

My ref: School Re-opening 3 Special Schools
Date: 12th June 2020
Contact: Please contact your school
for more information



To parents/carers of pupils in Special
School in Cambridgeshire and
Peterborough

People & Communities
Education Directorate

Dear Parent / Carer,

I am writing to update you about some of the recent COVID-19 developments affecting schools.

Recent Government Announcement on wider school reopening

On the 9th June the government announced that primary schools will not be expected to welcome back all pupils before the summer holidays. However, schools that have the capacity to take in more pupils have been encouraged to do so. Secondary schools will also be limited to only 25% of their pupils from year 10 and year 12. As we do not have any more information at this stage, we have asked schools to remain operating as they are now, and to not to make any changes to their current provision until further detailed guidance is issued by the government.

The guidance for special school opening provides more flexibility and special schools are not being asked to focus on any specific year group or key stage at this stage. Special schools are being asked to plan to increase numbers in line with the mainstream recovery approach and this will be guided by individual schools circumstances and the local authority have asked special schools to maintain their approach to attendance by utilising the multi-agency risk assessment tool already in place.

We are mindful that the majority of our special schools met the government's expectation to offer school places to support keyworkers and those pupils who are recognised to have the vulnerable needs and this level of support will continue, but for many this meant committing all their resources. Unfortunately, many special schools simply do not have the space nor the levels of staffing available to open to all pupils under the current government guidance. Admitting further children under current conditions is likely to take considerable additional resources and coordination at a national and local level, and this needs to be worked through before individual schools can begin to make their own plans for a fuller reopening.

Headteachers will review the situation on an ongoing basis, and will offer additional places to pupils wherever possible utilising the agreed Multi-Agency Risk Assessment that will measure the risk to your child and the school community in partnership with Health and Social Care officers, where appropriate. The Local Authority, Academy Trusts and your child's school will keep you up to date as these plans are developed.

Schools Capacity and Observing Social Distancing

As you know, those who are attending school have been placed into protective 'bubbles', limiting the number of pupils and staff that come into contact within the community of the

school. The bubbles are essential to control social distancing and minimise risk, but they mean less people and more space needed. Unfortunately, this means special schools may not find it possible to accommodate every pupil who wants to attend and some may only be able to attend on a part-time basis.

Each of our special schools are different. Some are limited in terms of space, while many have less staff 'on-site', as they themselves may be vulnerable, or shielding others. I appreciate this may mean some parents cannot send their children to school at this point, and until guidance changes schools will be limited in their capacity to provide education for every child in school. Importantly, however, they will continue to support home learning.

Safety at this time is critical, and remains our number one priority. Special schools have worked together with the local authority to agree operational procedures and risk assessment protocols to ensure we have a consistent offer in place for all children with special needs. We have also worked hard to ensure children and staff are protected in school, and we ask that families continue to observe social distancing outside of school. I have advised head teachers to use their discretion and not to admit pupils if they believe they have not socially distanced outside of school. It is vital that we keep our schools a safe place to attend for all.

Shielded Children

The position in regard to children or adults who are considered extremely vulnerable in relation to COVID-19 symptoms, remains unchanged and government guidance clearly states that children who are being shielded should not be attending school. We are fully aware of the growing challenges facing this group of children and we have asked schools to maintain levels of support for both pupils and families as we move through the phases and work towards reducing the risk to enable these children to be able to attend school. The decision for being included on the shielded list is managed by health colleagues and we are working closely with them to review this list on regular basis so that we can facilitate opportunities for these children to return to school. It is important to note that only health professionals can remove a name from the shielded list, but that we have agreed that provision for children who are removed should be considered as soon as possible to avoid any delays. Consideration for including children once they have been removed from the shielded list will still be undertaken through the agreed multi agency risk assessment and should the risk assessment show a place can be provided this will be offered in line with the school's reintegration plan, details of your school's integration plan will be provided by your schools. Special schools will continue to work closely with health colleagues to provide opportunities, when it is safe to do so.

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP).

You will be aware that the government has amended legislation to allow for easements to the responsibilities local authorities have in the delivery of EHCP's. We have communicated with all families who have a child with an EHCP asking for their views on what they feel are the priorities in the delivery of their individual plans. It is really important that we gather your view and the views of young people on the issue of their individual plans, so please respond as quickly as you can.

Local authorities have been asked to use 'reasonable endeavours' to deliver the requirements of individual EHCP's, as we are not in a position to deliver all aspects of the plans due to the restrictions in place to meet other government guidance, such as social distancing.

Reviews of EHCP's will still be undertaken, but there may be a delay in the timescales, which means that we may not meet the annual deadline on this occasion. This is part of the amendments to the legislation, but be reassured that we are intent on addressing and completing all reviews as soon as practical.

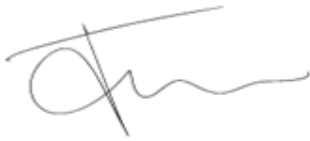
We are working closely with all the support teams and schools to ensure we provide as much support as possible and we appreciate your support with these measures.

School opening from September

At the time of writing, it is difficult to be certain about what will happen in September. Clearly, the government hopes that it will be possible for all pupils to be in school from the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, but it is likely to proceed with caution.

When I am in a position to offer parents further clarity on these or any other relevant matters, I shall write to you again. Meanwhile, may I take this opportunity to thank you for everything you are doing, and for your continued support during this difficult period.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Lewis', with a horizontal line above it.

Jonathan Lewis
Service Director – Education
Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council