

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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Dear Principal

VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – CONTINUED PROVISION OF EDUCATION

On 19 March 2020, I asked all schools and pre-school settings to provide a safe and welcoming “supervised learning” environment for the children of key workers and for vulnerable children, as defined in Annex A.

Recent figures from the daily survey of schools show attendance of children who are deemed vulnerable is very low. This may be cause for concern where attendance could be in their best interest.

I am asking you to work in conjunction with the parents/carers, the Education Authority and where appropriate social services, to identify and assess the children identified within this vulnerable group at your school to determine if the best interests of the child would be met by the school’s continued supervised learning. Some of you may already be doing this.

I recognise that these are challenging times for all of us. Support for our vulnerable children and young people is central to our response to COVID-19. To be clear, my position is that all vulnerable children and young people should be facilitated to continue to attend school where it is in their best interests and safe and appropriate to do so.

For them, school acts as a protective factor and alleviates the pressure experienced when this routine and place of safety is not otherwise available. In the absence of them attending school there will be significant pressures being experienced in the home which will only lead to additional problems. I ask you all to act urgently not only to safeguard vulnerable children and young people but to alleviate the additional pressures being experienced within their families. Safeguarding and maintaining the best interests of each child should take precedence.

I can confirm that the Education Authority will be considering requests for transport to school for vulnerable children on a case by case basis.

I want to ensure that you have the support required to continue to deliver a safe and welcoming “supervised learning” environment and I have asked my officials to provide specific guidance for vulnerable children and young people. This guidance will be accessible on the DE internet shortly and a link will be emailed to you upon its release.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey my continuing appreciation for the enormous effort and commitment both you and your staff continue to undertake to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable children at this very difficult time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Weir". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education

Covid- 19: Guidance on Children attending School

The term vulnerable encompasses those children who are in need of protection, or in need, as defined by the Children (NI) Order 1995.

Children and young people in need may include those:

- Receiving support from Health & Social Services including family support, child protection and looked after children services
- On the Child Protection Register
- With statements of special education needs
- Accessing EOTAS
- Accessing Education Nurture Units
- With emerging and diagnosed mental health needs
- Who are homeless
- Who are young carers
- Subject to paramilitary threat
- Whose parents have mental health problems
- Whose parents have alcohol and drug addictions
- Affected by domestic violence