

INFORMATION SHEET



Schools re-opening: information relevant to children and young people with severe learning disabilities

On 2 July 2020 the Government announced that all children and young people, in all year groups and setting types, will return to education settings full time from the beginning of the autumn term. While coronavirus (COVID-19) remains in the community, the Government says this means schools and colleges should judge for themselves how to balance and minimise any risks from coronavirus (COVID-19) with providing a full educational experience for children and young people.

Schools and colleges are also asked to plan for how they will ensure education provision in the event of a local lockdown.

All school and colleges, including special schools and colleges, must follow public health advice to minimise the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission. See the Government guidance [here](#).

The DfE and DHSC also published a letter to children and young people with SEND, their families and those who support them. Please find the letter [here](#).

This resource is based upon English guidance. If your loved one attends school in Scotland, they will be expected to go back to school part-time from 11th August 2020, with periods in school increasing as it is safe to do so. Measures may be different in special schools. The Scottish Guidance can be found [here](#). Schools will be reopening in [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) from September and may also include some part-time learning. In some cases in Wales, children may have been asked to attend phased returns from as early as 29th June 2020. If you have concerns about your child returning to school in any one of these countries, we would suggest that you speak to your child's school and/or local authority to find out what re-opening measures they have in place to help your child. If you have any concerns about these plans and what it means for your child with severe learning disabilities, please do contact the CBF Family Support Line on 0300 666 0126 or email support@thecbf.org.uk. The CBF has produced a range of new Covid-19 resources which you may find useful, all resources are available on our [Covid-19 Information and Resources Page](#).

Involving families in planning and decision making

Since 20 March 2020 Local Authorities should have been working with schools and parents to do risk assessments of all children with an EHCP to decide whether they attend school or not. Those assessments should now be used to help work out what

support children need to return to school or to cope with full school opening if they already attend. The guidance says schools should:

“contact parents and involve them in planning for their child’s return to their setting from September. They should also contact and involve young people over 16 who have EHC plans. That might include visits to the setting, social stories, and other approaches that specialist settings normally use to enable a child or young person with SEND, who has spent some time out of education, to return to full provision.”

We know that some families have not been contacted to discuss risk assessments and this may be an anxious and uncertain time for families where plans for supporting children and young people to return to school or college are not yet clear.

Local SEND Information and Advice Services (SENDIASS) may be able to support families in conversations with the Local Authority or the school. You can find your local service [here](#). There is an introductory film on how a local IASS team can be contacted [here](#). An additional film tells you more about what an information, advice and support service will do for you, find it [here](#).

Legal duties of schools and local authorities

During lockdown local authorities have only had to make “reasonable endeavours” to provide the support specified in Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. After the summer holidays local authorities will have a duty once more to deliver the provision specified in a child’s EHCP. They will still have flexibility around new needs assessments and plans until 25 September. It is possible that duties could be suspended again in certain areas of the country in the event of local lockdowns. Otherwise, your child will have the right to everything specified in their EHC plan.

Specialists, therapists, clinicians and support staff should provide interventions as usual.

The guidance also says that *“All education settings have a statutory duty under equalities legislation to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children. Many children and young people will have found lockdown exceptionally difficult socially and emotionally. Settings should consider any challenging behaviours or social or emotional challenges arising as a response to the lockdown and offer additional support and phased returns where needed.”*

Best practice in supporting children with severe learning disabilities to return to school

The CBF would expect any Reasonable Adjustments in place before lockdown to be reinstated. The need for extra Reasonable Adjustments should be assessed and additional support should be put in place for all children with severe learning disabilities, in order to manage the difficult transition to a new school situation.

Best practice would be input from health and social care staff, working in partnership with the school and family to develop a bespoke “transition back to school” support

package for each child or young person with a severe learning disability. This might include, for example:

- Communication support, to explain the changes in school or college and what is going to happen (See CBF Communication information page [here](#))
- Help children with coping skills around the return to school and mixing with more people than they have been used to, see this CBF information on Teaching New Skills [here](#).
- Support to manage the new hygiene requirements, which may be extremely difficult for some children with a severe learning disability to comply with. (See CBF information on [handwashing](#) , [temperature taking](#) and [spitting](#))
- Support to desensitise children to facemasks or PPE (See CBF information sheet on [facemasks](#))
- Introduction to new staff to build relationships if staffing has changed
- Specific plans for managing the risks for children with PICA behaviour with greater use of sanitiser, wipes and facemasks around them
- Specific plans for children and young people who need to move around regularly where movement around school or colleges is being limited to minimise the risk of virus spread

For a list of professionals who can help and provide support please see this information [here](#).

Behaviour Policies

The Government guidance for special schools says that “*Settings should consider updating their [behaviour policies](#) with any new rules or policies, and consider how to communicate rules or policies clearly and consistently to staff, pupils and parents, setting clear, reasonable and proportionate expectations of pupil behaviour.*” It goes on to talk about sanctions for deliberately breaking rules, including around hygiene and movement around school.

There is a large amount of evidence to show that it is inappropriate to use a sanction or punishment approach to challenging behaviour in children and young people with severe learning disabilities. Evidence-based approaches to behaviour should be used and restrictive interventions and blanket restrictions should be avoided.

Schools developing new behaviour policies may find the resources below helpful.

- [Positive Behaviour Support principles for practice during Covid 19](#)
- [Restrictive Practices Review](#)

The following section of the guidance should be followed in regard to children with severe learning disabilities: “*provision for children who have SEND may have been disrupted during partial school closure and there may be an impact on their behaviour. Settings will need to work with local services (such as health and the local authority) to ensure the services and support are in place to ensure a smooth return to settings for pupils.*”

Schools should work together with families to use Positive Behaviour Support and personalised strategies to support young people to return to school. This resource explains the approach and helps families check how PBS is being used:

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/understanding-behaviour/pbsguidesforfamilies.html>

This should follow the best practice advice we have set out in the section above.

Exclusion remains in place, as a last resort. The guidance is clear, however that parents should never be pressured to remove their child from school or to home educate them.

School transport

Where school transport is named in an EHC plan, it should be provided and funded by the local authority as before. As dedicated school transport tends to be consistent and does not involve mixing with the general public, the two metre social distancing rule will not apply from the autumn term. This means that escort services and school buses should be able to operate as normal. There may be additional requirements, for example:

- use of hand sanitiser upon boarding and/or disembarking
- organised queuing and boarding where possible
- distancing within vehicles wherever possible
- the use of face coverings for children over the age of 11, where appropriate - for example if they are likely to come into very close contact with people outside of their group or who they do not normally meet

These changes may require the kind of additional support for children with severe learning disabilities as set out in the best practice section above.

Local lockdown/second wave/self-isolation

It is possible that schools may be required to close in future if there is a second wave of the virus, or in the event of local outbreaks. Families may also have to self-isolate if they or someone they have been in contact with has symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19. In this event, families may wish to see our information sheets: [Information on school closures](#) or [activities 1](#) and [activities 2](#).

The Department for Education has set up a dedicated helpline for COVID-19 related education issues. Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and 10am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday, and can be contacted on 0800 046 8687.

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