or otherwise meet the definition in section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Read the guidance on how schools should continue to support vulnerable children

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>).

Those with an [EHC](#) plan should be risk-assessed by their school/college in consultation with the local authority and parents, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a school/college place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. This could include, if necessary, carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services. Many children and young people with [EHC](#) plans can safely remain at home.

We know that schools may also want to support other children who are vulnerable where they are able to do so. Eligibility for free school meals in and of itself should not be the determining factor in assessing vulnerability.

We will work with schools, colleges and local authorities to help identify the children who most need support at this time. Looking after these children will enable schools to support the country during challenging times.

## Is it compulsory for critical workers to accept their place offer?

No.

Many parents working in these critical sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

When making alternative arrangements, parents should not rely upon those outside their household for childcare.

### **Is it compulsory for parents of vulnerable children to accept their place offer?**

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend provision, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk. In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an education setting, and their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker and education provider should explore the reasons for this directly with the parent.

Further details on the process schools should follow, if vulnerable children who have a social worker do not attend, are outlined in the section on 'Attendance' below.

Where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting the virus, the education provider should talk through these anxieties with the parent following the guidance for educational settings about COVID-19 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>) set out by Public Health England.

Educational settings may also want to consider how to encourage children and young people to attend. Social workers will remain in contact with vulnerable children and families, including remotely if needed.

Those with an EHC plan should be risk-assessed by their school in consultation with the local authority and parents, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a school/college place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. This could include, if necessary, carers, therapists or clinicians visiting the home to provide any essential services. Many children and young people with EHC plans can safely remain at home.

### **How do we identify pupils who are the children of critical workers?**

Schools should speak to parents/carers to identify who requires a school place.

If it proves necessary, schools can ask for simple evidence that the parent in question is a critical worker, such as their work ID badge or pay slip.

### **Should schools only offer places to children of single-parent critical workers and children where both their parents are critical workers?**

Children with at least one parent/carer who is critical to the COVID-19 response can go to school if required.

However, many families with parents working in critical sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

### **Can support and teaching staff send their children to school?**

Teachers and school staff are critical to the COVID-19 response, so can send their children to school. In the same way as for other critical workers – many such families should be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

### **Can schools, trusts and local authorities take a flexible approach to the vulnerable children definition depending on their local circumstances?**

We know that schools and trusts will have some knowledge of children they consider vulnerable, who have not yet been formally recognised as such, for example, children who have been referred to children's social care but not yet appointed a social worker. It is reasonable for schools and local authorities to take a judgement on including those pupils, although they should take care to balance this with overall numbers of pupils going to school in their local area.

Eligibility for free school meals should not, in and of itself, be a determining factor in assessing vulnerability.

### **Do children in foster care come under the definition of vulnerable children?**

Yes, all children who are looked after by the local authority are eligible. For all looked after children, local authorities will be well placed to identify them and ensure that foster carers know that they will be eligible for a temporary school place and how to access support.

## **Funding**

### **Will schools receive funding support?**

Schools will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year, as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure. That will ensure that they are able to continue to pay their staff, and meet their other regular financial commitments, as we move through these extraordinary times.

We know that schools may face additional costs as a result of COVID-19 and have published guidance setting out the process for schools needing to claim for these exceptional costs

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-schools>).

## **Attendance**

### **Do schools need to take an attendance register?**

During this period, schools do not need to take an attendance register. For administrative purposes Code # (planned whole or partial closure) should be used.

However, we will be asking schools to submit a short daily return

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings>), reporting whether they are open, and how many children and staff are in school. This will allow for a record of attendance for safeguarding purposes, and allow schools to provide accurate, up to date data to the government. This will also help [DfE](#) to track capacity in the system, enabling the department to feed into wider tracking of the impact of the virus to support scientific advice.

### **Will critical workers or parents of vulnerable children be penalised if they do not send their child to school?**

Children with a parent or carer listed as a critical worker ([https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision%22%20/t%20%22\\_blank](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision%22%20/t%20%22_blank)) are eligible for a school place. However, many parents working in these sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

For vulnerable children who do not attend, or who discontinue, particularly where there are child protection concerns, the education provider should follow the process below, including through notification of the child's social worker.

