



Department of Health & Social Care

Mental Health, Dementia and Disabilities Unit
Department of Health and Social Care
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Vivien Cooper OBE
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Dear Viv

Thank you for your letter of 18 March 2020 to Sir Chris Wormald, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health and Social Care and Jonathan Slater, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education. Sir Chris has asked me to respond to you on his behalf, on this occasion. Officials from the Department for Education will respond to you separately.

Before I turn to your points, I want to re-iterate that public safety is the Government's top priority. The Government wants to ensure that it is doing everything in its power to be ready to delay and mitigate the threat that COVID-19 poses to people in the UK. The Coronavirus Act will provide us with necessary legal measures to be able to implement our phased response. It gives us the powers to keep essential services running at a time when large parts of the workforce may be off sick. Some of those measures are very significant, and a departure from the way that we do things in peacetime. They are strictly temporary and proportionate to the threat we face, and we hope that many will not have to be used at all. Each power will be activated only on the basis of scientific advice and will be in place only for as long as clinically necessary.

The Government is producing clear guidance for practitioners in the event that the powers contained in the Coronavirus Act 2020 to allow temporary flexibilities in the Mental Health Act are introduced. The guidance will include specific considerations for practitioners on the use of these flexibilities, including on the specific needs of people from vulnerable groups, including for children and young people younger than 18.

I would like to reassure you that I and my team are liaising closely with NHS England colleagues and those within the Department and Government's response to COVID-19 to ensure that the needs of people with a learning disability and/or autism are understood and met. There are a number of pieces of relevant guidance that have been issued (listed in



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Annex A), including guidance in easyread, and more will be forthcoming. Please do continue to indicate where you see issues and we will seek to address these wherever possible.

Thank you for your recent very helpful proposal regarding how the CBF can help to support families and carers through the development of specific guidance on managing and mitigating challenging behaviours. As you know I am keen to ensure that practical guidance and resources are made available without delay to provide the support that parents, families and carers need. I will come back you to your proposal very shortly.

We discussed a number of the issues raised in your letter of 18 March during our call with Ray James, on 23rd March, and I understand Ray has also written to you. Let me assure you that during these unprecedented times we remain committed to Transforming Care, refreshing our governance structure and developing the action plan. NHS England and NHS Improvement have also set up a number of webinars, which I know you have been part of, to discuss how COVID-19 is impacting on families of children with behaviours considered challenging, people with learning disabilities/and or autism and their families and we are identifying actions to take forward.

I hope you will continue to engage with us during these challenging times and I look forward to working with you on ensuring that the additional needs of children and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism are met during this pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

David Nuttall
Deputy Director, Dementia and Disabilities Unit



Clinical Guidelines and Guidance on COVID-19

[Clinical guide for front line staff to support the management of patients with a learning disability, autism or both during the coronavirus pandemic – relevant to all clinical specialities](#)

[NICE Guideline \[NG159\]: COVID-19 rapid guideline: critical care in adults](#)

[COVID-19: Infection prevention and control](#)

[COVID-19: Guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection](#)

[COVID-19: Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK](#)

[COVID-19: Guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable](#)

[COVID-19: Guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing](#)