

COVID-19 Impact

The government has issued guidance and information for parents and carers regarding school, nursery and other educational closures.

You can find this information at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

The information here is based on that guidance as of 20th March 2020.

The government has asked us to “remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children where they can.”

For as long as we can maintain our services in the face of staff absences, we are committed to providing continuing care to children of parents/carers whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response; those who work in the critical sectors defined by the Department for Education; and those children considered as vulnerable.

We will support you as much and for as long as we are able, but we need your help to do this.

If You Are NOT a Critical Worker & Your Child is NOT Considered Vulnerable

Until told otherwise, we only able to provide care for children of critical workers and those children considered vulnerable.

Sadly, that means we cannot provide childcare to other children outside those key groups, including all those we've enjoyed having up to now.

We'll miss you for a while and hope it will only be a short time!

You'll obviously have questions about how long this may be and what happens when we're allowed to re-open fully. Nobody knows how long it will be, but we have put in a place a way for you to ensure your child's place is retained for the duration of these special arrangements.

If you would like to retain your child's place from 1st April for the duration of these special arrangements, we ask you to pay a one off 'Retention Fee' of £10 per day booked. For example, if your child attends 2 days per week, your retention fee would be a one-off £20 retention fee to retain your usual booking pattern. This would mean your child's sessions are secure for when the nursery re-opens as usual.

Please let us know by email if you would like to take up this offer.

The rest of this notice applies only to those who are critical workers or parents / carers of children considered vulnerable/

Critical Workers

A summary list of those qualifying is given below (as defined by the Department for Education).

The government have stated that: “Children with at least one parent or carer who are identified as critical workers by the government can send their children to school if required.”

We will be asking parents/carers to sign a declaration that they qualify as a critical worker **as defined by the Department for Education**.

Vulnerable Children

The guidelines say that children are counted as vulnerable when:

- They have an assigned social worker (including children in need)
- They have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- They have a child protection plan
- They are looked after by the local authority

We will work with you and the local authority to identify children who count as vulnerable.

We Need Your Help & Support Too

The government and Essex County Council have made it clear that they will continue to pay early years funding for those children who qualify. If you have applied for funding, completed your declaration form and provided us with the relevant eligibility codes, your funding will continue as normal.

This is good news, and we're grateful to both central government and Essex County Council for the measures they have put in place.

BUT Oaklea Montessori CIC cannot sustain its operations on the funding alone. We rely on fees to pay our staff and bills, and our insurance does not cover the impact of COVID-19.

We have no option but to continue to charge fees as we normally do for everything other than your free entitlement.

We normally invoice fees monthly in advance, but we're looking at **potentially** moving to weekly invoicing for fees, recognising that the situation and individual circumstances are changing very rapidly. That means if your circumstances change or the government brings in new restrictions, you'd only be paying for one week ahead at a time. We will update you on this as soon as we can.

- We want to help you. **Please help us by ensuring you pay any amounts due as soon as possible.**

It is a fast-moving and confusing time. We understand everybody is worried and has many questions.

- **Please understand that our staff may not be able to answer your questions** immediately. Guidance is being issued and updated, and we will try and answer your queries as openly and honestly as possible.

Government Key Principles

Government is urging all parents and carers to follow some key principles (which you can find in full by following the link above). The most relevant to us are:

- 1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.**
- 2. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.**

- 3. Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.**

Key Worker Categories

This is a **summary** of definitions issued by the Department for Education, which you can find in full here:

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

In order to sign your declaration, you will need to check the full list using the link above.

- **Health and social care** (doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, etc.)
- **Education and childcare** (teachers, nursery staff, social workers, etc.)
- **Key public services** (justice system workers, religious staff, charity workers, etc.)
- **Local and national government** (only those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response, those delivering essential public services, etc.)
- **Food and other necessary goods** (those in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery, etc.)
- **Public safety and national security** (police, fire, rescue, etc.)
- **Transport** (workers in air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport, etc.)
- **Utilities, communication and financial services** (bank workers, oil, gas, electricity and water, etc.)