Parents will not be penalised if their child does not attend school.

## **What should schools do if vulnerable children do not attend school?**

There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend an education setting, so long as they do not have underlying health conditions that put them at severe risk. In circumstances where a parent does not want to bring their child to an education setting, and their child is considered vulnerable, the social worker and education setting should explore the reasons for this directly with the parent.

Where parents are concerned about the risk of the child contracting the virus, the school or social worker should talk through these anxieties with the parent following the advice set out by Public Health England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>).

Providers may also want to consider how to encourage children and young people to attend an education setting. Social workers will remain in contact with vulnerable children and families, including remotely if needed.

Local authorities and education settings do not need to complete their usual day-to-day attendance processes to follow up on non-attendance. Schools/education providers and social workers should be agreeing with families whether children in need should be attending education provision – and the education provider should then follow up on any pupil that they were expecting to attend, who does not.

Education settings should also follow up with any parent or carer who has arranged care for their child(ren) and the child(ren) subsequently do not attend. To support the above, education settings should take the opportunity when communicating with parents and carers to confirm emergency contact numbers are correct, and to ask for any additional emergency contact numbers where they are available.

In all circumstances where a vulnerable child does not take up their place at school, or discontinues, the education setting should notify their social worker.

## **Working with parents**

### **How should schools identify which pupils are the children of critical workers?**

Schools should speak to parents/carers to identify who requires a school place.

If required, we recommend asking for simple evidence that the parent in question is a critical worker, such as confirmation from their employer on what their job is and how it is critical to the COVID-19 response.

If any problems occur, schools should speak to their local authority.

### **What if my school is closed, but parents bring their children in?**

Once schools have assessed their demand and capacity, any schools that are unable to stay open should liaise with their local authority, and communicate with parents regarding whether their child needs to attend an alternative setting.

### **What are the expectations on schools regarding staying in touch with parents whose child is at home?**

We recognise that many schools have already shared resources for children who are at home and are grateful for this.

DfE is working with the BBC, and other partners, to provide advice and support directly to parents, including online resources they can access for their children at home. Schools should work with local authorities to monitor the welfare of vulnerable children who are not attending school, and other pupils they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes.



## Safeguarding

### Should my school still have a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)?

The optimal scenario for any school providing care for children is to have a trained [DSL](#) or deputy available on site. Where this is not possible schools should either arrange for a trained [DSL](#) or deputy from the school to be available to be contacted via phone or online video (for example working from home) or share trained DSLs or deputies with other schools. Further advice on [DSL](#) arrangements is in the Department's recently published Interim Safeguarding Guidance. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>)

### Does my school still have to follow Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)?

Yes. [KCSIE](#) is statutory safeguarding guidance that schools should continue to have regard to. Advice to support schools do this is available in the Department's recently published Interim Safeguarding Guidance. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>)

### How does my school support parents and carers keep their children safe online?

In their regular communications with parents and carers, schools should emphasise the importance of parents and carers securing any online support for their children from a reputable organisation/individual who can provide evidence that they are safe and can be trusted to have access to children.

Read the Department's guidance for safeguarding in schools. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>)

## Workforce

### Who can work in schools in light of recent social distancing measures?

We have published separate guidance on implementing social distancing measures in education and childcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>).

### Should school staff with an underlying health condition stay at home?

Our guidance on implementing social distancing measures in education and childcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>) sets out that staff with conditions that mean they are at increased risk of serious illness as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), such as those who are pregnant, should work from home where possible, and education and childcare settings should endeavour to support this.

### Should staff with serious underlying health conditions, which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), stay at home and take shielding measures?

We are strongly advising people, including education staff, with serious underlying health conditions which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), such as solid organ transplant recipients, and people with specific cancers, to rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. Staff in this position must not attend work. More advice on this can be found in the guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

## **Should staff who live with someone with a serious underlying health condition, who is taking shielding measures, stay at home?**

If a member of staff lives with someone in a vulnerable health group, including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting. The number of social interactions in the education or childcare environment will be reduced, due to there being fewer children attending, and social distancing and good hand hygiene being practised.

