



INFORMATION SHEET

Education during the pandemic: information relevant to children and young people with severe learning disabilities

Following the [Prime Minister's announcement on 4 January 2021](#), colleges, alternative provision, primary, secondary and special schools in England will *only remain open* for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.

This resource is based upon English guidance. If your loved one attends school in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, educational settings will remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers. In Scotland, all other students will learn remotely until at least the 1st February 2021. The Scottish guidance can be found [here](#). In Wales, all other students will learn remotely until the February half term (unless infection rates fall significantly). The Welsh guidance can be found [here](#). In Northern Ireland, all other students will learn remotely until at least the 8th March 2021. The Northern Irish guidance can be found [here](#).

If you have concerns about your child attending 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 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](#).

Guidance for England

The guidance "restricting attendance during national lockdown: schools" was published on the 7th January 2021 and can be found [here](#).

The parent guidance was published on the 8th January 2021 and can be found [here](#).

All our information sheets are available to download free of charge.

To enable us to continue our work [please support us](#) or donate £3 by texting CBF to 70450.

Is this resource helpful? Please spend a few minutes giving us some feedback: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/cbfresources



Guidance for special schools, specialist post-16 providers and alternative provision during the national lockdown can be found [here](#).

Attendance

Children in England *can attend* school or college if they have an education, health and care (EHC) plan or if they have been identified as otherwise vulnerable. This includes:

- children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services
- adopted children or children on a special guardianship order
- those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
- care leavers
- others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

Special schools, alternative provision, and early years settings will remain open.

Shielding/Self isolation

The government has reinstated shielding guidance across England. This means that all children who are deemed clinically extremely vulnerable are advised *not to attend* education settings. The government expects education settings will offer remote education to these children. All other children will learn remotely until at least the 8th March 2021.



Families who have to self-isolate if they or someone they have been in contact with has symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19, or are shielding may wish to see our information sheets: [activities 1](#) and [activities 2](#).

Remote provision

The government has asked schools to put systems in place for vulnerable pupils who are self-isolating or shielding, to keep in contact with them, offer pastoral support, and check they are able to access education support. If your child is not at school their school or college should be finding ways to help them learn.

The government is still providing laptops and tablets to enable remote education. If your child does not have access to a tablet or laptop and could use one for learning, you can request one from your child's school or college.



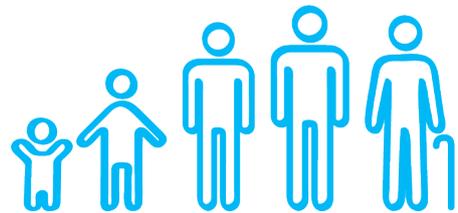
Parents, carers and pupils cannot apply directly to the Government for laptops, tablets or internet access the school should do this on your behalf, although many schools have not yet received the amount requested.

Involving families in decision making about school attendance

If your child is entitled to attend school please don't feel bad about taking what your child is entitled to. The Government is encouraging you to take the place unless there is a reason not to (such as shielding). Although there have been comments about the number of children in school, places are being provided for children with ECHPs due to the extra needs of this group and the extreme demands placed on families when children are not able to attend. The guidance is really clear that "Schools are expected to allow and strongly encourage vulnerable children and young people to attend. Parents/carers of vulnerable children and young people are strongly encouraged to take up the place."

Best practice should be for schools or local authorities to discuss with you the best approach for your child's school attendance. The guidance for special schools says that "Many children and young people will have found restrictions exceptionally difficult socially and emotionally. Settings should consider any challenging behaviours or social or emotional challenges arising as a response to restrictions (following discussion with the parents or young person) and offer additional support and phased returns where needed."

"Any further risk assessments undertaken should inform a plan of action which focuses on supporting attendance and engagement and, in the spirit of co-production, should involve parents and incorporate the views of the child or young person. They should involve young people over 16 who have EHC plans."



"Where schools grant a leave of absence to a vulnerable child or young person they should still speak to parents and carers, and social workers (where applicable) to explore the reasons for this and any concerns raised. The discussions should focus on the welfare of the child or young person and ensuring that the child or young person is able to access appropriate education and support while they are at home."

