

Dear Early Years and Childcare Providers,

Well this new year and new term has started with a phenomenally challenging week for the early years and childcare sector, both nationally and in Kent. Thank you to the very many of you who have been in touch with us in various ways to express how you are feeling about everything, raising issues and asking questions. As I have said to you in my communications already this week, we do strongly empathise with your position and responses and are continuing to regularly press the Department for Education directly, and also the Local Government Association, for further information and guidance, in which context we are also in regular contact with KCC in relation to funding for this term particularly. We will absolutely bring you any further information and guidance immediately we are able. To reiterate, please do continue to send your questions to us via established routes.

I would like to thank you for your forbearance and resilience and to reassure you that we will continue to do everything we can do to support you through this time.

Although there are not a huge number of government update links in our first Blog of 2021, we have provided a range of what we think is important and useful information below them. Please take time to scroll through the email to ensure you see all the information, which we hope will be helpful to you.

Our ongoing thanks for all that you do and continued plea for you to look after yourselves and those around you, under the most difficult of circumstances.

Yours

Alex Gamby

Updates for the Sector:

[Critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings](#) 31 December 2020

Change made: added those whose work is critical to EU Transition to the list of critical workers.

[If you need to self-isolate or cannot attend work due to coronavirus](#) 31 December 2020

Guidance for employers and workers on work absences due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

Change made: First published.

[Childcare providers: telling Ofsted about significant events](#) First Published: 4 January 2021

From the end of January 2021, childminders, nurseries and all other childcare providers must use an online notification form to inform Ofsted of significant events.

[Check which employees you can put on furlough to use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) 5 January 2021

Change made: Information about if your employee is unable to work because they have caring responsibilities resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) has been updated.

If your employee's health has been affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) or any other conditions

Your employee is eligible for the grant and can be furloughed, if they are unable to work, including from home or working reduced hours because they:

- are clinically extremely vulnerable, or at the highest risk of severe illness from coronavirus and following [public health guidance](#)
- have caring responsibilities resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19), such as caring for children who are at home as a result of school and childcare facilities closing, or caring for a vulnerable individual in their household.

[COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities](#) 5

January 2021

Change made: Updated to reflect 4 January announcement of national lockdown for all England.

Please also note that Out of School guidance had been updated on 31 December; however the national lockdown has superseded this information.

Updates for Families:

[COVID-19 vaccination: women of childbearing age, currently pregnant or breastfeeding](#) 31 December 2020

Information for all women of childbearing age, those currently pregnant or breastfeeding on coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination. Change made: Added more information about COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

[National lockdown: Stay at Home](#) 6 January 2021

Change made: Updated Guidance.

Guidance around childcare states:

There are several ways that parents and carers can continue to access childcare:

- Early years settings (including nurseries and childminders) remain open
- Childminders should continue to allow children to attend as normal except for school-aged children. Childminders caring for school-aged children (including reception children) should only admit [vulnerable children](#) and children of critical workers
- [Vulnerable children and children of critical workers](#) can continue to use registered childcare, childminders, and other childcare activities (including wraparound care)
- parents are able to form a childcare bubble with one other household for the purposes of informal childcare, where the child is under 14. This is mainly to enable parents to work, and must not be used to enable social contact between adults
- Some households will also be able to benefit from being in a support bubble
- Nannies will be able to continue to provide services, including in the home.

Other Relevant Updates and Information:

Symptom-free COVID-19 testing for Key Workers and their Families

Kent County Council has launched a symptom-free testing scheme for key workers and their families across the County from 4 January 2021. The test uses a lateral flow device and can detect in 30 minutes whether an individual has the COVID-19 virus. Any key worker and members of their family can book a test. Further test centres will be coming online as the scheme is rolled out. A letter from Public Health England with further information which can be distributed to staff can be accessed via:

https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/116851/Symptom-free-COVID-19-testing-letter-31-December-2020.pdf

To book a test, please follow this link: <https://kcc.healthit.org.uk/covbook/home>

Covid-19 Immunisation Programme

Some providers have asked if and when they might have priority access to the Covid-19 Immunisation Programme. Eligibility has been determined nationally by the Advisory Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, and detailed in the Green Book, which is effectively government policy.

