

COVID - 19 - ADMISSIONS TO SCHOOLS FOR CRITICAL WORKERS AND VULNERABLE PUPILS

Background

Parents and carers will be aware of the recent announcement by Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, that **all schools/education settings will close today, Friday 20th March, until further notice.**

As stated by the Government: 'the most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 is clear. If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. That is why the government has asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools/education settings to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.'

In light of this advice, parents/carers will be **notified when a reduced provision offer will be available for a limited number of children – this means children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response (critical worker) and cannot be safely cared for at home.**

Some families will therefore receive an offer of a place to attend educational provision during this time of wider closure. Whether you are a critical worker or not, **only families with an offer of a place should attend their school/education settings.** Sutton Council and schools/education settings are asking that **parents/pupils do not attend a setting before a place has been offered and confirmed by your school/education setting.**

A definition of a critical worker is set out in government guidance published on Friday 20 March - a link to the guidance is available here

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

The definition of a vulnerable pupil is:

'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.'

Parents and carers 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 ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be. If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed in the link above, AND you cannot keep your child safe at home then your children will be prioritised for education provision:

If you believe you may qualify for consideration of a place in a reduced provision and your child cannot be safely cared for at home then you should get in touch with your school/educational setting. Schools/educational settings will not always be able to guarantee a place, or even an offer of a place; if any offer of a place is made, it will only be based on what staff numbers can accommodate on grounds of health and safety for all.

More information for parents and carers on closure of educational settings can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers?utm_source=3af9bd53-8b24-49d0-92be-34d607ef773a&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

All of the Public Health Guidance still applies so please note, so if you are a critical worker or your child is designated as vulnerable please DO NOT send children to school/education settings if they have any symptoms of the virus - continue to follow Public Health England advice as normal - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

Thank you very much for your support in these challenging times. Together with schools/education settings, we are doing what we can to support our local community, given these unprecedented circumstances.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This document will be updated on a regular basis. Latest Update: 20th March

I work in a profession that is on the list published by the Government as a

If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed in the guidance above, and you cannot keep your child safe at home then your children will be prioritised for education provision. This does not mean children of all workers in these categories can or will continue to send their children to school. Many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home or they might work in one of the listed professions but not be considered critical to the Covid 19 response.

I am a critical worker but my partner isn't - should I send my children to school/education settings?

If it is at all possible, children should be at home. Children with at least one parent or carer who is identified as a critical worker by the government can send their children to school. Whilst we understand families may want to take up this offer to enable the other partner to work, we would ask parents to consider if this is absolutely necessary and is made on the grounds that parents would not be able to safely look after their children from home without this support.

Do I need to provide evidence that I am a 'critical' worker?

You may be asked to provide evidence that your employer has confirmed that you are a critical worker but schools may not always need to seek evidence. This will be managed by individual schools.

If I work part time do I need to send the child in each day?

No, but it's important to be in communication with the setting so they are aware who to expect in each day. We do acknowledge that working patterns may change over the coming weeks, and it is best to keep in communication with the setting of changing needs and their capacity to accommodate this.

I am a critical worker but my school/education setting doesn't agree – can you tell me if I qualify and then tell the school?

Schools will ultimately be responsible with respect to the interpretation of a critical worker based on the guidance issued by the Government. Parents should liaise with their employers and can provide evidence to schools that they should be considered a critical worker, however this is rightly the judgement of the school.

I qualify as a critical worker but my school/education setting doesn't have capacity for all eligible children – can I have an alternative provision?

We would ask schools/education settings to work with the Local Authority to identify an alternative placement for the pupil. Schools/education settings are best placed to take the lead on this because they know the pupils, their individual needs and they would be best placed to liaise with other provisions to plan those placements. Where a setting is unable to find a suitable placement then they should refer to the Local Authority who would then seek to identify a solution.

My child has an Education, Health and Care Plan and my school / education setting is shut/or insufficient staff to provide additional support, and cannot attend an alternative provision – will the Local Authority provide alternative provision?

Special schools and Opportunity Bases are particularly under pressure and are unlikely to be able to open to maximum capacity for all pupils with EHC plans. You should liaise with your individual schools/education settings about whether it would be possible to find alternative arrangements.

However, generally speaking we would not recommend placing pupils with EHCPs in alternative placements / settings because of the variety of different needs that they have (health and care needs). If a setting is absolutely clear that they cannot make the provision available safely and parents are absolutely clear that they cannot safely care for their children in any other way, they should contact the Local Authority who will seek to find alternative arrangements where possible.

Will my child still have all of the provision set out in his/her Education, Health and Care Plan?

The Local Authority and its partners will do everything possible to meet the current contents of all EHCPs. There will be times over the coming months when the availability of professionals, services and/or locations will be affected and we may not be able to do

everything as we would all like. This will include therapies as well as a number of other services. We will do our best to minimise this disruption and please speak to your school and/or call Cognus if you are worried or concerned.

Will schools be delivering a curriculum to pupils that attend school during the period of temporary 'closures'?

No. Schools will do whatever they can to ensure that activities that are put in place are of educational value but they will be unable to deliver a planned curriculum in the way that they would do normally. It is probably best to consider the provision available as 'childcare' and not 'education'.

