

Coronavirus: FAQs for school and college leaders 20 March 2020

These FAQs are intended to be read alongside the Department for Education's [Guidance for schools, colleges and local authorities on maintaining educational provision](#), and the accompanying [information for parents and carers](#), both published Friday 20 March. They are an attempt to capture the **most urgent questions** school and college leaders are currently asking, and to answer them to the best of our knowledge.

Some of these answers are based on discussions with the DfE, as well as the detail in the two documents above. They are provided here to enable school and college leaders to plan and prepare as best they can in this unprecedented time. If the thinking around anything here changes, we will inform members as soon as possible.

We know that you have many other questions which aren't included here. We will produce further FAQs as more information becomes available.

Please email coronavirus@ascl.org.uk with further questions, and we'll attempt to find and share answers to these as soon as we can.

What will be expected of schools next week?

Schools are being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children if they possibly can. These are children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

If it's impossible for schools open in this way from Monday, the expectation is that they will do so as soon as it is possible. Schools should look to their local authority (LA) for support if necessary, and to let their LA know if they don't think it will be possible to open at all.

How have critical workers been defined?

The full list of critical workers, as defined by the government for this purpose, is included in their guidance. It includes people working in key roles (importantly, not *all* roles) in health and social care; education and childcare (including nursery and teaching staff); key public services; local and national government; food and other necessary goods; public safety and national security; transport; and utilities, communication and financial services.

Do both parents need to be critical workers for their child to be offered a school place?

No. Children with at least one parent or carer who are identified as critical workers by the government have been told that they can send their children to school if required.

How will schools be expected to identify children of key workers?

There is no advice on this in the DfE document. ASCL has produced a [short guidance paper](#) with a suggested quick method of doing this using an online form or survey.

How have ‘vulnerable children’ been defined?

The DfE states that ‘vulnerable children’ includes children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, ‘looked after’ children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

However, their guidance also makes it clear that they know that schools will also want to support other children facing social difficulties, and that they will support headteachers to do so.

School and college leaders should therefore use their professional judgement, and their deep knowledge and understanding of their own communities, to offer places to children who they think will be particularly vulnerable if they are not at school for an extended period – even if they are not ‘officially’ classed as vulnerable.

Leaders should, however, be mindful of the overall aim of keeping children at home as far as possible, with children only being in school if they need to be so in order for their parents to do their critical jobs, or for their own safety.

Will all children eligible for free school meals be classified as ‘vulnerable’?

No. This would lead to too many children being in school. This needs to be limited both for public health reasons and to give schools the best chance to continue to provide limited provision for those children who most urgently need this.

Will parents/carers be able to decline an offered school place?

Yes. Parents/carers can choose not to take up the offer of a school place if they would prefer their child to stay at home – and the government advice encourages them to care for their children at home if they can.

It is expected, therefore, that only a proportion of children eligible to be offered a school place will actually take up that offer.

For vulnerable children, the child’s social worker will work with parents/carers to assess the best option for the child.

What happens if the number of pupils in my school who are eligible for a school place, and wish to accept this, exceeds the number we feel we can safely look after with the staff available?

Schools in this position are being asked to liaise with their Local Authority, to try to find places for some children in other schools.

What about special schools – many of which will have up to 100% of their pupils in one or both of these categories?

At the moment, the guidance to parents says that the government is encouraging LAs to keep open both residential special schools and residential specialist colleges wherever possible, as well as the majority of day special schools and colleges. They say that this will be achieved, where necessary, by moving staff into these settings to avoid closure.

Special schools, colleges and local authorities are being advised to make case-by-case basis assessments of the health and safeguarding considerations of pupils and students on an EHCP. The government recognises that some children will be safer in an education provision, while others will be safer at home. They are trusting leaders and parents to make these decisions and will support them as required.

We also understand that more detailed specific guidance for special schools is being produced. We will, of course, share this with members as soon as it is published.

How will children who usually take buses get to school?

The DfE is “working with LAs to ensure that children can attend the best setting for them and will provide transport arrangements to support them”.

Will what happens next week continue under further notice?

Not necessarily. Government recognises that schools and colleges are having to work incredibly quickly to ensure that provision continues for some children next week. If this situation continues for many weeks, it may be that a different long-term approach is required.

Local Authorities are being asked to coordinate provision across their local area. It’s possible that this may involve consolidating provision in a smaller number of schools. Local Authorities will work with schools to agree this longer-term approach.

Do we know any more about how exam grades will be determined?

We expect more information to be provided on this later today (Friday 20 March).