

Schools arrangements – January 2021

The arrangements for schools and early learning and childcare settings opening in January 2021 have changed. Children's Services central staff have met with Head Teachers and Union Representatives to prepare the arrangements which best meet local needs, in line with Scottish Government guidance published yesterday.

Parents and carers, pupils and staff have been contacted with information on the changes to arrangements for schools and early learning and childcare settings opening in January 2021.

These arrangements are being put in place as a precautionary measure in light of the latest developments in the path of the virus. A range of previously published evidence has made clear that schools are not high risk environments when the appropriate mitigations and safety measures are implemented.

However, controlling measures of community transmission plays an important role in ensuring that schools can stay safe, open and welcoming. These exceptional arrangements are therefore intended to ensure sufficient time to assess the impacts of the festive period on community transmission in light of a new strain of the virus having emerged, prior to the full reopening of schools.

School Transport will be running as normal but this will only be for those pupils who have been identified as entitled to receive in-school childcare and wellbeing support and in-school remote learning.

Parents and carers of children and young people entitled to attend early learning and childcare or school settings have been informed of this by letter or email from their child's school today.

Parents can now apply to ascertain whether they are classified as a key worker and whether their child would be entitled to attend their school or early learning and childcare setting on Thursday 7th and Friday 8th January for childcare and wellbeing support. Also from Monday 11th to 15th January for in-school remote learning while the majority of pupils will be undertaking this at home.

Parents can complete an application form online, and should provide as much information as possible. The application form can be found here:

<https://www.shetland.gov.uk/schools/information-key-workers-january-2021/1>

The application process will open from tomorrow, Wednesday 23rd December at 9am, and will close on Wednesday 30th December 2020 at 3pm. Families where there is one parent working from home will not be eligible for keyworker status. Applying for your child to attend school between Thursday 7th and Friday 15th January 2021 should be a last resort after all other options have been exhausted.

Families will be informed of the outcome of their application as soon as possible after Wednesday 30th December 2020.

The definition of key workers is those in posts which ensure that essential services can be delivered and cover tasks within the local community which support the vulnerable and aid community resilience. To support prioritisation of places, there are three categories of key worker:

- Category 1 – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning for other category 1 staff.
- Category 2 – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.
- Category 3 – All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to COVID-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

For the avoidance of doubt, during these phased reopening arrangements we would expect that all school staff and staff providing day care of children's services, including early learning and childcare, who are required to attend their work in person would qualify as category 1 or 2 key workers. Although, school staff working from home will not qualify for key worker status.

Helen Budge, Director of Children's Services said: "Staff across the Council have worked well together in a short space of time to enable this information to be sent out to everyone ahead of the schools closing for the Christmas break today. I am pleased also to confirm the arrangements for the start of next term.

"The In-Service day on Wednesday 6th January will continue as planned, with staff attending mainly virtually.

"Schools and early learning and childcare settings will open for childcare and wellbeing support for vulnerable children and children of key workers on Thursday 7th January. All other children and young people will have their Christmas holidays extended to include Thursday 7th and Friday 8th January 2021.

"There will be remote learning for all children and young people from Monday 11th January to Friday 15th January 2021. This will be undertaken in school for vulnerable children and children of key workers.

"The aim is for schools and early learning and childcare settings to re-open to all children and young people from Monday 18th January but this is dependent on the virus being under control."