If a member of staff lives in a household with someone who is in the most vulnerable health groups, as set out in the guidance on shielding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>), they should only attend work if stringent social distancing can be adhered to. Settings should allow staff who live with someone in the most vulnerable health groups to work from home where possible.

## **Staffing levels and deployment**

### **How many teachers and other school staff will be needed to keep schools open?**

This will vary on a school by school basis, based on the number of pupils each school is supporting and their individual needs. Schools should make an assessment of the capacity required and, when in doubt, discuss this with their local authority or trust when making decisions.

### **Should schools be using temporary workers?**

If schools think they may struggle to meet demand for places, they should liaise with their local authority or trust over their arrangements.

Schools may use temporary workers if alternative arrangements cannot be made. We trust headteachers to use their discretion and judgement in this regard and are grateful to all teachers for their support.

### **Will teachers and other school staff be asked to work in alternative settings?**

Staff may be asked by their employer to work in different locations to help maintain the required provision during this challenging period. We ask all those working in schools to be flexible when considering whether to make or agree to such requests. Whether an individual can be required to work in an alternative setting will depend on their individual contract of employment.

Once schools have assessed their demand and capacity, any schools experiencing problems should liaise with their local authority or trust to establish whether there is a need to move any pupils, teachers or other school staff to an alternative setting.

Schools and local authorities should have regard to guidance on social distancing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>) when making these arrangements.

Any schools that are unable to stay open should liaise with their local authority or trust about teachers providing support elsewhere.

Teachers and other school staff should continue to be paid by their employer as normal, regardless of where they are working.

### **Do teachers and other school staff require new DBS checks to work in an alternative setting?**

Where members of the school workforce are already engaging in regulated activity, and already have the appropriate DBS check, there is no expectation that a new DBS check should be obtained for them to temporarily move to another setting to support the care of children.

The type of setting on the DBS check for example, a specific category of school, is not a barrier. The receiving setting should risk assess as they would for a volunteer. See paragraphs 167 to 172 of keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>).

Whilst the onus remains on schools to satisfy themselves that someone in their setting has had the required checks including, as required, those set out in part 3 of KCSIE, in the above scenario this can be achieved, if the receiving setting chooses to, via seeking assurance from the current employer rather than requiring new checks.

### **Will there be enough support staff to provide support for pupils with education, health, and care plans (EHCPs)?**

Local authorities are responsible for provision for pupils with EHCPs. Schools will need to consider the support required for individual pupils with an EHCP on a case-by-case basis, and liaise as appropriate with their local authority to ensure adequate support is available.

We trust headteachers to use their discretion and judgement around the deployment of support staff, in line with guidance on vulnerable children and young people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>).

### **What are the expectations on school staff working from home?**

We would expect school staff to continue to support the education of pupils, and wider work of the school, in appropriate ways agreed with their school leadership team, but school leaders should be mindful of staff wellbeing and practical circumstances when designing these arrangements.

### **Can schools use volunteers to support the care and supervision of children?**

DBS-checked volunteers may be used to support the work of the school, as would usually be the case. It is important that they are properly supported and given appropriate roles.

## **Holidays**

### **Are schools opening over the Easter holidays?**

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. Schools should decide, in consultation with the parents of children who are currently attending school, whether it is necessary for this to include bank holidays.

### **What happens if your setting is having difficulty opening over Easter?**

Contact your local authority (or multi-academy trust, if relevant) if your setting needs support in making these arrangements.

### **When will teachers and other school staff take holiday?**

We understand that this is a very difficult time for teachers and all school staff, and we are asking a lot of them to help the country fight this virus. We know that school leaders, and local authorities, will make sensible decisions on staffing and what breaks will be needed. But we are asking schools, wherever possible, to maintain provision for children of workers critical (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19->

maintaining-educational-provision) to the COVID-19 response and vulnerable children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>) over the Easter holidays.

Schools may wish to consider adopting rota systems where appropriate to ensure that staff get appropriate breaks whilst managing provision through this challenging period.

### **Will support staff on term-time only contracts be paid over the Easter holidays?**

The department does not set pay or terms and conditions of employment for support staff. School leaders should discuss and agree any new working arrangement with individual support staff affected, and ensure that they have regard for contracts of employment.

