

11<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### **School Closure and Critical Worker School Places Policy**

All schools in England are currently closed for the majority of children until 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, with remote education being provided.

Empower Trust schools offer school places for vulnerable children and children of critical workers in the front line of the country's fight against Covid-19 who have no other available child care options. It is important to stress that the government's key message is: **Families should keep children at home if at all possible.**

In line with revised government advice, **every parents should act as though they or their child may have the virus.** To protect the safety of the children and school staff, **parents should only send their child to school if they absolutely need to attend a workplace.**

Parents should only apply to send their child to the critical worker places if their work is critical to the Covid-19 response and they have no other childcare option. The longer people refrain from social distancing the longer this crisis will continue.

Parents should not unnecessarily risk the safety and health of their children, other children attending the schools, their families and school staff.

Schools take every precaution to ensure children's safety and welfare whilst attending critical worker places. However, by the very nature of being in school with young children it is not possible to enforce social distancing - **children are safer at home with their families.**

Schools will do everything they can to support critical workers but, following risk assessments, schools may need to limit the available number of critical worker places due to staffing levels, facility restrictions or health and safety issues. The legal requirement to provide remote education for the majority of children who are unable to attend school due to the national closure, and to prioritise places for vulnerable children, will restrict the number of critical children schools can admit at this time.

If schools do not have the capacity to provide school places to meet all valid critical worker place applications, places will be allocated in the following priority order:

1. Children of primary healthcare workers, social workers and those working on COVID vaccination programmes
2. Children of secondary health care workers, those working in social settings and schools
3. Other critical workers

Within each priority, schools will prioritise the following additional considerations:

- a) Priority will be given to children in two-adult households where both adults are key workers and both need to attend a workplace, or single-parent households where the parent needs to attend a workplace.
- b) Children in two-adult households where at least one adult can work from home, or single parent households where the parent can work from home.

To ensure fairness, schools reserve the right to ask parents to demonstrate that they are critical workers by producing documentation such as a staff identity badge, a salary slip and/or a letter from their employer stating that their role is critical to the COVID response. Parents may also be asked to provide evidence to demonstrate that they need to attend a workplace to carry out their work. A waiting list will be maintained if the demand for places exceeds the school's capacity.

Government guidance states that, **to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus, parents should keep children at home if an adult is at home and it is possible to do so.** We realise that keeping children at home is not an easy option but, following government advice to protect themselves and others, everyone should act as though they or their children might have coronavirus.

Under government guidance, households with children under 14 can form a childcare bubble to allow one other household to provide informal child care between two households. Members of either household can provide childcare in a home or public place, including overnight care.