



## Financial support and guidance for the childcare sector during COVID19: Information briefing 6.0 – 6 January 2021

### Education and childcare provision: Impact of latest Government announcements

Pre-school education settings (PSEP), nursery units and nursery schools, primary and post primary schools are required to provide remote learning to pupils until the half term break in mid-February. Direct payments will be made to families whose children are entitled to free school meals. Special schools will remain open as usual.

Vulnerable children and children of key workers must have access to pre-schools (PSEP), nursery units and nursery schools and schools for supervised learning. Only one parent/guardian is required to be a key worker. The definitions of 'key worker' and vulnerable children are available on the [Department of Education website](#). Parents working in the education and childcare sector are included in the definition.

Childcare settings, including those based in primary schools, and childminders, are to **remain open**. Informal childcare is also permitted to continue. *Informal childcare is typically provided by grandparents and close family. It is not to be confused with unregistered childcare, provided by those not formally registered but who charge a fee, and is illegal.*

It is vital that childcare remains at the heart of decision making in relation to Covid-19 restrictions for the benefit of children, parents and our society and economy as a whole.

### Childcare sector continues to provide safe, quality care that is educationally and developmentally enriching

In recognition of the vital role of childcare, priority has been given to enabling the childcare sector to remain open, to both support parents to access work and provide essential childcare for those children whose parents need access to that care. This includes our youngest children, with the early years a critical point in child development, laying the foundations for lifelong learning and supporting their social and emotional development. Providing care and education for our youngest children cannot be done remotely, and we know from the evidence gathered throughout the pandemic that children are much less susceptible to severe clinical illness than the older population.

The evidence from Health and Social Care Trusts is that, across the board, childcare settings remain **low risk environments** both for children and for the childcare workforce, with rigorous infection prevention and control measures being implemented. Childcare settings and childminders have been open to all children since June 2020 and there is no evidence that this has contributed to a rise in virus cases within the community. The full guidance being followed by the childcare sector – both to protect children, and staff - is available [here](#). Whilst there is no evidence at this stage to suggest that transmission of the new strain of Covid-19 causes more serious illness in either children or adults, settings will continue to minimise the risks of transmission of either strain through strict compliance with the Department of Health's Covid-19 Childcare Guidance.

Many parents continue to express their confidence in the measures being implemented, and in the benefits to their children and the family overall in accessing childcare.

The Childcare Reference Group advocates for the inclusion of the entire childcare workforce alongside consideration of the prioritisation of the education workforce and other occupational groups in terms of vaccination roll out.

### Short-term closure Support Fund opens for applications

A £3.64 million fund to provide financial assistance for Covid-19 related closures in the childcare sector **between September and December 2020 has now opened for applications**. Those eligible to apply include registered Childminders, Daycare Providers, School Age Childcare, Crèches and Playgroups who have been reactivated by the Trust, operational during the period **1 September 2020 to 31 December 2020** and are **still currently operational**.

Funding will be allocated based on the type and / or size of a setting, and the length of period of closure. Full details are available [here](#). Funding has also been allocated for childcare providers located on school sites who were unable to operate due to school closures between 19 and 30 October 2020. Full details are available [here](#).

Recognising that this is also a financially difficult time for many parents, one of the objectives of the support and a condition of the funding is to ensure that childcare providers did not charge parents while their provision was temporarily closed due to Covid-19 during September to December.

Applications opened on 6 January and will close on 5 February 2021 at 5pm. The scheme is being administered by Early Years – the organisation for young children, on behalf of DE. Initially, eligible providers who have notified their HSCT Early Years Teams of a positive case in their setting, and those providers located on school premises, will have received an invitation to apply from Family Support NI. Any queries should be sent to the [Early Years Organisation](#).

### **Childcare Sustainability Support Fund**

The Childcare Sustainability Support Fund also remains open and will close on Friday 5 February 2021 at 5pm. Further information is available [here](#). This Fund is designed to further support the sustainability of the childcare sector in Northern Ireland, building on previous financial recovery scheme, to help childcare providers that have opened – or remained open – **in the period 1 September to 31 December 2020**. The Scheme is also being administered by [Early Years – the organisation for young children](#), on behalf of the Department of Education.

### **Advice and information**

**Altram: guth na luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge/voice of Irish medium early years** Call 028 9033 2517 or email: [eolas@altram.org](mailto:eolas@altram.org) Altram is the regional support group for Irish-medium early years projects and was set up to support Irish-medium early years providers, promote high quality early years provision through the medium of Irish and promote the importance of the early years in Irish medium education.

**Early Years–the organisation for young children:** Tel: 028 9066 2825 / email: [support@early-years.org](mailto:support@early-years.org). Early Years is the largest organisation in Northern Ireland working with and for young children. They are a non-profit making organisation, working since 1965 to promote high quality childcare and early education for children aged 0-18 and their families. Currently Early Years provides information and training for parents, providers, employers and local authorities.

**Employers For Childcare:** Freephone: 0800 028 3008 / email: [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org). Their Family Benefits Advice Service provides advice and guidance on a wide range of childcare and work-related issues to parents, employers and childcare providers. They can carry out personalised ‘better off’ calculations and advise parents and childcare providers on financial support available.

**Family Support NI:** [www.familysupportni.org](http://www.familysupportni.org) hosts an information hub on childcare during the pandemic, including guidance for settings on reopening and details of financial support available to the sector. This guidance is updated on a result basis as feedback from settings is incorporated, and to reflect broader developments. The website includes a ‘search’ function which allows parents to find childcare in their local area. Childcare providers should ensure their details are kept up to date on this portal.

**NICMA:** Telephone 028 9181 1015/ Email: [info@nicma.org](mailto:info@nicma.org). NICMA is a membership organisation and professional body working to support and develop quality home-based childcare and learning for the benefit of children, families & communities. We have and will continue to help and support all childminders throughout the difficult time of this pandemic.

**Parentline NI:** Call FREE on: 0808 8020 400 Chat online or Email: [parentline@ci-ni.org.uk](mailto:parentline@ci-ni.org.uk) Parentline NI offers an impartial, non-judgemental listening ear. For advice on something specific or general support and guidance for anyone caring for or concerned about a child or young person. Parentline NI is open 9am to 9pm Monday to Thursday, 9-5pm Friday and 9am to 1pm on Saturday.

**PlayBoard NI:** Telephone: 028 9080 3380 or email: [info@playboard.org](mailto:info@playboard.org). PlayBoard NI is the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people’s play in Northern Ireland. A membership organisation, PlayBoard offers support, guidance, and advice to School Age Childcare providers.