Links are here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a>

The priority groups for vaccination advised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation are shown on page eight.

This is what the NHS is putting into practice locally.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

Earlier this week we wrote to you regarding the Government's position on Early Education Funding this term. Please be aware that providers mainly or 100% funded from FEE can access the CJRS as described below.

Providers should note that the guidance on [Early Years providers' access to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme \(CJRS\)](#) has been updated to reflect this approach to funding in the spring term, to take account of the position of any providers who see reductions in entitlements funding as a result.

In the spring term 2021, local authorities' funding to providers should return to the normal approach of funding on the number of entitlement hours delivered. The following guidance is relevant to EY providers being funded on this basis.

We recognise that many early years providers rely on a mix of DSG funding and other income streams such as parental fees. Where DSG funding has reduced, or

non-public income has ceased or reduced, it may be appropriate for providers to seek support from the CJRS to furlough staff. Providers should only furlough employees if they meet the following conditions:

- the employee works in an area of business where services are temporarily not required and whose salary is not covered by public funding
- the employee would otherwise be made redundant or laid off
- the employee is not involved in delivering provision that has already been funded
- the employee is not required to deliver provision for an attending child
- the grant from CJRS would not duplicate other public grants received and would not lead to financial reserves being created.

If it is difficult to distinguish whether staff are funded through continuing public funding, for the purposes of meeting the first 3 conditions listed above, then the total proportion of staff (based on gross payroll) that are retained (for example, not furloughed) should, as a minimum, be equivalent to the continuing DSG funding, as a proportion of all income that the provider usually receives. For example, if the current DSG funding is equivalent to 25% of normal total income, then this should be the proportion of staff (based on gross payroll) that could not be furloughed.

Where providers consider furloughing staff, they should ensure that they take a fair and reasonable approach to part-time, sessional and temporary staff, reflective of good HR practice and legal requirements.

We would expect nurseries and childminders to bring staff off furlough and back to work as demand increases. In practice this will mean that, for example, if they have furloughed 6 members of staff, and they need 3 back at work in order to meet demand for childcare, then they should bring 3 staff off furlough and back to work, and reduce their claim on the CJRS accordingly.

Support for Children of Key Workers and School Opening Times

Schools have received two letters from David Adams, KCC Interim Director of Education this week. The following is an excerpt from one of them for your information:

Whilst we understand that schools are trying to restrict numbers of pupils accessing the school at this time to support the fight to reduce transmission of the virus, I need again to clarify the DfE guidance on provision for key workers. This does not stipulate that both parents must be key workers. Therefore, I ask that if you are placing such restrictions on families accessing your school, please reconsider this.

Additionally, we have been informed that a number of schools have adjusted the timing of the school day, thereby restricting the time supporting key worker children which is impacting on staff in other schools, on teachers delivering remote learning, and on partner agencies, particularly the NHS. I request that you consider this when establishing your provision. Wraparound provision, including before and after school clubs, can continue to operate in all primary schools; for those primary schools within the contingency framework area attendance is restricted to children of critical

workers and vulnerable children until the 18 January. Whilst schools are not required to continue to operate these provisions, both we and the DfE would ask schools consider the implications for parents who are critical workers and the impact on vulnerable children if these provisions are to cease and encourage provisions to continue where schools are able to safely operate for those that need them.

The latest DfE guidance regarding Key Workers can be found here: [children of critical workers](#).

DfE Update to the Local Authority

Please see the extract below from the DfE to local authorities in relation to data collection:

*Before Christmas, we wrote to inform you that we would be reducing the frequency of the local authority early years data collection from weekly to fortnightly with effect from 7 January. At the time of that decision, we felt that the national situation was stable enough for us to make the change. Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 4 January of a new national lockdown, we now find ourselves in a different position. **After careful consideration we have decided that we need to return to a weekly collection while the current national COVID restrictions are in place, with immediate effect.** We have no intention of resuming the twice-weekly collection of the previous national lockdown period.*

*We know that this will be frustrating for some of you and that it will cause additional work. However, with the new lockdown in place, **it is essential that we have timely data to enable us to monitor supply, demand and resulting sufficiency of childcare places closely, and to identify emerging risks and issues as a result of the current lockdown.***