



Briefing 20-12

March 2020

COVID 19 Special briefing: Key Worker Guidance

1. Introduction

The Government has issued guidance on key worker provision '*Guidance for schools, colleges and local authorities on maintaining educational provision*' which was published late on 19 March 2020.

The full statement is below. The statement has already created some ambiguity; whilst it is welcome that the statement is not too prescriptive allowing for some local determination this has led to the question of 'is there a requirement for both parents to be key workers?' to be able to access the limited educational provision that will be made available.

In this regard APSE would point to the very first bullet point in the guiding principles which states

'If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be'

This therefore means local protocols and arrangements would allow for sensible and reasonable flexibility in determining access to educational provision and whether or not it is possible for a child to be at home. For example, a worker who is frontline in adult social care and unambiguously a key worker but who has a partner who is a non-key worker but who may be unable to look after their child for other reasons, such as medical reasons, would be able to access the limited educational provision. A key worker with a partner who is able to act as the primary carer would not. Single parent key workers would be covered in any event under the guiding principles.

A further matter that has been raised with APSE is the scope of the guidance for example to workers such as refuse drivers / loaders and those critical to local infrastructure such as highways as well as school catering and cleaning staff, many of whom are already being deployed to work on additional services for vulnerable residents. Again it is APSE's view that the guidance would allow for such workers to fall within scope of the key worker guidance. However, given the limited provision of school places and the overarching purpose of the policy on schools in limiting the spread of Coronavirus and subsequent COVID 19 infections, it will be necessary to be sensible and proportionate in how these matters are determined locally.

The Full Statement is as follows:

As a country, we all need to do what we can to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

That is why the government has given clear guidance on [self-isolation](#), [household isolation](#) and [social distancing](#).

And 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 to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.

It is important to underline that schools, 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, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

Schools 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.

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](#).

We know that schools will also want to support other children facing social difficulties and we will support head teachers to do so.

Parents 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. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.

Please, therefore, follow these key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.
3. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.
4. Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.
5. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed below, and you cannot keep your child safe at home then your children will be prioritised for education provision:

Health and social care

This includes but is not limited to doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

Education and childcare

This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who must remain active during the COVID-19 response to deliver this approach.

Key public services

This includes those essential to the running of the justice system, religious staff, charities and workers delivering key frontline services, those responsible for the management of the deceased, and journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting.

Local and national government

This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services such as the payment of benefits, including in government agencies and arms length bodies.

Food and other necessary goods

This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines).

Public safety and national security

This includes police and support staff, Ministry of Defence civilians, contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic), fire and rescue service employees (including support staff), National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas.

Transport

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

Utilities, communication and financial services

This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure), the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage), information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response, as well as key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors.

If workers think they fall within the critical categories above they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.

If your school is closed then please [contact your local authority](#), who will seek to redirect you to a local school in your area that your child, or children, can attend.

We are grateful for the work of teachers and workers in educational settings for continuing to provide for the children of the other critical workers of our country. It is an essential part of our national effort to combat this disease.

APSE Comment

A balance needs to be struck between effective isolation measures and limiting the spread of the virus and ensuring critical local council services continue alongside those of health and social care. For example, catering staff within schools who are already in some areas being effectively deployed to provide for vulnerable residents, including those who may need support with feeding children following loss of earnings as a result of job losses or closures, are clearly critical to the functioning of the local authority in its response to COVID 19. There is also a need to recognise that there are less 'obvious' key workers including those working in environmental services. For example, with more people self-isolating or home working there will be an increase in domestic waste and recycling. If there are staff shortages this may lead to prioritisation of residual waste but the public will expect services to continue and from a hygiene point of view it would be unacceptable for communities already facing a health emergency to face long delays in basic refuse services. Therefore undoubtedly Directors of Environmental Services will be arguing for key worker status amongst their own staff teams.

Accordingly, APSE will be monitoring the impact of the key worker advice and, should it become necessary, we will make further representations to Government on this matter on behalf of our member authorities.

If you have any questions or comments on this issue please feel free to email through or to stay up to date and join the APSE Covid 19 WhatsApp Groups visit the [APSE COVID 19 web hub here](#).

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