



Essential Workers Childcare – Covid-19

20 March 2020

Dear Parent,

As you will be aware the Education Minister has closed schools from **Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020** to try to slow the spread of the Coronavirus.

However, he has asked schools to make childcare provision available to parents who are **keyworkers** in the fight against Covid-19. This is not a statutory requirement.

A list of keyworkers as currently defined by DE is available from the Department of Education Website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/letter-minister-education-education-sector>

We are appreciative of the need to keep key workers in their roles to maintain essential services and Forge will play its part. Do please work with us to ensure the school can operate with a limited number of children and staff.

We are also very aware of the need to take the unprecedented threat from Covid-19 seriously and reduce social contact to an absolute minimum in the months to come.

We understand the Department of Education are compiling clarifying guidance, however, this may be available before the close of business today.

If you believe you are a keyworker and need your children to be in school/Pre-School, please note the following points:

- **Only Keyworkers with no other alternative option** in terms of childcare should enrol their children for attendance at school during this closure period. For example, if your partner is not a keyworker, they or another relative (not over 70 or in a vulnerable group), or friends who are available should care for your children to maintain social distancing and reduce further spread of this virus.
- **We will not have the capacity to follow the curriculum as would normally be the case.** The school is short staffed due to the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic and that is likely to worsen. This keyworker service is described as childcare and that is appropriate.
- Places will be offered **based on our capacity**. This may mean we have to prioritise according to need, i.e. - not accepting the children of every key worker on the Minister's list. We are seeking guidance from government on order of priority should that be the case.
- Everyone who continues to work in school or sends children to school must accept that the risk of infection is higher than would be the case if children were at home (observing Department of Health social distancing advice). The school cannot offer the usual assurances regarding health and safety.
- Please note that if a child in school on this basis is sick and displays symptoms of any illness that may be communicable, we will require them to be collected from school and kept off in line with self-isolation guidance.



Essential Workers Childcare – Covid-19

20 March 2020

At present we are unable to offer breakfast club provision or after schools. If a Pre-School session is operable it will be morning only.

The school day would run from 9.00 – 2.00pm for P1 -3 and 9.00 – 3.00pm for P4-7

This is a situation like no other we have faced and we are prepared to do our bit to support efforts to sustain good healthcare and essential services. The guidance from DE is changing regularly and our response and capacity today could have changed within the space of a day.

We are appealing to parents to be honest and act with integrity in this and not to use this service unless essential. We may require verifying documentation regarding your role/occupation.

Please contact us via [info@forge.belfast@sch.ni.uk](mailto:info@forge.belfast@sch.ni.uk) to have an online enrolment form sent to you by email for completion and return. **Please do this by 6pm today** to allow us as much planning time as possible.

We will contact parents who wish to avail of the service and who meet the criteria as soon as we can. **Do not send your child on Monday morning unless you have a confirmed place.** Please understand that planning is rushed, and circumstances are constantly changing.

Thank you for your understanding and co-operation.

Yours Sincerely,

Neville Watson

Principal