

## **Guidance on COVID-19 (C-19) Clusters**

### **Supporting Key Workers and vulnerable children**

The aim of this guidance is to provide strategic support to school and pre-school leaders on clustering as a means to provide a supervised, safe environment for the children of Key Workers and vulnerable children as per the Minister's statement of 20 March 2020. This service is only for those Key workers who are unable to find a viable alternative option to care for their children at home

For the purpose of C-19 Cluster schools, the term 'schools' refers to nursery schools, non-statutory pre-school education settings participating in the Pre-School Education Programme, primary schools, post-primary and special schools.

It is acknowledged that many schools are already working individually or collaboratively with neighbouring schools and settings to provide this essential service at this difficult time, and are also supporting the home learning arrangements for pupils. The Department would not wish to deter those of you content with your current single operation / collaborative approach to change this.

#### **Development of the Guidance**

A multi-disciplinary team (including but not exclusive to, Department of Education, Education Authority, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Controlled Schools Support Council, Education and Training Inspectorate) are developing detailed implementation guidance for clustering and a helpline for Key Workers and principals and leaders of schools and pre-schools is operational at (Tel: I&S)

The guidance should be read in conjunction with the DE FAQs for schools opening for children of Key workers document which is regularly updated.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/department-education-releases-covid-19-coronavirus>

This guidance is for those schools who wish to cluster who are not currently doing so. It should be emphasised that this approach is not about creating large hub schools or settings with large numbers of children or staff. Rather the intention is to ensure there are sustainable arrangements in place across the education estate to

provide a sufficient number of places for those Key workers who have no alternative. The Department will require schools to register their intentions and it will monitor the proposed and actual number of children and pupils on a daily basis.

The comments you have provided through daily returns to DE and district inspectors have been very helpful in drawing up this guidance which will be updated regularly based on your continued feedback and queries.

### **How might clustering work?**

A group of schools, for example, within a geographical location, an Area Learning Community or a Shared Education partnership, may come together to agree the use of the available premises to provide a cluster to be used for supervising children of Key workers and vulnerable children.

The cluster school should be a facility which is used by those parents who have no alternative child minding arrangements and are working in essential roles in the fight against COVID-19 / have vulnerable children. Pre-school educational settings are not suitable environments for older children. Definitions can be found at

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/department-education-releases-covid-19-coronavirus>

### **How many schools would form a C-19 Cluster?**

This will differ across localities.

The group of schools can be from one phase or cross-phase and can be cross-sectoral. Any reasonable configuration that works in the best interests of children is acceptable. If possible children from pre-school settings should be looked after in a primary or pre-school building.

They will also be supported by other schools in the area which have not had children of Key Workers attending to date.

The location of the C-19 Cluster schools may change depending on circumstances. It would be helpful if the school building had a range of facilities including, if possible, space for outdoor play.

The arrangements will be flexible depending on number of children requiring supervision and the number of staff available.

### **Once a 'group of C-19 Cluster schools' has been identified what happens next?**

A central liaison contact should be identified and register the C-19 Cluster with DE/EA. Details of how to register will be available on the DE website COVID-19 page.

Registering as a C-19 Cluster will provide the appropriate indemnity for schools and staff.

The employing authorities and DE will have governance responsibility. The chair of governors should be informed of the building being used in the cluster.

C-19 Clusters will, at the moment, operate during normal school hours. These arrangements may change according to the needs of key worker parents. For example, children may require supervision at weekends and during the holidays and this may be of particular importance at the Easter break which may coincide with the predicted peak infection period.

The C-19 Cluster schools will be supported by a **named link officer** from a multiagency team including, but not exclusive to EA, CCMS, ETI and CSSC staff. The link officer will be allocated on a locality basis and will work across sector and management type. The link officer will work flexibly and will their input will reflect the specific needs of the C-19 Cluster depending on the phase of development of that cluster.

## **C-19 Cluster school arrangements**

School leaders, including principals/playgroup leaders, vice-principals and senior teachers, from across the schools in the cluster should agree a leadership rota, perhaps on a weekly basis for who is the 'Leader in Charge' and may also wish to consider appointing a Deputy Leader.

All staff, teachers, leaders, classroom assistants, non-teaching, cleaning staff and support staff, across all the schools involved in the cluster, who are available for work within PHA guidelines, will be expected to be pooled to work in the C-19 Cluster. Rotas should be drawn up perhaps daily / part-daily or weekly and this should include detailed rotas for cleaning staff. EA will assist with this through the linked officer support. Staff from schools that are closed should also be involved in this arrangement where possible. Where requested and in line with PHA Guidance, we will try and facilitate requests for any necessary materials. Staff numbers should be kept to the required number for the children in attendance and to facilitate social distancing.

C-19 Clusters should be mindful of the PHA guidance and seek to keep the numbers of both children and staff to a minimum while ensuring children are supported during these unfamiliar times and circumstances.

Volunteers from the wider education and youth sector with appropriate vetting, may also support the supervision of children in cluster schools on a rota basis and during holiday periods. Youth service, EA and other volunteers will also assist in the provision of activities/resources for children during holiday periods.

The Leader in charge will determine the number of children that can be safely accommodated, in line with PHA guidance. Support will be available to the leader in charge from a link officer to help with decision making.

Some specific guidance to assist with decision making for C-19 Cluster schools:

- **Cleaning:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>
- **General updates:** <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

- Social Distancing: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

You should note that DE is producing specific guidance for Social Distancing in Education Settings and this will be uploaded to the DE website week beginning 30 March 2020.

The staff will supervise and support children as they work through the learning packs which have been provided by their own schools. They will facilitate the children's access to remote learning using technology and will supervise the children at play, break and lunch times. The

C-19 Clusters will apply the safeguarding and child protection regulations as outlined in DE Circular 2017/04. Designated and Deputy Designated teachers should be included in staff rotas. A simplified version of the safeguarding arrangements and the safeguarding flowchart, with clear information for all staff and volunteers will be available to all C-19 Clusters from the CPSS.

Where possible, a child's school should pass on any relevant medical, safeguarding or SEN information to the leader in charge. This will not always be possible due to staff absence as a result of illness or self-isolation. It will be important that parents provide this information.

EA will provide advice and support to centres on SEN provision as required.

Additional funding pressures, experienced by the school providing resources to the C-19 Cluster (including for example cleaning / materials), should be recorded with a view to reimbursement of funds at an appropriate time in the future. Procedures for this will be put in place by EA.

### **What is the role of key worker parents?**

An EA helpline (Tel: I&S) for parents seeking information on the location of C-19 Clusters will be available.

Lists of available schools that are open will be made available daily on the DE website. When clusters are registered with DE this list will be made available on the DE website.

Parents/guardians, identified as Key Workers by the Ministerial guidance will be required to register their children, with the cluster school, where possible and preferably for a week in advance, indicating the days for which supervision will be required.

Key Workers should only use the C-19 Clusters if they have no alternative child minding facilities.

Parents will be responsible for notifying the leader in charge of their child's medical or special educational needs, in the absence of staff from the child's own school. The leader will determine if the child's needs can be appropriately met in the C-19 Cluster.

Parents will be required to supply a packed lunch and snacks for their children. Some schools may already have their own arrangements in place and that arrangement should remain if sustainable for the C-19 Cluster. Further work will be done to consider the feasibility of the EA's catering service providing breakfast and lunch for the children. Further guidance will be provided in due course.

Children will not be required to wear school uniform.

Parents will arrange to leave and collect their children from the cluster, as no home to school transport will be available. These arrangements may change according to the needs of key worker parents