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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 can be found at [www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home)

This decision does not suggest that schools and colleges are no longer safe places for young people. Instead, limiting school attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that children and adults have with people in other households as a critical part of the response to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

The new restrictions mean that schools, special schools, alternative provision, and colleges will remain open only for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people to attend on site. All other pupils and students will receive remote education until at least February half term and must remain at home, in line with national guidance further details of which are set out below.

We understand this is not welcome news for many parents and carers but it is essential if we are to successfully reduce the transmission of the virus and protect the NHS. In Bedford Borough there is a growing pressure on the hospital and the wider health system and our colleagues across Health and Social Care are working tirelessly to ensure the viability of our health services.

### **Children of critical workers**

All schools are remaining open to the children of workers who are critical to the COVID19 response and EU transition, and who are unable to safely stay at home. There is a need to use this offer of support ONLY if there are no alternatives for childcare for your child(ren).

We have seen a sharp rise this week in the number of parents and carers indicating that they are in the above categories and this is putting pressure on schools to remain open to more students and hampering efforts to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

If you are a critical worker and your child(ren) can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of a school place provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role and you cannot support your child(ren) at home.

As part of the response to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 at this difficult time we would therefore request that if there is an alternative adult, such as partner or second parent who is not a critical worker, who can work from home or is able to take leave from a non-critical job as per the Government's guidance, then this option is preferred, as it is deemed as a more appropriate alternative.

Vicky Head, Director of Public Health  
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The list of critical workers can be found here:

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

## **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 or lead professional 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 Council to support you.

The DfE definition of vulnerable children and young people who can access their school or college can be found here:

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

## **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 shouldn't be left alone overnight and babies, toddlers and very young children should never be left alone.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

**Vicky Head**  
Director of Public Health

**Martin Purbrick**  
Interim Director of Children's Services