

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Letter to Parents and Carers**

Dear Parent / Carer,

This letter follows the Government action taken yesterday (23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020) to restrict all non-essential travel of action and the decision taken on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to close all early years' settings, schools and colleges. Both decisions have been taken as part of the Government's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency. This is a direct intervention to reduce the spread of the disease and to prevent unnecessary deaths. The Government has directed early years settings, schools and colleges to remain open to provide support to vulnerable children and their families and for people identified as critical to managing the outbreak of the virus.

I need to make it clear that school closures are critical to reduce the spread of the virus to a level the NHS can cope with. This is essential to save lives. If a substantial number of children continue to attend school this will unravel this initiative and make this pandemic likely. The Government have also stated that all non-essential travel must be stopped.

**Children of Critical Workers**

Schools are remaining open only to the children of workers critical to the ongoing management of Covid-19, that are unable to safely stay at home.

We need to ensure that the number of children and young people accessing the offer of provision in a setting, school or college is kept to the lowest number possible. Therefore, even if you have been deemed a critical worker, if your children can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role.

The list of critical workers can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

If the school, setting or college feels that your role does not fit the critical worker criteria, you may be asked to verify this or to keep your children at home. If you have a partner who is not a critical worker, you may be questioned as to why they are not able to stay at home as per the Government's guidance.

Schools, settings and colleges are open to provide care to enable critical workers to respond to the crucial role you will play in the response to the COVID-19 emergency, but you must also support your school, setting and college and only use this offer of support if you have no alternatives for childcare for your child(ren). Clearly the more children and young people that attend an education setting the wider the risk of spreading the virus grows.

**Children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) or a Social Worker.**

If your child has an EHCP and/or an allocated Social Worker and it is not possible to safely keep them at home, they may attend school, college or early years setting. Please only use the offer of provision when it is absolutely necessary and let your education provider know what you decide.

If you do decide to keep your child/ren at home and you need additional support, please contact your school and they will work with the local authority to support you.

## **Government Advice re Leaving Children Unattended**

There is no law about when you can leave your child on their own but it is an offence to leave them alone if it places them at risk. As parents, you should use your judgement on how mature your child is before you decide to leave them at home.

If you are at all unsure, the NSPCC recommends that children under 12 are rarely mature enough to be left alone for a long period of time, children under 16 shouldn't be left alone overnight and babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone.

It is important to note that schools, settings and colleges will not be able to provide an education offer to your child(ren) but will be able to provide facilities to enable you to go to work and/or keep vulnerable children safe. All normal and usual education activity has been suspended during this emergency period.

Schools continue to work closely with the Local Authority and the Headteacher Associations in order to offer a consistent and safe response to the current crisis. The health and safety of your children and your family is everyone's first priority.

Thank you for your co-operation at this time.

Kind Regards,



Clare Kershaw  
Director of Education  
Sent on behalf of:  
Essex County Council  
The Association of Secondary Headteachers in Essex  
Essex Primary Headteachers' Association  
Essex Special Schools Education Trust