

My Ref: MG/AR-005-2020/C-19 003
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Date: 30/03/2020

Dear Parents, Carers, Families and Young People

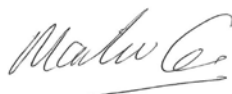
COVID-19: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

1. I am writing to update you on what we are doing to continue to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) continue to be able to access education during the Covid-19 pandemic. As you will know, children with SEND face particular challenges at the current time as do their families, and those who support them, care for them and provide the education opportunities they deserve.
2. I want to reassure you that we are here to support you as much as we possibly can through these uncertain times. We will continue to ensure that our systems and processes are still in operation, and that we continue to ensure that your needs are met as much as possible, whilst respecting the requirements of public protection.
3. I want to outline the actions we are taking, in response to Government guidance, and the approach which is set out in the Minister's open letter, which is attached for your information):
 - a. **The SEND Team** – the team are working remotely at the moment, and although we are still running panels, these are also being held remotely. We will do all we can to continue to respond to queries and requests for advice, but please bear with us as it may take longer than usual for us to respond. We are updating the Local Offer www.stocktoninformationdirectory.org with useful information.
 - b. **Support** – SENDIASS and the Parent Carers Forum have web pages on their sites with resources and information that you will find useful.

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- c. **Keeping as many schools open as possible** – we are working with schools to ensure as many stay open as possible to support the most vulnerable, and children of critical key workers
 - d. **Special schools staying open, and working together** – we are working with our special schools to retain their provision. Although Ash Trees had to close temporarily, they will reopen week commencing 30 March 2020.
 - e. **Ensuring the needs of children placed out of area are prioritised** – we are ensuring that we are in regular contact with all schools to ensure they continue to be providing the support our children deserve.
 - f. **Risk assessments and variations to EHCPs** – a risk assessment to establish the individual needs of each child or young person with an EHCP is being undertaken. This assessment will incorporate the views of the child or young person and their parents wherever possible. This will inform the decision about whether needs should continue to be met in school or college, or whether needs can be met at home safely. If changes are made, this will be in the form of an addendum to the EHCP. Government guidance is clear that many children with EHCPs can safely remain at home, especially where they are not receiving, or have only limited need for personal care.
4. These are uniquely challenging times, and we need to continue to balance the need to operate as much as possible with the need to safeguard you, staff and partners.
 5. I can assure you we are doing everything we can to ensure that you continue to receive the best possible support during this difficult time.

Yours faithfully



Martin Gray
Director of Children's Services

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