

FAQS

Please note that this document will change as our emergency situation evolves. Principals will be notified as soon as updates happen. A link will be placed on the DE website.

SUPERVISED LEARNING

Q: What is 'supervised learning'?

A: Supervised learning is about providing a facility in schools and pre-schools for vulnerable children and those of key workers to allow parents to continue with their vital jobs. By providing the facility for supervised learning, school and pre-school education staff will play a vital role in ensuring key services, including the health service, can continue to operate. Children attending school or pre-school settings will not experience a continuation of their usual classroom based teacher led education routine, although they will be able to access appropriate learning opportunities they would otherwise have accessed at home.

Q: How will schools and pre-school settings resource the supervised learning of children during this time?

A: Teaching and non-teaching staff who are not ill, self-isolating or at risk (as defined by PHA guidance) should be available to support the supervised learning of vulnerable children and those of key workers over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Depending on the number of staff available, consideration may be given to developing a rota for staff in each educational setting, based on staff working a reduced number of hours per day/days per week or alternate weeks without any loss in pay.

If there are not sufficient numbers of staff to manage this, then the employing authority will investigate the possibility of using staff from another school or pre-school or asking some or all of the children at your school or pre-school to attend another school or pre-school.

It may take some time for schools and pre-schools to establish the demand for this service, and it is expected that settings may, over time, agree to work in partnership to provide cover collectively.

In addition substitute cover may be required, and can be accessed through the Northern Ireland Teachers Register (NISTR).

STAFFING & LEARNING

Q: Can I bring in staff from another school to support my staff?

A: All schools and pre-school education settings are being asked to work together to deliver this service. This may include the attendance of staff at a setting other than their own, or the attendance of children at a setting other than their normal setting.

Q: How will I be expected to balance delivery of remote learning to children who are at home with staffing a school or pre-school to accommodate children of key workers?

A: In many cases schools and pre-schools will already have arrangements in place to continue to teach young people remotely. Schools and pre-schools should be able to explore how they can use the same approaches adopted to deliver remote learning to young people whether or not they are in school or pre-school.

TRANSPORT

Q: Will school transport be running?

A: From Monday 23rd normal school transport will not be running. However as the situation develops and is assessed, this may be amended. Currently this is to ensure health and safety of children.

FOOD

Q: Will school meals be provided?

A: Parents should be advised, at least in the interim, to provide packed lunches for their children. The Department of Education and the Department for Communities (DfC) are working together to ensure continuity of provision for children and young people who may be vulnerable or who currently avail of free school meals through school. DfC is currently working on this aspect and will be including the community and voluntary sectors, youth services and local councils as well as considering the availability of EA catering services and canteens to assist in the provision and distribution of meals to those who need them – not just children and young people.

Work is underway to identify which schools will be served directly with an inevitably reduced service and schools will be kept informed as soon as this becomes clear.

PRE SCHOOL

Q: What if my setting or class normally provides part-time pre-school provision?

A: Children should attend as usual. Further guidance will issue.

Q: What happens with pre-school children who usually attend in the morning/afternoon?

A: Children should attend as usual. Further guidance will issue.

Q: What if a child is usually in part-time nursery or part-time pre-school education provision?

A: Children should attend as usual. Further guidance will issue.

Q: Does this cover nursery schools and nursery units in primary schools?

A: Yes.

Q: Does this cover non-statutory pre-schools settings?

A: Yes. Non-statutory pre-school education providers will continue to be funded by the Education Authority and will not lose funding as a result of the closure arrangements. Non-statutory pre-school education providers should continue to submit monthly claims to the Education Authority in the usual way. Pre-school education provision in non-statutory community and voluntary settings is provided on a part-time basis, for a minimum of 2.5 hours per day, five days per week.

ACCEPTING CHILDREN IN TO SCHOOL

Q: Can I accept children who are registered pupils at another setting, including in another phase of education?

A: You may accept children into your school or pre-school setting whether or not they are normally enrolled at your school or pre-school if you can do safely and in compliance with PHA guidelines. Pre-school settings are not suitable environments for older children.

This needs to be in conjunction with EA/DE so that accurate registers of children's whereabouts are maintained. Further guidance will be provided.

Q: Can I accept children who are not children of key workers?

A: The aim of closing schools and pre-school education settings to pupils is to reduce the number of children in those settings to enhance the effectiveness of our response to the Covid-19 outbreak, therefore the children attending settings for supervised learning should be limited to those of key workers and vulnerable children .

Parents should be encouraged to source alternative safe and appropriate provision if they are not prioritised for this service and such children should not attend school.

Q: Is there a limit on the number of children I can admit into the school or pre-school?

A: While there is no set limit, if you find there to be a high demand for places at your school, you may wish to consider utilising space at neighbouring settings to adhere to the Public Health Agency (PHA) if you can do safely and in compliance with PHA guidelines. Pre-school settings are not suitable environments for older children. The DE and EA will advise you further if this arises.

Q: My school is a single sex school, can I accept children of both genders at this time.

A: Yes. These children will be in attendance at your school so normal admissions requirements do not apply for supervised learning.

Q: Can the children of teaching and non-staffing teaching staff attend?

A: Yes in line with guidance.

