



Champions for children and families

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Dear Parent,

Thank you for the support you continue to show to school colleagues and for all the efforts you have made through the pandemic so far. The national lockdown that came into effect on Tuesday 5 January 2021 requires us all to once again do our part to reduce the spread of the coronavirus so that our frontline health services can treat those who need urgent care. The best way we can do that is to stay home and reduce the number of contacts we and our children have with others.

Schools have been asked to reduce the number of pupils in attendance while recognising that not being in school brings other challenges for children and increases the complexity of family life. There are many sources of support for you, including some helpful ideas from the [NSPCC](#) which you may find useful. Within [national guidance](#) issued late on Thursday 7 January, the Department for Education is explicit that should you wish to not send your child into school when their classroom is open, then schools will authorise that absence if you advise them of your decision.

Schools which normally run early years classes (Foundation Stage) or an on-site nursery are expected to run those classes as far as they are safely able to do so. This is alongside the ability for other nurseries and childminders to care for pre-school age children only.

For children and young people in reception years and older, the guidance sets out the changes to education that is required during the lockdown period. This guidance sets out a significant balancing act for schools and the council is supporting all schools to establish the operational plan that is right for them in light of this national guidance. A key element of provision will be an active remote learning programme which will be published by each school on their website and scrutinised by Ofsted.

We are sharing a set of common principles (attached to this letter) which underpins our advice to schools so that you can understand the context of local decisions that your school is making.

To conclude, during this lockdown period we would urge you to comply with all elements of guidance designed to help us all overcome this pandemic.

Stay home, protect the NHS and save lives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Carroll'.

Cllr Stuart Carroll
Chairman of Cabinet,
Adult Social Care, Children's Services,
Health and Mental Health RBWM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. McDaniel'.

Kevin McDaniel
Director of Children's Services

Common principles to support national guidance in the Royal Borough

There are some things that schools *must* do:

- Operate a safe environment for staff, pupils and visitors in line with Covid-19 controls and set out in their risk assessment.
- Provide remote learning for pupils who are not attending the site, and there is clear national guidance on what constitutes suitable remote support.
- Offer appropriate provision for pupils with education, health and care plans through onsite learning.
- Respect parental wishes for children to not attend in person learning due to Covid-19 anxieties.
- Not provide onsite learning for pupils with no authorised reason to attend.
- Support the access to food for those pupils eligible for free school meals based on low income. Schools may use local catering provision or the Department for Education's national voucher scheme which is in the process of restarting.

There are some things that schools *should* do:

- Offer on-site education for vulnerable pupils. There is guidance about a range of vulnerabilities and schools should discuss with parents how a pupil can best access education.
- Support pupils to access remote learning effectively through national and local schemes, including the redeployment of school equipment as necessary. Ultimately, schools can allow these pupils to attend onsite learning.
- Offer on-site education for the children of critical workers. There is an [updated definition of critical workers](#).

It is foreseeable that due to reasons including illness and isolation resulting from the pandemic, schools will need to prioritise how their resources are allocated in order to provide a safe provision.

The local advice to support such decisions is:

- Maintain the remote learning offer as most pupils will be working away from site.
- Maintain safe early years learning as those pupils will struggle the most to be engaged with remote activities.
- Reduce the provision of a specific activity to some pupils in order to provide sufficient education to all pupils.
- Limit onsite attendance and we advise the following priority in discussion with parents/carers to seek volunteers first:
 - a. Vulnerable children who need to be in school
 - b. Pupils with an EHCP plan whose parent wants them to attend school
 - c. Pupils of critical workers where there are no non-critical worker adults able to keep them at home
 - d. Pupils who cannot access sufficient remote learning
 - e. Pupils of critical workers where not all adults at home are critical workers.
- Moving to a rota system is not recommended in the DfE guidance but represents a last resort in the event of a sustained resource shortage.