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## COVID-19

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Dear parents and carers,

The Department for Education has issued guidance today for schools and colleges on maintaining educational provision during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools and educational settings have a key role to play, alongside other partners, in meeting our priority to preserve life, prevent spread of infection and keep critical services going. We are working together to coordinate our response to the pandemic.

The guidance makes it clear that where children can safely stay at home they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. This is particularly important for children and young people who attend special schools who may have underlying conditions which increase their vulnerability to infection.

We are being asked by Government to continue to provide care for a limited number of children including children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

The guidance published includes 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. Clearly for special schools the vast majority, if not all pupils meet these last criteria.

Parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response may need support from schools and educational settings and we are working hard to provide that support wherever possible. Many parents in this category will be able to keep their children at home. Where children can be safely cared for at home they should be.

For those who cannot keep children safely at home and who work in one of the critical sectors listed below, your children will be prioritised for care provision.

However, it may not be possible to provide this in your child's usual special school, as inevitably school staff will also be impacted by the virus and our shared priority is to keep children safe and prevent the spread of the virus.

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 care:

- Health and social care
- Education and childcare
- 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
- Food and other necessary goods
- Public safety and national security
- Transport
- Utilities, communication and financial services

Further guidance on key workers can be found in the following link:

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

The underlying health vulnerabilities of pupils and availability of suitably trained staff mean that the care that can be provided to children and young people who attend special schools will be limited. In the event of a special school not being able to provide care on site which keeps children safe they may need to close. If this happens special schools will write to parent/carers to plan for any special arrangements that may need to be made in order to care for those children who cannot be cared for safely at home without support. In a few cases there may be a delay while these arrangements are identified. We thank you for your patience and understanding during this period.

Yours sincerely



Dr Gabrielle Stacey

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