



Chief Executive Officer: **Stephen Chamberlain**

Chair of the Board of Trustees: **Bob Dool**

Registered office: **Littleport and East Cambs Academy, Camel Road, Littleport, CB6 1EW**

Email: [stephen.chamberlain@activelearningtrust.org](mailto:stephen.chamberlain@activelearningtrust.org)

Mobile: 07551 387171

Telephone (Central Office): 01353 223300 Extension 103

**Executive Assistant to the CEO:**

Mrs Siobhan Gaskins

Email: [Siobhan.gaskins@activelearningtrust.org](mailto:Siobhan.gaskins@activelearningtrust.org)

Telephone: 01353 223300 Extension 150

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Dear Parent / Carer

I know that your headteachers have been keeping in touch but, as CEO of The Active Learning Trust, I wanted to write and thank you for the support you have given schools since the Government announced a national lockdown from 4<sup>th</sup> January, and to outline a few of the areas of support that The Trust and your schools are making available for you and your children.

Can I remind you that the national lockdown restrictions, including the 'Stay At Home' message can be found at: [www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home).

The Government decision to introduce a national lockdown does not suggest that schools are no longer safe places for young people or staff. Instead, limiting attendance is about reducing the number of contacts that all of us have with people in other households, which science suggests will in turn reduce the potential for COVID 19 to spread.

The new restrictions mean that schools will remain open **only for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people** to attend. All other pupils and students will receive remote education until February half term and must remain at home, in line with national guidance. Further details on this is given below.

I understand this will not be welcome news for many parents and carers, but it is absolutely essential if we are to successfully protect the NHS and reduce the transmission of the virus. We are not yet through these pressures, and we must all contribute to ensuring that our health services remain viable.

### **Children of critical workers**

Schools are remaining open to the children of workers who are critical to the COVID-19 response and EU transition response, who are unable to safely stay at home.

### **Please think carefully before sending your children to school**

We need to ensure that the number of children and young people accessing the offer of provision in our schools is kept to the lowest number possible, so that we can reduce household mixing and the risk of spreading coronavirus. As a result, schools will have a limit on the number of children they can safely support in their bubble arrangements. Even if you

are a critical worker, if your child can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should do so. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role.

The list of critical workers can be found on the government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>.

If your child's school feels that your role does not fit the critical worker criteria, you may be asked to verify this with a letter from your employer detailing why you personally are critical to the COVID-19 response or EU Transition. If there is an alternative adult such as a partner or second parent who is not a critical worker, you may be asked why your child is not able to stay at home as per the Government's guidance. If the other adult is working at home or able to take leave from their non-critical job, this will be deemed as a safe alternative.

Schools are open to provide education to enable critical workers to respond to the crucial role they play in the response to the COVID-19 emergency, however you must also support your school and only use this offer of support if you have no alternatives for childcare for your child. Clearly, the more children and young people that attend an education setting, the wider the risk of spreading the virus. Schools are working towards ensuring all critical requests can be accommodated, but should the situation in schools reach a point where safety may be compromised, for example if there is insufficient staffing available (due to illness), schools may be asked to prioritise entry due to limited space.

### **Vulnerable children and young people – including those with education, health and care plans or a social worker**

If your child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan and/or an allocated social worker they may attend their school. If you do decide to keep your child at home and you need additional support, please contact your school and they will work with you to support your child with home learning.

The Department for Education (DfE) definition of vulnerable children and young people who can access their school or college can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

If your child attends a specialist school please think carefully to consider if you can safely keep them at home. If we are to effectively support the NHS and help reduce transmission of COVID-19 we will need to consider the needs of each child, medical and educational, on an individual basis. Our heads at both Highfield schools would be pleased to discuss any individual issues with you. Please contact them if you have any concerns.

### **Free School Meal Entitlement and Provision**

We understand that families continue to live in uncertain times and many are facing changes to their financial circumstances as a result.

If you have not previously applied for Free School Meals, or your situation has recently changed and you now feel you may be eligible, please visit either:

Cambs schools: [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals) or telephone 01223 703200.

Or

Suffolk Schools: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/school-meals-uniforms-and-trips/apply-for-free-school-meals/>

If you are currently in receipt of free school meals, your school will be in contact to advise what provision is being offered to you during this period of school closure. We understand that the Government are planning to reintroduce the voucher system used during the previous lockdown, and more information will be forwarded to you as soon as we have details.

### **Government advice on leaving children unattended**

There is no law about when you can leave your child on their own, but it is an offence to leave them alone if it places them at risk. As parents, you should use your judgement on how mature your child is before you decide to leave them at home.

### **Summer 2021 exams / assessments**

The Government has decided that, in these circumstances, it is not possible for GCSE and A Level exams to go ahead in the summer as planned. They will be working with Ofqual (the organisation responsible for regulating qualifications, examinations and assessments in England) to consult rapidly and put in place alternative arrangements that will allow students to be assessed fairly. The Secretary of State for Education announced in Parliament yesterday that Primary school SATs will not take place this year. Schools will be providing more information on these changes soon.

### **Remote Learning**

Parents and carers of students who are not currently attending school, will have been notified of the school's plan for delivering remote learning during this time. The Department for Education has published expectations on these arrangements:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools-res>

If you are concerned about your child's progress, access to ICT or have a query over the content of remote learning, please contact your school who will be happy to discuss this with you.

### **Childcare and Early Years**

Early years settings – including nurseries, childminders and school-based provision – can remain fully open during this period, however, reception classes and higher year groups will access numbers on an individual basis in line with critical worker and vulnerable group needs.

For your information, parents can form a childcare bubble with one other consistent household for the purposes of informal childcare, where the children are under 14. This is mainly to enable parents to work and must not be used to enable social contact between adults. Some households will also be able to benefit from being in a support bubble. Details of support and childcare bubbles can be found here:

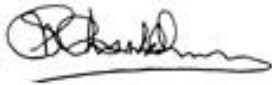
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household#what-a-childcare-bubble-is>

Finally, as I started this letter, I would like to end by again thanking you for your continued support of our school, and your compliance with the wider national restrictions in place. Whilst last year was extremely challenging for parents, carers, their children and our school staff, I was extremely proud to lead an organisation that included people such as yourselves who faced the challenges head on. The guidance I have outlined above is current as at

today's date, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021 but, as you will appreciate, the situation is being constantly updated. We will advise you of further developments as they become relevant.

I have every confidence that together we will all play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Chamberlain', with a horizontal line underneath.

Stephen Chamberlain  
CEO  
The Active Learning Trust