



20 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

School closure, and maintaining educational provision

Thank you all for your support, kind words of encouragement and thanks (including a much needed jar of coffee!) that you have all given the staff here at Eltham Church of England Primary School this week. It has been appreciated and welcome in this difficult time for us all.

In this spirit of togetherness and understanding, and most importantly to ensure that we are all acting and making decisions in line with the government's guidance on social distancing, household isolation and self-isolation, I am writing to respond to the guidance last night on maintaining a provision at school for vulnerable children and those whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response.

I must be clear from the beginning that we are being asked to make decisions that are in line with the principles of the government's message:

"If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. ... 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"

This is part of the government's national strategy of social distancing, and as such should be our first consideration.

Last night the government produced a list of those who schools have been asked to open for to provide a level of care so that their parents can continue to provide a service that is "critical to the Covid-19 response".

- Health and social care
- Key public services
- Local and national government
- Food and necessary goods
- Public safety and national security
- Transport
- Utilities, communication and financial services

A full explanation of these roles are found following the link below:

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

It is important to note that there are key principles attached to the list:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support ... provision will be available for them
3. Parents should not rely on childcare for those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category ...
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.
5. Residential special schools ... and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

Lastly, the guidance highlights that:

“If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed, **and you cannot keep your child safe at home** then your children will be prioritised”

The spirit of the guidance is the expectation that if there is someone at home (including a recognition that you might be listed in the critical sector) and **you can safely care for your child at home; then under the social distancing guidance – you should do so.**

If you believe that you fall within the critical categories the guidance is that:

“(You) should confirm with (your) employer that, based on (your) business continuity arrangements, that (your) specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.”

That is to say that the emergency provision is not a statutory requirement, but a resource and help as part of a national response.

This is a very different type of provision than schools usually provide; for these children it will be about **care and not education**. This is about keeping children safe and allowing key workers to go to work and care for the sick, or to keep food supply chains moving.

Furthermore, all of the above is subject to the school’s ongoing risk assessment of being able to provide the staffing levels required to provide such a service. Being that they, and their families, are also at the same risk as us all in contracting the virus!

Therefore, I am planning the provision in the following three phase approach:

- Next two weeks
- Easter Holidays
- The Summer Term

For next week, If you feel that your work is within these categories **and** you are unable to ensure the safety of your child, please establish with your employer that your role is critical and email the school on sao1@elthamce.greenwich.sch.uk with:

- Your name
- Your child’s name and class
- Your role and employer
- **Contact details of your employer and line manager**
- Any other adult in the house’s role and employer
- The days (next week) on which you are unable to ensure safe keeping of your child
- Contact email and telephone number

We will then use this information to be able to prioritise the need against the level of staffing that is available. Given the short timescale that has been given to respond to the guidance, we will be working throughout today to organise the provision and organisation and will write to those identified directly in due course to confirm arrangements next week. Furthermore, if your circumstances change in the coming weeks please contact me via sao1@elthamce.greenwich.sch.uk .

May I finish by repeating my thanks for your support in this unprecedented time. Also reiterating that all of these decisions are based on the overarching principle of social distancing which the government once again implored us to respect and follow. I can confirm that our staff are being very supportive of the strategies we are putting in place and we have the full support of the Governing Body

With very best wishes,

Matthew Bulpitt
Headteacher

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)