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

The previous changes to the Children and Families Act which were introduced during the first lockdown have now completely ceased and children are entitled to all the support in their EHC plans. Children are expected to be in school where possible in order to receive this education and care.

The guidance states “It is vital that all children with SEND attend their education setting so that they can receive high quality teaching and specialist professional care. All therapies and support that would normally be in place for children with EHC plans should now be back in place, and our focus is on supporting local authorities, health commissioning bodies and education settings to restore full provision for all children and young people with EHC plans.”

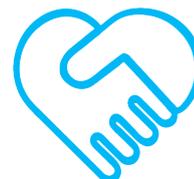
The guidance does acknowledge that in the event of staff shortages or a local outbreak it may be impossible to provide in person support. In these cases schools “should seek to resume as close as possible to the specified provision for the child or young person as soon as possible.” Schools should not use risk assessments previously drawn up to filter attendance but may use them to prioritise support. “Any redeployments should not be at the expense of supporting pupils with SEND”.

“Where providers have had to temporarily stop on-site provision on public health advice, they should inform the local authority to discuss alternative arrangements for vulnerable children and young people and work towards welcoming back pupils as soon as possible, where feasible to do so.”

“Where a pupil has provision specified within their EHC plan, it remains the duty of the local authority and any health bodies to secure or arrange the delivery of this in the setting that the plan names. However, there may be times when it becomes very difficult to do so, for example, if they are self-isolating. In this situation, decisions on how provision can be delivered should be informed by relevant considerations including, for example, the types of services that the pupil can access remotely, for example, online teaching and remote sessions with different types of therapists. These decisions should be considered on a case by case basis, avoiding a one size fits all approach.”

Support and care

During this lockdown you can leave home to access respite care, attend a support group, or visit your support/childcare bubble (if you are legally permitted to form one). This means that children under 14 can access childcare if they are part of a [childcare bubble](#) or attend any respite care or short break provision available.





There is recognition that care for disabled or vulnerable people is a clear reason for being away from home and disabled people can attend a support group (of up to 15 people).

Travel

You can travel outside your local area to access education, for caring responsibilities, or for visiting those in your support bubble – or your childcare bubble for childcare.

Transport services to education settings should continue to be provided (see section below).

The guidance also states that “where a child routinely attends more than one setting on a part time basis, for example, because they are dual registered at a mainstream school ...and a special school, schools should work through the system of controls collaboratively, enabling them to address any risks identified and allowing them to jointly deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for the child.”

Free School Meals and wraparound provision

Free school meals should still be provided to all those eligible whether or not they are attending school. Schools will be given extra funding to provide food parcels or meals. The government is putting in place a national supermarket voucher scheme for when schools cannot offer food parcels.

You can check if your child is eligible for free school meals and apply on your local authority website [here](#).

If you need urgent help accessing food, for example when shielding, you can [contact your local council](#).

The guidance states that “Schools should continue to offer wraparound provision, such as breakfast and afterschool clubs, for those children eligible to attend school (i.e. children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people)”

Health

The guidance states “Schools should consider how they are working with school nursing services to support the health and wellbeing of their pupils; school nursing services are continuing to offer support to pupils in school and working remotely– school nurses as leaders of the healthy child programme can offer a range of support including:





- support for resilience, mental health and wellbeing including anxiety, bereavement and sleep issues
- support for pupils with additional and complex health needs
- supporting vulnerable children and keeping children safe”

Testing

The Government is delivering a rapid asymptomatic testing programme in the Spring term for children and young people in year 7 and above (or equivalent) and school staff. This testing programme will be delivered in all settings with secondary age pupils, including special schools.

In her open letter to families, minister for children and young people Vicky Ford states that:

“Testing is voluntary, so no child or young person will be tested unless informed consent has been given by the appropriate person (usually the parent or young person). As such, no children or young people will be prevented from receiving face-to-face education if for any reason they are not tested.”

