

EDUCATION, LEISURE & HOUSING

Executive Director: James Wylie
Council Offices, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1NY

Tel: (01856) 873535 Website: www.orkney.gov.uk
Fax: (01856) 876327 Email: education.leisure@orkney.gov.uk



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Dear Parent/Carer,

Revised School Opening, January 2021

Yesterday the Scottish Government introduced a further Education Continuity Direction. The effect is to legally instruct local authorities to provide childcare for key workers and vulnerable children and young people on the first week that schools were due to re-open after the Christmas holidays, and extend the school holidays for all other children and young people up to Monday 11 January.

From the 11 January all those eligible for childcare should attend nursery and school and all other children and young people will be provided with remote learning at home.

Please note that Papdale Halls of Residence will remain closed until such time as Scottish Government determines that all pupils can return to school and nursery. At the present time we expect that to be 18th January. Halls residents eligible for childcare during the period 7th to 15th January should attend their island school.

Wednesday 6 January

The Scottish Government has granted Orkney Islands Council an exceptional closure day on Wednesday 6 January to allow all nurseries and schools time to plan and prepare for these new and exceptional circumstances.

Thursday 7 and Friday 8 January

On Thursday 7 and Friday 8 January, childcare for key workers and vulnerable children will be offered in your child's normal nursery or school. Please note that this provision is available for the times that your child would normally be at nursery or school. Children may bring things to do with them, such as a book to read or music to listen to, however these items should not be shared with others.

In the case of children considered to be vulnerable, there will be no requirement for parents or carers to apply for a place. Schools will contact families direct on 6th January where it is recognised that it would be beneficial for a child to be present in school. The Scottish Government has instructed local authorities to broaden the definition of vulnerability to ensure that children experiencing any significant disadvantage which may impact negatively on future attainment are included in this group.

In the case of key workers, if you successfully applied, for or your child was allocated, a childcare place in one of our Hubs earlier this year, then a place has been reserved for you and you need not re-apply. We would ask however that you notify your child's school by email of the days you require childcare.

If you are a key worker, as defined by the categories below, did not previously apply for childcare but now require it, please complete the application form as soon as possible.

- **Category 1** – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers; staff working in schools and nurseries
- **Category 2** – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.
- **Category 3** – All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland

Link to application form: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/OIC-Childcare/>

Please note that you should not expect to hear whether your child has a place until Wednesday 6 January.

School transport, school meals and school cleaning will operate as normal from Thursday 7 January.

11-15 January

From the 11 January all those eligible for childcare will attend school/nursery as normal. All other children and young people will be provided with remote learning at home.

18 January onwards

As we go into the holiday period, it is hoped that by January 18, nurseries and schools will be open as usual for all children and young people.

Whilst it is correct at the time of writing, the information provided in this letter is subject to change. Orkney Islands Council will continue discussion with the Scottish Government on the 5 January to seek a bespoke alternative for all the children and young people of Orkney to receive face to face, in school learning as soon as practically possible and for as long as Orkney continues to be in the unique position of having very few cases of COVID-19. It is our argument that for academic progression, for the health and wellbeing of our young people, and for the economic prosperity of our community, nurseries and schools should be open as normal and remain so for as long as this remains safe. Should such a bespoke plan be agreed to by the Scottish Government we will notify you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



James Wylie
Executive Director