

Statement on school places for the children of critical workers

Senator Sam Mézec, Minister for Children

Wednesday, 25 March 2020

At this time of unprecedented disruption and worry, it is essential that the workers who are critical to protecting Islanders and our Island are able to go to work.

The Government has considered which services and staff are most critical to the Island's response to Coronavirus.

Yesterday, we contacted the first wave of these workers – those focused on health and care, formal emergency responses, public protection, social work and residential childcare.

We have let them know how we will support their childcare needs, so that they can continue to support Islanders through the Coronavirus crisis.

We're also working with a range of organisations to get a better understanding of who all our Island's critical workers are and how we can help them to keep working.

They will include employees working across our supply chains and food retailers, in home care and personal support for the vulnerable, and those maintaining essential Island infrastructure and safety, as well as our air and ferry links.

We'll keep the list under regular review to ensure that we can respond if our needs change.

Under the new arrangements, the Education Minister and I are ensuring that the children of critical workers, and a group of the most vulnerable children, can attend a childminder, nursery or school while our schools are closed.

In line with advice from the Medical Officer for Health, schools are being asked to continue to provide care for the children of critical workers from school nursery to Year 8, and for vulnerable children from school nursery to Year 13.

In doing so, we have to ensure that childminders, nurseries and schools can adopt effective social distancing.

We have liaised closely with representatives of childminders, the nursery sector and all schools to agree the new arrangements, which started yesterday where schools were already fully prepared and today for all other schools.

The children of critical workers in Year 9 and above are not included in this plan, because they are old enough for their parents or carers to find alternative care for them, although we will consider exceptional cases.

We're still finalising the arrangements for children in private nurseries, but we hope to have agreed these today.

We have updated the guidance for childminders on our website.

As we work together to support our most vulnerable groups in the community, I would again urge you to help put our children first, helping to keep them safe during this turbulent time.

Our schools have strong relationships with their children and families. During the closure period, schools will continue to be a point of contact for families, providing advice, signposting and requesting additional support, when needed, through the new Children and Families Hub, which opened on Monday.

Some children will be more vulnerable during this period and it is imperative that we do all we can together to ensure that these children are safe.

Parents and carers are responsible for keeping their own children safe, but safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

We need to look after and support our children together. We are relying on the public to help be our eyes and ears in the community.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the significant work that has gone into making these new arrangements possible for the children of critical workers and for our vulnerable children.

It has not been an easy task to plan and implement at such short notice, but I am certain that the first children coming into most schools today will be warmly welcomed and will be delighted to see their teachers and the staff who support them.

Headteachers and teachers have responded to our call for help with exceptional flexibility and adaptability. They are a credit to our education system.

We are equally pleased to be working with the representatives of the childminding and private and voluntary nursery sector, who share our commitment to put children first during these unprecedented times.

Our priority is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people during this time, to enable our Island's critical personnel to be available for work.

We will be keeping these arrangements under regular review in response to changing circumstances and in the light of ongoing public health advice.