

20 March 2020



Dear Parent/Carer

Support for parents - school closure from Monday 23 March

The government announced on 18 March that all schools will close at the end of the school day today until further notice, apart from for specific groups of pupils.

Why are schools closing?

The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus) 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. 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.

Is the school safe for some children and staff to attend?

It is important to underline that schools 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. We will monitor staffing levels and ensure that children who do attend are safe.

Which pupils can still attend from Monday 23 March?

- 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 have contacted parents of those pupils today.**
- Children with a parent whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response – please see the list attached to this letter which sets out the sectors covered. Many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be. **We asked parents via social media earlier today to tell us if they are a critical worker and intend to send their child(ren) to school from Monday. Even if you have not already told us, you can still send them to school on Monday if this applies to you as long as you telephone the office first.**

What does this mean in practice?

Please, therefore, follow the government's key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be cared for safely 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 they can attend school.

3. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category. This covers grandparents, friends, or family members who are: over 70 (regardless of medical condition); under 70 who have underlying health conditions; or are pregnant.
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 that the general population has been asked to take, which means avoiding non-essential use of public transport, public gatherings (including cinemas, pubs and restaurants) and gatherings with friends and family.

What are the arrangements for pupils who are still attending school from Monday 23 March?

- The Early Years Centre will be closed on Monday and children who normally attend there should be brought to the Main School site in Sutton Street. Please bring children to the main entrance for 9am if not attending breakfast club.
- What times will school be open on Monday? On Monday, we will be open at our usual times. We will operate breakfast club from 8.30am for all children who wish to attend but will keep this under review. Other children come into the school yard as normal.
- Will lunch be provided for children who can attend school? We are working closely with our school meals provider. There will be food available for all pupils who attend school including those entitled to free school meals.
- Do children still need to wear uniform? Pupils need to wear their school jumper but we encourage them to wear joggers or tracksuit pants and trainers due to the range of activities we will be providing.
- What will children who attend school be doing? We are unable to provide lessons as normal because the majority of pupils and some staff will be absent. We are planning a range of activities to keep pupils interested and motivated to attend.
- Are there any circumstances when pupils cannot attend? We must all continue to follow the current advice about coronavirus: pupils should stay at home if they are unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature to avoid spreading infection to others, otherwise they should attend as normal; if pupils become unwell on site with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature they will be sent home. If anyone in your household has symptoms, all members of the household must stay at home and not leave their house for 14 days from the day when the first person in the household became ill.

What are the arrangements for pupils who are not attending school from Monday 23 March?

- My child qualifies for free school meals. Will I receive any help to provide them with lunch at home? The government is working towards providing a national meal voucher system for all pupils who qualify for free school meals. In the meantime we are working with other schools across the trust to deliver packed lunches to pupils at home who qualify for free school meals, along with communications from school and activity packs to keep children engaged. These deliveries will take place on Monday 23 (with two packed lunches), Wednesday 25 (with two packed lunches) and Friday 27 March. To be clear, at this stage the meals are only for those children whose parents have applied to the local authority for free school meals as they are in receipt of benefits.

- How will my child's learning continue while they cannot attend school? Your child has already received some work and guidance and we will continue to update and provide resources as necessary. Please keep checking the school website for further information and resources.
- Does my child/our family need to be isolated while pupils cannot attend school or can they go outside? Unless they have symptoms of coronavirus or your household is isolating for 14 days because one member of the family has symptoms when you must follow the stay at home guidance, you should ensure they follow the same social distancing principles that everyone has been asked to take.

How long will these arrangements be in place for?

The Government has said schools will remain closed for most pupils "until further notice". It is not clear how long this will last but we are expecting it to be for a period of weeks or months.

How will we keep you updated during these arrangements?

We will continue to update our social media (specify Facebook, Twitter etc) and our school website which has a specific webpage about coronavirus:

<https://www.walkergate.newcastle.sch.uk/website/coronavirus/455074>

We will be keeping in touch with parents by text and telephone so please ensure your contact numbers are up-to-date.

Our school office remains open and you can contact us by telephone or by e-mail at admin@walkergate.newcastle.sch.uk If it is not urgent, please try to use the email and leave the telephone free for urgent calls. Finally, we appreciate that this is a worrying time for everyone including children. We understand that many will be anxious at the disruption to their lives and, for some, they will be disappointed that activities and events planned for this school year may not take place

Schools are at the heart of our communities and we will be working with the other schools in the trust, the City Council and other organisations in the local area to continue to support and care for our young people and their families as best we can in these challenging circumstances. It is vital that we all work together to follow the government's advice to protect the most vulnerable people in our society.

Yours faithfully

Alison Young

Head Teacher

List of sectors where workers are critical to the COVID-19 response

This is based on the government guidance published on 19 March 2020:

<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 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 can attend school from Monday 23 March.

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.

Further advice

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

If the school your children usually attend is closed then the government advises you should contact your local authority, who will seek to redirect you to a local school in your area that your child, or children, can attend.