**SEN Assessment Team Information for Families**

**19.3.20 (updated 30.3.20 & 1.5.20 & 18.5.20)**

This information has been put together to help answer some of the initial questions arising from recent announcements. It is acknowledged that the situation is frequently changing, and we will respond to any changes by issuing further guidance.

**New guidance associated with pupils returning to school.**

Children with EHCPs remain part of the cohort of pupils prioritised for attendance at school, alongside the newly eligible groups of pupils in mainstream schools in Years R, 1 and 6.

In addition, pre-school settings including childcare settings are also being asked to welcome children back. The newly eligible pupils are encouraged to attend from 1st June 2020 provided the government’s 5 steps of pandemic recovery are met.

Secondary schools, sixth forms and further education colleges have been asked to offer some face to face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 and year 12 students.

Special schools and special post 16 institutions have been asked to work towards a phased return of more children and young people irrespective of year groups.

**What does this mean for my child or young person with an EHCP?**

Children in mainstream schools:

If your child/young person is in a mainstream school the school will continue to consider the suitability of their attendance through the risk assessment process. They should do this in consultation with you.

If your child is in Year R, 1 or 6 the school will contact you as part of the process they put in place to welcome that whole year group back.

Schools are currently planning how they will do this, taking into account new guidance associated with social distancing and the safe support of all members of the school community.

Your school will also need to consider any specific transition support your child will need to support their additional needs and should discuss this directly with you as part of the planning process.

If your young person is in year 10 or 12 the school will need to consider their needs in the design of their face to face opportunities and should be in touch with you or the young person direct to arrange this.

Children and young people in special schools:

Special schools will need to phase the return of pupils to their schools. They need to follow the national guidance which will enable them to support social distancing where possible and therefore they will need to have a reduced number of pupils in at any one time.

The geographical area and size of their classrooms may mean that they cannot yet offer places to all pupils as this is not safe. They may consider flexible approaches to attendance (for example part-time) or they may consider that for some learners, it is safest to continue with online learning in the way they have so far.

The special schools will use the risk assessment process in consultation with you to enable them to agree placements and support plans going forward. As all special schools are different the return to school plan will be unique to each school based on their individual circumstances as assessed by the Headteachers and Governors.

They must consider any increase in numbers on site very carefully to try to keep everybody safe and well.

Headteachers from our Special schools know their communities best and so they will be liaising with parents and carers directly about welcoming more pupils into school. They will also be liaising with appropriate partners such as health teams and school transport. It is worth noting that the safest arrangements for pupils who are eligible for transport assistance to school may take more time than usual to arrange. If this applies to you, your school and/or the school transport team will keep you informed regarding these processes.

**The latest DfE guidance associated with implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings can be found here:**

[**https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings)

This guidance includes information about children and young people who are considered clinically extremely vulnerable or extremely vulnerable. It is important you read these sections if they are applicable to you and discuss the implications with your setting and relevant medical professionals to inform decision making around school attendance.

**What if my child is in a newly eligible year group but I do not want them to return?**

Children in the newly eligible year groups are strongly encouraged to return to school, however the government has confirmed that families offered places but who choose not to accept them will not be fined.

**Pupils under EHC needs assessment currently.**

The Local Authority is considering these requests in line with current statute.

It is important that families understand that whilst every effort will be made to process the agreed assessments and seek the required advice the process may be subject to unavoidable delays due to the ongoing situation.

The SEN Assessment Team will keep families informed.

**Information about all professionals contributing to EHC needs assessment:**

* Partners ordinarily expected to contribute to EHC needs assessment will endeavour to provide appropriate assessment and written advice within the prescribed timeframes.
* Any report will need to have wording inserted that provides relevant context about how the assessment was undertake e.g. if the young person could not be seen in their education setting.
* It should be noted that whilst every effort will be made to offer alternative arrangements if staff are absent from their roles due to self-isolation requirements/ill-health then reports from these professionals may not meet statutory timeframes. A decision regarding the suitability of an EHCP will not be made until appropriate reports are available.

**Exceptions to statutory timeframes associated with EHC needs assessment.**

The DfE provided guidance which came into force on the 1st May 2020, you can find it here:

[**Education, Health and Care needs assessments and plans: guidance on temporary legislative changes relating to coronavirus (COVID-19)**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus).

This guidance relaxes duties around statutory timeframes for EHC needs assessment where elements of the process are not practical for reasons related to COVID-19.

It does, however, require that Local Authorities continue to process assessments as quickly as possible and requires contributors to the process to consider other methods of assessment (virtual) to enable them to provide advice to the process.

The Local Authority must have the correct advice to enable them to make a decision about the suitability of issuing an EHCP and to enable them to correctly populate such a plan.

In West Sussex our colleagues in other services such as the Educational Psychology Service or health teams will be endeavouring to provide advice as best they can in these circumstances. The SEN Assessment Team will use this advice to process assessments as promptly as possible. They will not, however, be able to make decisions where there is key information missing and your contact in the team will keep you informed if the usual timescales are affected for your child’s assessment.

**What happens with Annual Reviews?**

The DfE provided guidance which came into force on the 1st May 2020, you can find it here:

[**Education, Health and Care needs assessments and plans: guidance on temporary legislative changes relating to coronavirus (COVID-19)**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus).

This guidance provides extra flexibility over the timing of Annual Reviews, where, for a reason related to COVID-19, the review cannot be completed in the usual timeframes. However, it should be completed as soon as is reasonably practicable.

The guidance also notes that priorities for review should be identified by the Local Authority and in West Sussex we consider settings should continue to prioritise:

* Pupils where there has been a significant change in needs or circumstances
* Children who are looked after
* Children approaching transition in the next academic year

Annual reviews may need to be conducted in different ways i.e. remotely, however the principles of family and young person voice within these processes remain unchanged. If a delay is required to the timing of the process the setting should discuss and agree this with the family and alert the SEN Assessment Team.

**Will my child get all the provision in their EHCP?**

The DfE provided guidance which came into force on the 1st May 2020, you can find it here:

[**Education, Health and Care needs assessments and plans: guidance on temporary legislative changes relating to coronavirus (COVID-19)**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus).

This guidance temporarily lifted the statutory duty on local authorities to maintain the precise provision in EHC plans; with local authorities needing instead to apply ‘reasonable endeavours’ to support these children and their families. The changes are in place for 1 month initially.

The changes require the local authority or health commissioning body to keep a record of the provision being provided if it is different to that specified in the EHCP. Families need to be fully involved in the decisions around this delivery and why changes are needed, and the provision delivery/changes should be subject to review.

West Sussex SEN Assessment Team is beginning engagement with settings around these requirements. We will be asking school’s to initially analyse changes to provision and engage with families around this. They will then provide the details of their analysis to us. If, however, you have a concern currently please do get in contact with your usual SENAT contact or use the shared email addresses below.

**SENAT:**

In line with current guidance the SEN Assessment Team will be mainly working from home for the foreseeable future.  The team is very fortunate to have the required technology, including phone and email access, when working remotely in this manner.  Telephone numbers and email contact details remain unchanged.

There are processes in place to manage post, however communication with the service electronically going forward will be the most sensible approach.  If you don’t have an email address the following shared addresses will be checked during working days and information will be passed on:

[SENAT.North@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:SENAT.North@westsussex.gov.uk)

[SENAT.South@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:SENAT.South@westsussex.gov.uk)

**Our thoughts:**

May we take this opportunity to acknowledge the challenging circumstances we are all currently in and thank everyone involved in supporting children and young people with SEN&D for their ongoing support and care.

Jo Hill

Service Manager

SEN Assessment Team