

## ST. JOSEPH’S PRIMARY SCHOOL

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| **Principal: Mrs I Porter BEd MEd CCET**  **E mail:** [**iporter336@c2kni.net**](mailto:iporter336@c2kni.net)  **Telephone: 02844 841546** |  | **45 BALLYCRUTTLE RD DOWNPATRICK**  **CO. DOWN**  **BT30 7EL** |

27th  March 2020

I***mportant Update***

Dear Parents / Carers,

**Ref: Supporting Children of Key Workers and vulnerable children**

As Principal I am acutely aware of the current crisis everyone is facing and will endeavour to do all in my power to help ensure the health and safety of the pupils and staff in our settings and wider communities. I am pastorally keen to support the Minister’s request re the availability of childcare facilities for key workers and vulnerable children in this crisis. Mr Weir in a letter to schools stated ***“We need to ensure that critical workers are able to continue to do their important roles, therefore I will seek to ensure that the education sector can continue to provide assistance for as long as possible. However I would reemphasise the message I have previously stated; that parents / carers should only send children to an educational setting if there are no other viable arrangements, schools and preschools should be open to vulnerable children or those who have at least one parent/carer who is a key/critical in relation to dealing with the Covid-19 response, and all schools and pre-schools must ensure stringent social distancing rules are in place at all times.”***

It is worth bearing in mind that we have been instructed to close to minimise the risk of infection transfer at a time of national and global crisis. It is essential, therefore, that we are still able to comply with this ultimate reason for closure. Please remember that the safest place for your child is at home and you should only request a place if all other options have been exhausted. The N.I. Executive have also asked parents to keep their children at home wherever possible. The fewer children in school, the lower the risk that the virus will spread and infect the vulnerable individuals in our society.

Consequently, we will only be able to offer places for childcare based on capacity and in line with PHA social distancing guidance. To inform that decision, we need to be able to manage who can access the care, otherwise the original reason for closure of our school becomes meaningless. In practice, this may mean we are not able to safely provide the offer of childcare depending on sufficient staffing and safeguarding measures.

Once key information has been gathered and decisions made, only families with an offer of a place (when all other avenues have been perused) should attend, and they should only do so when directed to by us. It could potentially be impossible to accept the number of families who may apply for such provision, given the extensive nature of the Minister’s key worker list.

To support us and help us inevitably to support those most in need and yet still safeguard appropriately, we request that, if you request this provision, you contact the Principal with the information required in the form below. Before doing so, please consider the current guidance. ***Please be aware, guidance may alter on a daily basis, if we receive more specific updates from the Education Minister***

Please do not assume that we will be open as this will be dependent on availability of staff and provision being put in place by the Department of Education to ensure PHA regulations are met in the current crisis.

Before contacting us, please pay particular attention to the following points. We will not be able to operate a ‘normal’ school day. There will be no teaching. We are already operating with a significant reduction in staffing and this will probably continue to get worse over time.

**Points to consider**

A list of key workers, issued by the Department of Education is listed overleaf. Only children with parents working as key workers and out at work at the same time should consider requesting care. In single parent families, the individual parent MUST be a key worker.

If possible, alternative childcare arrangements should be sought before deciding to send your child. For example, with other family members, friends etc. Please try and use our care as a last resort. This is to try and limit the number of children and adults together in a small space in line with recent social distancing guidance.

Children attending will be required to wear their uniform. They should not bring bags or books as this creates potential for cross contamination. Please be advised that we will be performing childcare duties, rather than teaching, as not all teachers are currently available to teach specific year groups and teachers must also be available to prepare online/remote learning. At this point in time a packed lunch would be required to be sent in with your child each day.

We would ask that you pay attention to the points outlined above before requesting childcare. To minimize the spread of the virus, it is essential that we keep the number of children and staff in our setting as low as possible. Therefore, please do not make this request unless it is a last resort. Obviously, it goes without saying, if your only option is to request our care, we will look after them in order to support you in your important role.

These are challenging times and we greatly value the work that everyone is doing to limit the long term impact of this potentially devastating virus. This situation is continually developing and we will endeavour to keep you informed of any future changes as promptly as possible.

We keep you all in our thoughts and prayers.

Yours sincerely,

Imelda Porter

Principal

Key Worker List as identified by the Education Minister: The list is not prescriptive. However, to give some guidance the following outlines the broad categories of what would be defined as a key worker:

• Health and Social Care. This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, home carers and staff required to maintain our health and social care sector;

• Education and childcare. This includes pre-school and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who will remain active during the Covid-19 response;

• Public safety and national security. This includes civilians and officers in the police (including key contractors), Fire and Rescue Service, prison service and other national security roles;

• Transport. This will include those keeping air, water, road and rail transport modes operating during the Covid-19 response;

• Utilities and Communication. This includes staff needed for oil, gas, electricity and water (including sewage) and primary industry supplies, to continue during the Covid-19 response, as well as key staff in telecommunications, post and delivery, services and waste disposal;

• Food and other necessary goods. This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution and sale, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (e.g hygiene, medical etc);

• Other workers essential to delivering key public services;

• Key national and local government including those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the Covid-19 response.

The children of these key workers who are covered are children up to the end of Year 10 as well as our vulnerable children. Vulnerable children is defined currently as those children who are in need of protection, or in need, as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995. Further guidance on this is attached.

Schools are, therefore, being asked to continue to provide supervised education for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

For the purpose of this guidance, the term vulnerable encompasses those children who are in need of protection, or in need, as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995. Children and young people in need may include those:

• Receiving support from Health & Social Services including family support, child protection and looked after children services

• Who are young carers

• Subject to paramilitary threat

• Whose parents have mental health problems

• Whose parents have alcohol and drug addictions

• Affected by domestic violence

• On the Child Protection Register

• With statements of special education needs

• Accessing EOTAS

• Accessing Education Nurture Units

• With emerging and diagnosed mental health needs

• Who are homeless

**APPLICATION FOR CHILDCARE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN OF KEY WORKERS**

Please email your response to [iporter336@c2kni.net](mailto:iporter336@c2kni.net) by 4:00 pm Friday 27th March, with the following information included:

**Children’s Names:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**KEY WORKER ROLES**

Parent One – Name and Role: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Parent Two – Name and Role: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Alternatively, please confirm your key worker role as a single parent – Name and Role:

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If possible, please note any particular considerations the school should be aware of if we are in a position where we need to manage who can access this offer of childcare support.

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**We STRONGLY underline the fact that, due to staff shortages, this provision will most likely not be in place for Monday 30th March. Please provide us with up-to-date contact details, particularly if grandparents can no longer be listed as one of the priority contacts during this period.**

Contact Details: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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