

# 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 in England 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, updated on 28 August 2020, [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 are expected to go back to school part-time from 11<sup>th</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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 2020. 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, with the 26 August 2020 guidance stating that the focus should be to “*restore full provision for all children with EHC plans*”.

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.*”

### **Face coverings**

On 26 August 2020 the Government announced that schools have the right to require the use of face coverings by children year 7 and above in communal areas and corridors where social distancing is not possible. This is also one of the precautionary measures that should be used in the event of a local lockdown. This requirement does not apply to those who are exempt “*due to physical or mental illness or disability*”.

Exemptions in education settings are the same as exemptions elsewhere. Children and young people with severe learning disabilities are likely to be exempt and

teachers and other staff are asked to “*be sensitive to their needs*” We know the use of face masks will be difficult for many young people, including the use of masks by those around them. Please see [CBF information sheet](#) on face masks for more details about how to help people with severe learning disabilities manage the use of face masks.

If your child’s school is requiring the use of face masks in some areas they should communicate this clearly to parents. The CBF would recommend that the school discuss with families whether their child is exempt and any Reasonable Adjustments or extra support they may need in light of this new requirement.

### **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 displayed by 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. New guidance on [Transport to school and other places of education: autumn term 2020](#) was published on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2020 and updated further in the 26 August update to [Guidance for schools: coronavirus \(COVID-19\) What school leaders, teachers and school staff need to do during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

School transport is different to public transport, with less stringent requirements, but distancing should still be put in place wherever possible. The guidance states that “*social distancing should be maximised within vehicles whenever it is possible, between individuals or ‘bubbles’*” and fresh air should get into the vehicle through opening windows and ceiling vents. Face coverings are also now required on school transport for children age 11 or older unless they are exempt.

When Local Authorities are implementing controls, they should take account of particular needs of children and young people with SEND, and ‘*where necessary*’ the views of parents and the school.

You can find some key points regarding school transport and children with learning disabilities whose behaviours are challenging below:

- When children demonstrate behaviours such as spitting or use saliva as a sensory stimulus, this should be considered carefully in deciding what safeguards to put in place. In this scenario, “*maintaining distance on transport is particularly desirable*”.
- Children and young people who are not be able to use a face covering should not be expected to do so.
- Lip-reading masks may be suitable for some children and young people who need to lip read, or to see people’s faces, to communicate.
- Drivers and passenger assistants will not normally need to use PPE, even if they are not able to maintain distance from the children and young people they are supporting
- Transporting children and young people with SEND may require close contact. In these circumstances controls to reduce risk of transmission e.g. staff washing hands more frequently, should be used.
- Some Local Authorities might ask parents to accept personal travel budgets or mileage allowances to take their child to their school or place of education. This is permissible only with the parent’s consent.

### **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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