

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

Tel: 028 9127 9306

Email: private.office@education-ni.gov.uk

03 April 2020

Dear Colleague

On 31 March 2020 I wrote to schools and pre-school settings outlining the need to continue to be open to accommodate the children of key workers who are unable to secure alternative arrangements for their care.

My Department and colleagues from the EA and other education partners have been supporting schools to ensure the arrangements they have in place are sustainable as we move to the next phase in the course of this world wide pandemic. The evidence gathered indicates that there are in excess of 250 children requiring, but unable to secure, places in schools or pre-schools settings while their parents provide the critical front line services we all need.

I acknowledge there is no perfect solution in the midst of a worldwide crisis, particularly as events are changing day by day. I am also acutely aware that without the commitment and efforts of school leaders and staff, critical support for children of key workers and the most vulnerable children would not be possible. I unreservedly value the work which you and your colleagues have undertaken to date.

As we approach the Easter period, which it has been predicted may coincide with the peak of the COVID-19 virus, I would strongly urge schools to consider their position in the current context taking account of the new guidance and support arrangements in place. Schools are familiar places for children and teachers are very well placed to provide the secure supervision they need during these difficult times.

We all have a part to play in this very challenging time, none more so than those on the front line. I would therefore ask you to contact your link officer (if you do not have these details please contact EA on 028 3836 8186) and other schools in your local area to put in place arrangements that are sustainable and provide a much needed service to provide places for the children who need them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Weir". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education