## **Pay**

### **Will teachers and other school staff continue to be paid?**

Yes. Teachers and other school staff will continue to be paid during this period as normal, and we expect schools to continue to fulfill their contractual duties to their staff.

### **Will teachers and other school staff, be entitled to sick pay for an absence caused by coronavirus (COVID-19), including the need to self-isolate if a member of their household has displayed symptoms?**

Arrangements for teachers and school staff sick pay are agreed between employers and relevant unions. We have confirmed that schools will receive the same level of funding regardless of any period of partial or complete closure, and so would expect pay to continue as normal.

## **Supply teachers and other contingent workers**

### **Should schools continue to pay supply teachers and other contingent workers?**

Schools will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure. This will ensure that they are able to continue to pay for staff, and meet their other regular financial commitments. We expect schools to continue to pay staff they employ directly in the usual fashion, and correspondingly not furlough them.

We expect schools will draw first on their existing staff to maintain necessary provision, but schools may continue to need supply teachers and other temporary workers throughout this period. We encourage schools and employment businesses (agencies) to continue to liaise on any potential need to ensure workers are available where required.

Schools should have regard to the guidance for public bodies on payment of their suppliers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procurement-policy-note-0220-supplier-relief-due-to-covid-19>) to ensure service continuity during and after the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

### **What support is available to supply teachers, and other temporary workers, who are not currently engaged by schools?**

The support available for supply teachers and other temporary workers will depend on their employment status and individual circumstances. If you are not directly employed by a school or local authority, but are an employee, agency worker, or on a zero hours contract, you should speak with your employer in the first instance, and refer to the guidance for furloughed employees and workers (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>).

Employers should refer to the guidance for furloughing employees and workers

(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>).

If you are self-employed, you should refer to the guidance for the self-employed income support scheme

(<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/self-employment-income-support-scheme/>).

If you are unsure on what type of worker you are, you can read employment status advice and guidance

(<https://www.gov.uk/employment-status/>).

## **Will there be changes to the way DBS checks are carried out as a result of social distancing guidance?**

Yes. Please refer to the guidance on changes to DBS ID checking guidelines

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-dbs-id-checking-guidelines>).

## **Will schools receive additional funding to manage the cost of hiring additional temporary workers?**

Schools will continue to receive their budgets for the coming year as usual, regardless of any periods of partial or complete closure, and this will ensure they are able to continue to pay for staff, and meet their other regular financial commitments, whilst providing the reduced provision required during this unprecedented period.

We do not anticipate schools will need additional funding specifically to manage the cost of hiring additional temporary workers, as we expect most schools will draw on their existing staff to provide ongoing provision.

## **Practicalities**

### **What is expected of schools in terms of opening hours?**

We expect schools to operate for their normal hours. Where possible, we would encourage breakfast club and after school provision, to help support the children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response.

### **What public health advice should schools follow?**

Schools should refer to the guidance for education and childcare settings

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>) on how to implement social distancing, and continue to follow the advice from Public Health England on handwashing and other measures (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>) to limit the risk of spread of coronavirus.

### **Schools and early years settings in some areas are operating in 'hubs' - for example, groups of schools/settings operating at a single site. Is this permitted?**

With significantly reduced pupil numbers, and risks of understaffing due to illness, we understand that shared provision through multi-school or early years hubs and clusters is an option being considered in some areas. In some cases, arrangements are already in place

There are issues to balance when making choices about provision at this time. First and foremost is public health, which remains the priority. Any arrangements should enable staff and children to follow social distancing guidance and limit other risks relating to the spread of the virus. We recognise that this is a particular challenge in some settings.

Alongside this, issues such as safeguarding and consistency of provision for pupils with SEND should also be considered. Additionally, in the current circumstances there will be practicalities to consider, including how children and teachers access settings while limiting travel.

We want to ensure the system is sustainable, and are working through these points with schools, early years settings, local authorities, trusts and other stakeholders, via the Department for Education (DfE)'s central and regional teams.

Our intention is to publish further guidance after Easter.