“The test involves a swab of the throat and/or nose... we recognise that the self-swabbing may cause significant concerns for some children and young people with SEND. Where self-swabbing is not possible, special schools and special post-16 institutions are likely to have staff who have undertaken a variety of training to support health needs and who could administer swabs where appropriate. In exceptional circumstances, settings may want to work with parents to agree to a parent coming in to support their child to self-swab or to swab their child.”

The government has asked family carers and staff to self-isolate and [book a test](#) if they are displaying symptoms. The main symptoms are a high temperature, a new continuous cough and/or a loss of or change to your sense of smell/taste. Staff and pupils should not come into school/college if they have symptoms.

The full guidance on mass asymptomatic testing in specialist settings is available [here](#):

Face coverings

The guidance on face coverings remains the same. 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 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 [facemasks](#).

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.

Reasonable Adjustments

The CBF would expect Reasonable Adjustments to be in place for children with severe learning disabilities whose behaviours challenge. 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.

The guidance says “Some pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (whether with education, health and care plans or on SEN support) will continue to need specific help with the changes to routines they are experiencing, so teachers and special educational needs coordinators should plan to meet these needs, for example using social stories.”

Best practice would be input from health and social care staff, working in partnership with the school and family to develop a bespoke 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 changes in school and mixing with different people than they have been used to, see this CBF information on Teaching New Skills [here](#).
- Support to manage the hygiene requirements, which may be extremely difficult for some children with a severe learning disability to comply with. (See CBF information on [handwashing](#) and [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.*” The updated guidance also says “*Many children and young people will have found restrictions exceptionally difficult socially and emotionally. Settings should consider any challenging behaviours or social or emotional challenges arising as a response to restrictions (following discussion with the parents or young person) and offer additional support and phased returns where needed.*”



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. The guidance on [Transport to school and other places of education: 2020 to 2021 academic year](#) still stands.

When Local Authorities are implementing controls, they should take account of particular needs of children and young people with SEND, and to be informed by the views of parents and the school. Regarding mileage allowances and personal travel budgets, the guidance is clear that:

“In order to maximise home to school transport capacity, some local authorities have asked some parents to accept personal travel budgets or mileage allowances to take their child to their school or other education setting. This is permissible with the parent’s consent but not something on which parents or local authorities can insist. Local authorities should not expect parents to commit to accepting a personal payment or mileage allowance for a specified period of time, and participation will not impact future eligibility on dedicated school transport. The local authority will need reasonable notice to put home to school arrangements back in place for the child or young person when required again”.

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, “*distancing is particularly important*”.
- 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.

Helpline

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.



Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service, provides support to children, young people and their families who aren't currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). You can access via the 'See, Hear, Respond' service self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015."

Complaints

The parent guidance states that for concerns about safeguarding, or the amount/quality of face to face or remote education, family carers should speak to their child's teacher or headteacher. If you still have concerns you can raise these with Ofsted. In post-16 settings, families should speak to the college or provider first, and follow this up with a formal complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency if the complaint remains unresolved.

"If you have concerns about safeguarding or the quality of education your child is receiving, you should talk to their teacher or headteacher. If you still have concerns you can raise them with Ofsted who may decide to inspect the school."

"If you have concerns about the amount or quality of the remote education your child is receiving you should talk to their teacher or headteacher. If you still have concerns you can raise them with Ofsted who may decide to inspect the school."

"If you have concerns about the quality of education, you should talk to the college or provider in the first instance. You can also follow the formal complaints process with the Education and Skills Funding Agency regarding any post-16 training provider, college or employer that is funded by ESFA if you have exhausted the provider's own complaints procedure, including any appeals process"



Last updated 29/01/21

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are a registered UK charity specifically focussed on the needs of children, young people and adults with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges, and their families. We will make a difference to the lives of people with severe learning disabilities, whose behaviour challenges, and their families by:

- Championing their rights
- Ensuring timely information and support
- Raising awareness and understanding
- Promoting and sharing best practice

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email info@thecbf.org.uk or visit our website: <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk>