My ref: Parent Letter – January Lockdown
Date: 7th January 2020
Contact: Please contact your school for more information

To parents/carers of pupils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Early Years Establishments, Schools and Colleges

People & Communities
Education Directorate

Dear Parent / Carer,

You will be aware that on Monday 4 January, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which has now come into effect. Full details of the lockdown restrictions including the stay at home message can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home.

This central Government decision does not suggest that schools and colleges are no longer safe places for young people. Instead, limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households.

The new restrictions mean that Primary and Secondary schools and colleges will remain open **only** for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people to attend. All other pupils and students will receive remote education until February half term and must remain at home, in line with national guidance. I have set out further details below. Alternative provision and special schools will be open but the number of places will be limited. All schools may have reduced spaces due to staff illness and confirmed Covid-19 cases.

I understand this will not be welcome news for many parents and carers, but it is absolutely essential if we are to successfully protect the NHS and reduce the transmission of the virus. In Peterborough and Cambridgeshire we have witnessed the growing pressure on our NHS hospitals and the wider health system during the past few weeks. We are not yet through these pressures, and our colleagues across Health and Social Care are working tirelessly to ensure the viability of our health services.

Children of critical workers
Schools are remaining open to the children of workers who are critical to the COVID-19 response and EU transition response, who are unable to safely stay at home.

Please think carefully before sending your children back to school

We need to ensure that the number of children and young people accessing the offer of provision in a school or college is kept to the lowest number possible, so that we can reduce household mixing and the risk of spreading coronavirus. As a result, schools will have a limit on the number of children they can safely support in their bubble arrangements. Therefore, even if you are a critical worker, if your child(ren) can remain at home rather than attend school, 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 on the government website:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision

If your child's school or college feels that your role does not fit the critical worker criteria, you may be asked to verify this with a letter from your employer detailing why you personally are critical to the COVID-19 response or EU Transition. If there is an alternative adult such as a partner or second parent who is not a critical worker, you may be asked why your child(ren) are not able to stay at home as per the Government's guidance. If the other adult is working at home or able to take leave from their non-critical job, this will be deemed as a safe alternative.

Schools, settings and colleges are open to provide education 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. It may be likely that schools will not be able to accommodate all critical worker children and they will have to prioritise entry due to limited space.

Vulnerable children and young people – including those with education, health and care plans or a social worker

If your child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan and/or an allocated social worker they may attend their school or college. 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.

The Department for Education (DfE) definition of vulnerable children and young people who can access their school or college can be found at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision

If your child(ren) attends a specialist school or setting please think carefully to consider if you can safely keep them at home. If we are to effectively support the NHS and help reduce transmission of COVID-19 we will need to limit the number of children and therefore contacts even in our special schools and settings. Resources for specialist settings will be impacted by the need to implement additional safety measures and this will mean that there will not be access to the full number of places.

We have worked closely with our special schools and specialist settings to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people. Places will be assessed on an individual basis and schools and settings have been asked to contact all parents to discuss the individual needs of all children who attend special schools and settings. However, we cannot guarantee that there will be space for everyone, and we would therefore ask that you consider if you can keep your child(ren) at home and help support the local and national pressures. Special schools and settings, in partnership with the Local Authority, will look to provide as much support as possible for any child(ren) who stay home.

Free School Meal Entitlement and Provision

We understand that families continue to live in uncertain times and many are facing changes to their financial circumstances as a result.

If you have not previously applied for Free School Meals, or your name has recently change and now feel you may be eligible, please visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals to see if you meet the criteria and to apply online. If you have any queries in relation to free school meals entitlement please contact our Education Welfare Benefits Team on ewb.fsm@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or telephone them on 01223 703200

If you are currently in receipt of free school meals, your school will be in contact to advise what provision is being offered to you during this period of school closures.

Government advice on 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 should not be left alone overnight and babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone.

Summer 2021 exams / assessments

The Government has decided that, in the circumstances, it is not possible for GCSE and A Level exams to go ahead in the summer as planned. They will be working with Ofqual (the organisation responsible for regulating qualifications, examinations and assessments in England) to consult rapidly and put in place alternative arrangements that will allow students to progress fairly. The Secretary of State for Education announced in Parliament yesterday that Primary school SATs will not take place this year. Schools will be providing more information on these changes soon.

Remote Learning

For parents who are not accessing school, you would have notified of your schools plan for delivering remote learning during this time. The Department for Education has published expectations on these arrangements: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools - res

If you are concerned about your child/ren's progress, access to ICT or have a query over the content of remote learning, please contact your school who will be happy to discuss this with you.

Childcare and Early Years

Early years settings – including nurseries, childminders and school-based provision – can remain fully open during this period, but reception classes and higher year groups will remain closed. Parents can form a childcare bubble with one other consistent household for the purposes of informal childcare, where the children are under 14. This is mainly to enable parents to work and must not be used to enable social contact between adults. Some households will also be able to benefit from being in a support bubble. Details of support and childcare bubbles can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household#what-a-childcare-bubble-is

Finally, I would like to thank you for your continued support of our schools, settings and colleges and your compliance with the wider national restrictions in place. Whilst last year was extremely challenging for parents, carers, their children and our school staff, I was extremely proud to see how you all stepped up and faced the challenges head on. I have every confidence that together we will all play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Lewis
Service Director – Education
Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council