What will my child be doing at the education setting?

This may be different across settings, so please discuss this with them directly.

What if the Local Authority cannot find an alternative?

We would do everything we can to place pupils in an educational setting but it may be that we are unable to find an alternative straight away. We would keep a record of all pupils and families and would stay in touch with families as and when a place becomes available.

Can I go to a school/education setting that is nearer/more convenient?

In principle the answer is no unless it is demonstrable that you are unable to attend your normal school/education setting because of capacity issues. You would need to talk to your school/education setting in the first instance about alternative arrangements and if a solution is unable to be found the LA after that

Will you provide transport as I don't want to use public transport?

No, unless you are usually entitled to SEN transport - any questions on this please contact SEN.Transport@cognus.org.uk

My child usually receives SEN transport to school – will this continue?

If your child will still be attending their school / education setting, then we will continue to provide assistance. However, there may be a different provider or crew delivering this assistance. We are contacting schools and families regarding these arrangements. Please contact SEN.Transport@cognus.org.uk if you have any questions.

Are schools doing consistent hours and breakfast / after school clubs?

The ambition is that schools open normal hours including breakfast and after school clubs, however, schools/educational settings will have discretion about what they are able to

provide. You would need to talk to individual schools about this (these provisions are sometimes run by third parties and there may be capacity issues for this provision as well).

Can I just turn up at a preferred school/education setting?

No. You should only be attending your own school/education setting where a place has been agreed OR unless told that there is another setting you can use. You will not have a place at any school/education setting unless they confirm to you that you do, and this may change as the capacity of the school changes.

My child requires medication – can an alternative school/education setting administer?

This should be discussed with the home and host school/education setting to see if this is possible or not. If it is not, it may be possible for the parent to come in and administer the medication if necessary but only by agreement by the host school/education setting.

Can an alternative school/education setting refuse if they have space?

Yes they can. Each school/education setting will be assessing their capacity on an ongoing basis and this will change daily.

Will schools/education settings ‘select’ pupils that they make provision for?

No, over and above the criteria that the Government have set out (pupils of critical workers and vulnerable pupils). Schools/Education settings will not be “selecting” pupils by ability, behaviour, or any other criteria but will have capacity issues and so may need to decide how they prioritise the places available.

Will schools still be able to exclude pupils from the provision that is made available?

It would be unusual for a school/education setting to exclude children in these very unusual circumstances given that they are not providing education and the normal rules around exclusions will not apply. However, schools/education settings must ensure the safety of staff and pupils in their care and may ask some pupils or parents to no longer attend for a fixed period or permanently.

Does Infant Class Size legislation continue to apply?

No but there will still be an assessment that individual settings will make to ensure that the provision that they have is safe and viable.

No local schools/education settings have space – can you force them to take additional pupils?

No

Is there a list of schools/education settings with space and how often updated?

We are looking to gather information from schools/education settings and we will try and communicate this to parents as accurately as possible where we are asked. However as will be appreciated, the concept of spaces in schools/education settings will change depending on the situation at any one time. Schools/education settings will be the arbiters of whether they have space or not.

If I prefer the alternative school/education setting, can I stay/transfer there permanently?

It is important that you remember that placement at this time will be very different from the normal experience. However, we understand that some pupils may make friends in alternative settings or parents might wish to attend other school/education settings in the longer term. There is a normal process for this but we would not encourage anyone to be considering this until the outbreak has been contained and until schools/education settings fully reopen as normal.

Will my child need a new school uniform?

Each setting will decide whether school uniform is required, but if going to an alternative setting you would use your current school uniform (ie the one that the pupil usually wears to school).

Should schools/education settings be opening their usual hours?

This is at the discretion of the school/education setting.

My child has been submitted for an Education Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) can I get a place at my school/education setting?

No. Unless the parent meets the critical worker criteria then there is no ask on schools/education settings to make a place available for those that do not currently have an EHC plan but may be in the assessment process.

My childcare provider is telling me that I need to continue to pay childcare fees when they are not open is this correct?

Providers have been asked to be reasonable and balanced in their dealings with parents in relation to fees. It is acknowledged that childcare providers will be financially impacted as a result of covid-19, therefore, the government announced on 17 March that they 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.

Will my child have access to Free School meals if he or she is not defined as vulnerable or their parents are not considered critical workers?

[Free School Meals guidance](#) has been published today. This guidance explains what schools should be doing to make sure eligible pupils have continued access to free school meals where:

- (i) the pupil has to stay at home because they and/or wider family members are displaying coronavirus (COVID-19) related symptoms
- (ii) the school is only open for certain groups or is closed temporarily

Parents should contact individual schools about how they are proposing to make free school meals available for those that are eligible but please be aware this may not always be possible in the circumstances. The Government are currently developing a national approach to providing support through supermarket and shop vouchers. We will provide further details shortly.

How can I find out if my school/education setting is open or closed or what the latest position is?

You should contact the school/education setting directly if you have any questions about the provision that is available at the school. We are also asking schools to update the [‘opencheck’ system](#) so that parents can see what the latest position is for each school in the Borough.