

Childcare and In-School Learning for Essential Workers

Some changes have been made to national and local guidance for Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and schools following the announcement by the First Minister on Monday 4 January 2021.

Schools and ELC settings will provide childcare on 7 and 8 January 2021 for children of essential workers and for children identified as vulnerable by Perth & Kinross Council's education or social work staff. From 11 January to at least 1 February 2021 learning in ELC settings and schools will be provided for this group.

For all other children and young people, the holiday period will be extended until 11 January 2021, and from 11 January to at least 1 February 2021 these children and young people will be required to learn at home.

The Scottish Government's guidance for school re-opening arrangements in January 2021 emphasises that "local authorities and schools should have regard to the overarching policy aim of these exceptional school closures, which is to reduce the number of children, young people and adults from different households interacting in- person within communities (including schools) as far as possible, in order to prevent COVID-related harms. If it is possible for children to be cared for safely and have their learning supported sufficiently well at home, that approach should be preferred."

Scottish Government Guidance on Essential Worker Categories

The definitions of essential workers agreed with local authorities previously during the pandemic will continue to apply. Whilst decisions will be taken at the local level, Scottish Government expect local criteria to include consideration of:

- Category 1 – Health and Care workers directly supporting the COVID-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning for other category 1 staff.
- Category 2 – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.

New Scottish Government additions from January 2021

In addition to the categories identified above, the Scottish Government added the following groups of staff to qualify as category 1 or 2 essential workers:

- All school staff and staff providing daycare of children's services, including childminders and early learning and childcare, who are required to attend their work in person. This includes staff working in the Independent Sector.
- All staff who are involved in delivering the COVID-19 vaccination programme
- All staff who are involved in supporting contact tracing

- All courts and tribunals staff and judiciary, and all legal professionals and jurors involved in court business.

Perth & Kinross Council - Essential Worker Criteria

In addition to Category 1 and 2 above, these additional essential workers met the criteria for Children's Activity Centres from March – August 2020, and continue to hold that status for this period of temporary lockdown.

- Burial and cremations staff
- Refuse collection staff
- Military staff involved in COVID-19 work
- Agriculture
- Food production
- Agriculture/food haulage
- Postal delivery
- Vector Aerospace employees supporting national infrastructure work
- RASAC (P&K)
- Agriculture and related supply chain/haulage
- Supply chain/logistics and distribution companies for food and drink businesses.
- Postal/courier/delivery workers
- 3rd sector organisations directly supporting social work/social care activities
- Companies supporting national infrastructure relevant to COVID-19 response and recovery (includes infrastructure supporting supply chains such as ports)

As part of the local flexibility for local authorities to determine the criteria for essential workers, it has also been agreed that the following posts are considered essential workers and are included in the criteria from 7 January 2021.

- Tayside Contracts and Mitie Staff providing services that support schools
- Transport contractors who keep roads clear during severe weather
- Essential food retailers.

These groups of staff will be eligible for childcare and in-school learning along with the groups of staff considered as Key Workers during the lockdown period.

Other Considerations

Only essential workers who cannot fulfil their critical functions when they are working remotely from home may qualify for childcare and in school learning provision.

If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.

Children can also be cared for at home by a non-shielding carer from another household. This could be a relative or friend, a nanny or babysitter. Such carers are also strongly advised to limit the number of households they provide childcare to in order to minimise the risk of transmission between households. Where possible this should be a single household.

We cannot designate whole workforces or entire groups of staff as key workers. Letters from employers indicating key worker status under UK government or other arrangements do not automatically confer eligibility under Perth & Kinross Council criteria.

Children and young people may be able to attend their own school, or ELC setting on the days that their parent(s) are required to be at work if all of the following apply:

1. Both parents are essential workers OR are a lone parent and an essential worker*, and
2. Both parents, or a lone parent, are required to attend their place of work (if an adult is working from home then children should stay at home) *and
3. No one else is available to provide childcare. If there is a relative or friend who can reasonably provide childcare through an informal essential childcare arrangement, this should be put in place. Informal essential childcare arrangements are permitted within Level 4 restrictions. Further information is available from the Parentclub website:

<https://www.parentclub.scot/topics/coronavirus>

*Exceptions apply

Scottish Government Advice for employers

The following advice is for employers who believe their employees may be key workers and are considering supporting them to request a space in school for their child during this exceptional period on that basis.

During this period of strict lockdown, employers should:

- only contact the relevant local authority to make the case for key worker designation for employees if it is a measure of last resort.
- think critically about what staff they consider to be essential workers, to ruthlessly prioritise those providing absolutely essential services to the public in these emergency times.
- revisit work with unions and workers to identify only the absolute minimum number of staff performing essential roles to deliver the COVID-19 response and provide basic, safe services.
- reduce in-person staffing levels to the lowest possible number required to maintain the production of essential goods.
- have discussions with staff to identify if they can access any appropriate alternative childcare or remote learning arrangements. This may include another parent/carer who is not an essential worker and is able to provide such support effectively from home. Alternative childcare arrangements may also include informal childcare or accessing a childminding service (which remain open to all children at present).

Parents who wish to apply for a place should contact their child's school or ELC setting.

There is an appeal process should the application for a place be refused by the school or ELC setting. A Review Group has been established which will consider all available information, including information from employers, and make a final decision on whether a

place is to be provided. Specific information about this process will be provided at the time if your application for a place is refused.

Please note, as this Review provides a right of appeal, Perth & Kinross Council's Complaints Procedure is not applicable (please see https://www.pkc.gov.uk/media/19043/Complaints-handling-procedure/pdf/2015989_complaints_procedure_FINAL).

If you have any queries that cannot be answered by your child's school, please contact:

ECSInformation@pkc.gov.uk