

## **Ambitious about Autism and the Schools Trust's approach to supporting pupils and young people in our educational settings during the Coronavirus pandemic**

Ambitious about Autism and our Schools Trust run TreeHouse School, The Rise School and Ambitious College serving nearly 300 children and young people across London and the Home Counties.

During this challenging and rapidly changing time we are following information, advice and guidance for education providers issued by the Government, Public Health England (PHE) and other key bodies. We are also taking into account staffing levels and the impact this has on the well-being and health and safety of pupils and learners.

### **Remaining at home**

The Government has been clear that social distancing is now a matter of priority, and the safest place for most children is at home.

For those with specific underlying health conditions (for example asthma, bronchitis, diabetes, being seriously overweight) the Government advises stringent 'social distancing'<sup>1</sup> and in some circumstances 'shielding'<sup>2</sup> depending on the nature of the condition (for example serious respiratory conditions, and those with increased risk of infection). These pupils should not be attending and we will support parents and carers to follow this guidance. The health of our vulnerable pupils and learners is imperative.

Any pupil or learner who is exhibiting symptoms however mild – a new and persistent cough and/or a fever - must remain at home for 7 days. If the pupil or learner lives in a household with someone who is exhibiting symptoms, they must remain isolated at home for 14 days.<sup>3</sup> They will not be allowed to attend school or college during this period to reduce the risk of infection to others.

For all children and young people who remain at home we are providing resources for home learning which will be kept up to date.

### **Vulnerable children and children of critical workers**

The Government has asked schools and colleges to close to most pupils and learners and 'to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend'. This means children who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

#### Vulnerable children

Government guidance defines 'vulnerable children' to include those who have a social worker and those up to 25 years old with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Those who have a social worker include looked after children, children with a child protection plan, and those who have been assessed as being in need under s.17 Children Act 1989.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> (accessed 23/03/2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19> (accessed 23/03/2020)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection> (accessed 23/03/2020)

'Those with an EHC plan should be risk-assessed by their school/college in consultation with the local authority and parents, to decide whether they need to continue to be offered a school/college place in order to meet their needs, or whether they can safely have their needs met at home.'<sup>4</sup>

'Special schools, colleges and local authorities are advised to make case by case basis assessments of the health and safeguarding considerations of pupils and students on an education, health and care (EHC) plan. For some, they will be safer in an education provision. For others, they will be safer at home.'<sup>5</sup>

### Critical workers

'Children with a parent or carer who is listed on the Government's critical worker list<sup>6</sup> should be considered for a school place, so long as their job cannot be done from home. Many parents working in these sectors will be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.'<sup>7</sup>

Critical workers include those whose roles are essential in:

- Health and social care
- Education and childcare
- Key public services
- Local and national government
- Food and necessary goods
- Public safety and national security
- Transport
- Utilities, communication and financial services

### **Running a safe service**

Our intention is to support the most vulnerable pupils and learners, and those whose parents are critical key workers during this unprecedented time. However, we need to continue to review our provision in light of updates to Government guidance, the number and training of staff available to work, and other issues that impact on being able to run a safe service.

It is critical that any service we deliver must be a safe service. Our settings must risk assess daily to ensure we have the correct levels of trained staff in place to meet children's needs safely. Where we do not have the correct staffing levels in place, we will make decisions on which pupils and learners can receive a service based on transparent criteria.

The children and young people who attend our settings are some of the most vulnerable in society. They thrive in settings where there is a predictable timetable, they have developed a rapport with their staff teams, have staff trained in working with them around medication, behaviour that challenges, and what works/doesn't work for that young person. They also need staff who can communicate effectively with them as not all our young people communicate verbally, and their expressive skills are not as highly developed as their receptive skills.

### **Criteria**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing> (accessed 23/03/2020)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers> (accessed 23/03/2020)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision> (accessed 23/03/2020)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing> (accessed 23/03/2020)

To be open, fair and transparent Ambitious about Autism has established a set of criteria to support decision making in terms of which children and young people can access our settings. However, it is important to note that **even if a young person qualifies to attend, they might not be offered a place as it will be dependent on our setting being able to operate safely.**

All pupils and learners will be provided with home learning, which will be updated. As per Government guidance, we will work with Local Authorities to monitor the welfare of vulnerable children who are not attending school and keep in touch with any other pupils and learners for safeguarding purposes.

<b>Children to remain at home</b>	<b>Children who may be offered a place listed in order of priority. We will assess all children in criteria (1) against staffing teams/levels. After that if we still have capacity we will move onto criteria (2) and so on. All decisions are subject to our ability to run a safe service.</b>
Children with symptoms, however mild – a new and persistent cough and/or a fever (for at least 7 days)	1) Both parents/carers are critical keyworkers, or in a household where the lone parent/carer is a key worker (Confirmation of the critical nature of the role will be needed)
Children in a household where someone is exhibiting symptoms (for at least 14 days, unless they start exhibiting symptoms, when the 7 day rule then applies as above)	2) Children with a named social worker, prioritising looked after children and children placed in residential care.
Children with underlying health conditions who have been advised by their medical practitioner to be 'shielded' to avoid infection	3) One parent/carer is a critical keyworker with no other childcare arrangements (Confirmation of the critical nature of the role will be needed)
Children with underlying health conditions who are advised to 'socially isolate' to avoid infection	4) Children with EHC plans who have been risk assessed that their needs cannot be met at home. This may include households where there is more than one child with an EHCP for special educational needs.
Parent, carer or child/young person's choice to 'socially distance' and remain at home – every child who can be safely cared for at home should be, to limit the chance of the virus spreading	

Parents who would like to request that their child or young person attends school or college must contact the school or college with information about why their child may qualify and confirm that the child has no symptoms (or living with someone with symptoms) or underlying health condition that requires social isolation or shielding.

If a place is offered it is not compulsory for critical workers to accept the place. There is an expectation that vulnerable children who have a social worker will attend school, so long as it is safe for them to do so. Parents will not be penalised for not sending their children to school.