

Tuesday 24 March 2020

School places for children of critical workers

The Government is today contacting the first wave of critical workers necessary to protect the Island during this unprecedented time to ensure that their children, along with a group of the most vulnerable children, can attend a childminder, nursery or school during the period of school closures. There has been close liaison with representatives of childminders, the nursery sector and all schools to facilitate this arrangement.

The Government has created an initial list of critical workers who are focused on health and care, formal emergency response, public protection, social work and residential childcare.

At the same time, we're working with other organisations to establish a wider understanding of the critical workers on the Island. This includes ensuring we have clarity of the most critical employees across our supply chains and food retailers, home care and personal support for the vulnerable, essential Island infrastructure and safety, as well as maintaining our air and ferry links. The list will be kept under regular review to respond to any change in requirements for critical workers.

Current advice from the Medical Officer for Health means that schools are being asked to continue to provide care for the designated children of critical workers from school nursery to Year 8, and vulnerable children from school nursery to Year 13. These arrangements will commence from midday today Tuesday, 24 March where schools are already fully prepared; and for all other schools from Wednesday, 25 March. This decision will be kept under regular review in the light of ongoing public health advice.

Children of critical workers in Year 9 and above are not included in this plan, as their age allows for their parents/carers to find alternative solutions for them. However, consideration will be given to exceptional cases.

The arrangements for childminders and children in private nursery settings are still being finalised, but it is expected that they will be introduced from Wednesday, 25 March.

In a joint statement Education Minister, Senator Tracey Vallois and Children's Minister, Senator Sam Mézec said: "Since the closure of schools was announced last week, the Government has been working hard to put in place alternative arrangements for critical staff and the most vulnerable children.

"We have considered which services and staff are most critical to the Island's response to COVID-19, alongside the need to ensure that childminders, nurseries and schools can follow effective social distancing.

"To achieve this, we have prioritised the first phase of workers as presently being most critical to our response and are, therefore, offering places for their children. These categories of critical worker will, of course, be kept under regular review.

"Where workers are undertaking roles critical to the COVID-19 response, and cannot look after their child or children at home or make alternative arrangements, the Government is now able to provide a limited number of places in the most relevant setting.

"Our priority is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people during this time, alongside the need to keep the Island's critical personnel available for work. As well as the children of critical workers, we have also been considering the needs of those children with the greatest vulnerabilities. These children will also be offered additional support, including a place at a nursery or school where practicable.

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Notes to Editors

1. For further information, please contact the press office on 01534 440430 or pressoffice@gov.je