



National Day Nurseries Association

*Brighter thinking
for early years



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
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23 July 2021

Dear Mr Williamson

We are writing to you as the three leading early years and childcare sector organisations in the country, to raise our urgent concerns that the early years and childcare workforce has not been included in the government's list of essential workers offered an exemption to the current self-isolation rules.

The recent spike in the number of adults being 'pinged' by the NHS app, or asked to self-isolate after coming into contact with a positive case, is having a significant impact on many settings' ability to support the families who rely on them. We are therefore deeply disappointed that the government has not recognised a need for early years and childcare practitioners who have been vaccinated to be allowed to continue to work, subject to daily Covid testing.

Early years provision is essential economic infrastructure providing an indispensable service to families, including children of those key workers being asked to leave isolation to keep other critical services running. They also provide a vital sense of stability and normality for children at what is a very difficult time.

Throughout the pandemic early years and childcare practitioners have gone out to work, to care for young children, despite the risks to themselves and to their households. Early years and childcare providers have taken rigorous safety measures to ensure their settings are as safe as possible for children attending and adults working there. This makes it particularly frustrating that they have not been included in this list of critical services.

As you may be aware, self-isolation is particularly challenging for the sector since staffing ratios can dramatically affect a setting's ability to operate.

Requiring fully vaccinated practitioners to continue isolating therefore causes unnecessary disruption for young children and their parents and has the potential to leave other critical workers without access to childcare. It also places a further financial burden on a sector already struggling with the impact of the pandemic on the sustainability of their business – putting parents' access to early years and childcare provision at risk for the future.

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Unlike schools, many early years providers will continue to open throughout the summer months. Given the critical importance of access to high-quality childcare for the wider UK workforce, we urge the department to immediately amend the current list of critical services to include early years and childcare.

We understand that some settings and providers will continue to have concerns about safety and will not wish to use this exemption. However, we believe individual providers are best placed to make the decision most appropriate to their setting about whether a member of staff who has been in contact with a positive case should continue to attend work.

Yours sincerely



Neil Leitch

Chief executive of the Early Years Alliance



Purnima Tanuku

Chief executive of National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)



Liz Bayram

Chief executive of the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)