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Q: Are special schools to open?

A: Yes – as those children who attend special schools have statements of special educational need and they fall within the definition of vulnerable children.

The schools should continue to work in partnership with parents and/or legal guardians to ensure that the best interests of children take precedence.

CLASS SIZES

Q: What are the implications for class size limits and teacher/pupil ratios?

A: This should be assessed based on what is being delivered in the classroom and bearing in mind guidance in relation to PHA advice about social distancing. For non-statutory pre-school providers, the ratio of adults to children is 1:8.

CHILDREN

Q: What age of children are included in this arrangement?

A: This arrangement extends to children from pre-school up to the end of Year 10. It also covers children who are vulnerable.

Q: What is meant by a 'vulnerable' child?

A: Vulnerable children encompasses those children who are in need of protection, or in need, as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Children and young people in need may include those:

- Receiving support from Health & Social Services including family support, child protection and looked after children services
- On the Child Protection Register
- With statements of special educational needs
- Accessing EOTAS
- Accessing Education Nurture Units
- With emerging and diagnosed mental health needs
- Who are homeless
- Who are young carers
- Subject to paramilitary threat
- Whose parents have mental health problems
- Whose parents have alcohol and drug addictions
- Affected by domestic violence

KEY WORKERS

Q: Who are 'key workers'.

A: The list is not prescriptive. However, to give some guidance the following outlines the broad categories of what would be defined as a key worker:

- Health and Social Care. This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, home carers and staff required to maintain our health and social care sector;
- Education and childcare. This includes pre-school and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who will remain active during the Covid-19 response;
- Public safety and national security. This includes civilians and officers in the police (including key contractors), Fire and Rescue Service, prison service and other national security roles;
- Transport. This will include those keeping air, water, road and rail transport modes operating during the Covid-19 response;
- Utilities and Communication. This includes staff needed for oil, gas, electricity and water (including sewage) and primary industry supplies, to continue during the Covid-19 response, as well as key staff in telecommunications, post and delivery, services and waste disposal;
- Food and other necessary goods. This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution and sale, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (e.g hygiene, medical etc);
- Other workers essential to delivering key public services;
- Key national and local government including those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the Covid-19 response.

Q: Will the 'key workers' list be changed in future?

A: The definition of 'key worker' will be flexible and dependant on the circumstance and requirements over the course of this critical period. There will be flexibility shown on the definition of key workers to ensure all those who need support receive it. You will be updated of any change to the definition.

Q: What are my options if a family does not meet the definition of key worker or their child is not vulnerable but wants to attend?

A: Families can be directed to the Family Support NI website which has details of a range of support available to families including registered day-care provision in the area.

Q: Do both parents of a child need to be key workers to be able to attend school?

A: No. The purpose of opening schools is to ensure that key workers can still attend their place of work and provide vital services. .

FUNDING

Q: Will I receive additional funding to complete a deep clean or for additional cleaning products?

A: If a setting incurs additional costs, arising from exceptional or emergency situations, such as completing a deep clean, the purchase of additional cleaning products or the setup an isolation room, the school should contact the Education Authority, as funding authority, in the first instance.

Q: When will schools be notified of their 2020-21 delegated budgets?

A: Following the Chancellor's budget statement on 11 March, the Finance Minister laid a statement to the Assembly on 16 March setting out the level of UK Government funding. The final 2020-21 budget for Northern Ireland Departments will be confirmed by the end of March. As soon as the Department is able to do so, it will advise schools immediately of 2020-21 delegated budgets.

Q: Will funding be provided to enable the school to set up an isolation room?

A: If a setting incurs additional costs, arising from exceptional or emergency situations, such as completing a deep clean, the purchase of additional cleaning products or the setup an isolation room, the school should contact the Education Authority, in the first instance. In support of all schools opening on Monday the EA can provide emergency supplies to those schools that find themselves short of supplies.

The EA will be able to provide either a collection or delivery service over the weekend if schools need supplies. Individual schools will need to contact the EA's

Covid -19 operations centre, which will continue to be operational over the weekend 8am to 8pm. The number is: 028 38368186.

Q: A large number of pupils wish to attend my school. What do I do?

A: Schools should ascertain as soon as possible the likely number of children who will be attending. Schools should accommodate these children where possible, whether on their own premises or in consultation with other schools. The children who attend should be those highlighted and not children outside of these groups. If it will take a period of time to make necessary arrangements, parents should be advised as to when their child can attend and should be advised not to send their child until this time. The Department is scoping the possibility of identifying additional accommodation should that be required.

Q: Will I receive additional funding if I accept children who are not registered at my setting?

A: If a setting incurs additional costs arising from exceptional or emergency situations, the school should contact the Education Authority, as funding authority, in the first instance.

EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

Q: Can external childcare providers continue to operate after school childcare provision in the school?

A: Yes, if the school is satisfied that it complies with PHA guidance.

GENERAL

Q: What hours am I expected to open?

A: Schools and pre-schools should open for their normal hours at present. Further guidance will issue on part-time and full-time pre-school provision.

Q: Can schools and pre-schools group together to provide 'hubs' where one setting caters for pupils from a number of settings?

A: This may be a suitable solution for some settings when staffing and child numbers become known.