### **Can schools flex on legal requirements in order to deliver this service?**

Legislation has been passed that allows for the temporary disapplication or modification of some requirements on schools to enable them to focus on this core new ask. Schools should focus on safeguarding duties (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>) as a priority. Where schools and trusts have concerns about the impact of staff absence – such as their designated safeguarding lead or first aiders – they should discuss immediately with the local authority or trust.

### **Are schools expected to provide education as normal to pupils who are in attendance?**

We understand that these are extraordinary times. The most important thing is that children of critical workers, and vulnerable children, are supervised and properly cared for at education settings. Schools have flexibility to provide support, activities and education in the way they see fit at this time. No school will be penalised if they are unable to offer a broad and balanced curriculum during this period.

### **Do schools need to provide educational support for pupils at home?**

We recognise that many schools have already shared resources for children who are at home and are grateful for this.

We want to support parents and schools to ensure young people's education can continue. Support available includes:

- a list of online education resources (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources>) which have been identified by some of the country's leading educational experts to help pupils to learn at home
- the BBC enhancing its education provision to include daily lessons, starting from 20 April 2020

### **If children are attending an alternative setting, will transport be provided?**

We will work closely with local authorities to put the necessary arrangements in place to support children.

### **Will it be mandatory for all schools, colleges and early years settings to remain open in some form?**

We are asking all schools and early years settings to remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

We acknowledge that some schools and early years settings may be unable to do so, and will support them to work with local authorities, regional school commissioners, and neighbouring schools and settings, to continue to support these children.

### **What else needs to happen if a child is attending a different setting than usual?**

Important information should be provided on day one, including emergency contact details, dietary requirements and medical needs to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children.

## **School meals**

## What about children who rely on free school meals, but will not be in school?

We will give schools and trusts the flexibility to provide meals or vouchers to children eligible for free school meals. Read guidance on supporting children eligible for free schools meals (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>), including details of the national voucher scheme.

## What arrangements should we put in place to feed children attending school?

Schools which are open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children should provide meal options for staff and children in attendance, and free schools meals for eligible pupils in attendance.

## Exams

### What will happen to exams?

Primary assessments, including SATs, and exams including GCSEs, AS levels and A levels, will not go ahead this summer. The exam regulator, Ofqual, and exam boards, will work with teachers to provide grades to students whose exams for GCSEs, AS and A levels have been cancelled this summer.

Read further information on the cancellation of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/how-gcses-as-a-levels-will-be-awarded-in-summer-2020>).

## Types of setting

### Will this apply to alternative provision/pupil referral units?

Alternative provision (AP) settings and pupil referral units (PRUs) serve a small number of children and young people, a high proportion of whom meet the definition of vulnerability and are well-placed to cater for their needs. This would be difficult to replicate elsewhere.

We will support these settings, via local authorities and other key agencies, to identify the best way to protect young people in AP and PRUs, and to keep them open where it is feasible to do so.

### Will this apply to special schools?

All children in special schools, and in particular in residential special schools, are in the vulnerable category. Special and special residential schools/colleges should be supported to remain open, wherever that is possible, to provide vital services and support to children with complex needs and their families. This may include assistance in sourcing and deploying specialist health and care staff, from other settings, to provide cover arrangements, and ensure the right ratios and skills are in place to enable these vital specialist settings to remain open safely where needed.

Schools, colleges, other training providers, and local authorities will need to consider the needs of all children and young people with an EHC plan, alongside the views of their parents, and make a risk assessment for each child or young person. This will inform whether they need to continue to be offered a school/college place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home. We note that some children with EHCPs may also have parents who are critical workers, and will need to have a school/college place available for that reason.

In collaboration with PHE and DHSC, we have produced guidance on isolation for residential educational settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>), including residential special schools and colleges. This contains advice on managing the

setting, in the case of self-isolation or infection.

### **Will this apply to academies, free schools and independent schools?**

Yes. We expect all schools to open, from Monday 23 March 2020, only to children of critical workers and to vulnerable children. To ensure this is done as efficiently as possible, we expect all schools to work with local authorities and regional school commissioners as necessary.

### **How should boarding and residential schools manage this new operating model?**

Most boarding schools will need to keep their residential provision open, and decisions will have to happen on a case by case basis.

Read further information on isolation for residential educational settings

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>).