



**Children, Young People and
Education Directorate**

Sessions House
County Hall
MAIDSTONE
Kent ME14 1XQ

Phone: (03000) 416991
Ask for: Matt Dunkley
Email: matt.dunkley@kent.gov.uk

Date: 20 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you to all of you and your staff for the magnificent response so far to the national crisis and the ask made of you in the coming weeks by central government announced this morning.

Apologies for another detailed letter but I'm sure you can appreciate the situation in respect of how schools maintain education for specific cohorts of children is constantly evolving and we need to ensure there is as much consistency across the County as possible.

Earlier today, Government released more information on Key Workers and vulnerable learners along with a document providing answers to questions from parents. We expect all schools to adhere to that guidance when assessing the numbers of pupils who wish to attend school from Monday 23rd March.

The expectation will be that all schools are open to accept qualifying pupils on Monday unless they have made specific arrangements with partner schools to operate an educational hub. We do know that this will be challenging for some of you. Whilst known numbers of pupils who wish to attend your school may be low, we advise that you ensure there are adequate staff on site to meet demand, should parents of eligible children choose to send their children to your setting without prior notice.

It would be advisable that even if your school is closed, there is a small staff presence on site for at least Monday and Tuesday to ensure pupils, who may not be aware of alternative arrangements try to access the school site, are supported appropriately.

If you are planning to be closed on Monday with no alternative arrangements for pupils in place, please can you contact your Area Education Officer as soon as possible. You should be aware that we will be providing guidance to parents on the KCC website advising them of the action they should take should their child be eligible to attend school but cannot access a place.

We have heard that a number of schools are trying to restrict numbers of pupils attending, by employing the rule that only families where both parents are Key Workers are able to attend school. This is not in line with Government guidance and schools should ensure that any child who has at least one parent who is a Key Worker has the offer of school provision going forward. Please also ensure that provision is always made available for those vulnerable learners that require it.

Yesterday we wrote to you requesting completion of an online questionnaire that captures details of whether or not you would be open and how many children you might be expecting to work with. To date only 160 responses have been received. It is essential your questionnaire response is submitted ASAP, to support the Authority in planning support to schools. Therefore, if you haven't already done so, please can you complete the questionnaire which can be found here:

www.kent.gov.uk/schoolscovid19form

Finally, most schools have now registered onto the Kent Closure website. This is a free service that provides two functions. Firstly, when a school is notifying a closure, part closure or a re-opening, it increases the reach of the message to parents and staff. Secondly, it provided essential statistical information, of the type the Government asks from us during any emergency.

However, throughout this period of significant disruption due to the COVID-19 outbreak, use of the website has been extremely limited, leaving the Local Authority with no clear indication of exactly how many schools have been affected enough to need to alter their usual opening arrangements.

Therefore, from Monday 23rd March, please can you ensure that you enter your school's status onto the website. In line with the latest Government advice, we anticipate the majority of schools will be updating their status to partially open, as they maintain services only for vulnerable learners and children of Key Workers. However, some will no doubt feel that due to lack of available staff, they may need to close entirely and make alternative arrangements for their students who wish to continue to attend school.

Within the website there is the ability to enter a narrative to explain the arrangements for each school. We request you complete that section, so we all have a clear understanding of what each school is offering.

We understand this is another administrative task for a school leader to undertake in this very difficult time, but the process is quick and straightforward and will be of huge benefit to stakeholders as we work to support schools as much as possible.

A basic user guide is appended to this letter to ensure every school can utilise this system. The website can be accessed via this link, www.kentclosures.co.uk.

As I have previously said, I really do appreciate all of your efforts during this extraordinary time and thank you for your continued co-operation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Dunkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Matt Dunkley CBE
Corporate Director
Children, Young People and Education