



18th January 2021

Open Letter from Jenny Coles, Director of Children’s Services, to all Parents and Carers of Children and Young People with SEND regarding Education Provision in Schools. This letter will give you information about how your school and the local area are working to meet your child’s needs in these difficult times. You do not have to do anything as a result of this letter.

Dear Parent or Carer,

I hope you are managing in these very difficult times. I am writing to outline the recent guidance published following the announcement of the national lockdown and how Hertfordshire County Council will be supporting you and your children.

As you will know, following the Prime Minister’s announcement on 4th January, the country has been in national lockdown to reduce the spread of Covid-19 since 5th January, full details of the lockdown restrictions can be found at [National lockdown - stay at home](#). A national approach will help control transmissions, safeguard the roll-out of the vaccine programme and protect both the vulnerable and our NHS.

The Department for Education published new national guidance about the arrangements for education during this period which can be found at [School national restrictions guidance](#) . We are writing to you to highlight key points from the guidance and provide further details about the local situation in Hertfordshire.

We understand how challenging it will be for both you and your children to be entering another period of restriction which has caused schools to restrict attendance, and that you may be worried about your child’s educational and emotional needs. We want to do all that we can to provide services and support to your family at this time, but we must emphasise how serious the current pandemic situation is. There are now many more people in Hertfordshire who have, or are affected by Covid-19, than during the previous lockdown in March 2020 and that means that many of the services that your child normally accesses will be affected.

Like the lockdown last spring the national guidance provides for families of children of critical workers and vulnerable children including those with a EHCP access to face to face learning in school.

The guidance also states that “if parents feel their children’s school is not providing remote education of a suitable quantity and quality, they are encouraged to in the first instance raise their concerns with the teacher or headteacher”.

Children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

In accordance with national guidance, all children and young people with an Education, Health and Care plan are expected to be able to attend their school, face to face on a full-time basis.

Exceptions:

- Pupils tested positive for Covid-19

- Pupils who are self-isolating because they are a close contact of someone tested positive for Covid
- Clinically extremely vulnerable pupils are also advised not to attend school/college.

Children and Young People with EHCPs Attending Mainstream Schools: If your child usually attends a mainstream school, it is expected that they should be able to access fulltime face to face education during the lockdown.

Children and Young People with EHCPs Attending Special Schools, Specialist Units or Alternative Provision: Our special schools, education support centres (ESCs) and primary behaviour services are faced with a particularly challenging situation during this lockdown period. For these settings almost all their pupils will be included in the vulnerable category and therefore the Government's expectation is that they will be offering a fulltime, face to face offer for most or all their pupils. At the same time, our special schools, ESCs and primary behaviour services are experiencing high levels of staff absence due to Covid which means they cannot open safely for all pupils to attend at the same time.

Option for parent to decide their child should not attend: Schools will continue to record attendance in the register for pupils with an EHCP, but if you would prefer your child to learn remotely during the national lockdown period and not attend face to face, you should advise your child's school/college and they are expected to authorise this absence. Non-attendance will not be penalised if your child is consistently access remote learning provided by their school.

Transport arrangements continue to be in place and can be accessed as usual.

Government guidance encourages schools to balance health and safety risks and that *"on occasion special schools/ alternative provisions may encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with vital specialist training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to the child or young person's specified provision as soon as possible."*

This means that at different points in the lockdown period some schools and alternative provision may have to reduce their offer so that some or all of their pupils have a mixture of face to face and remote learning, or if things become very serious, they may have to close for a short time. This will vary from school to school, as the situation is different for each one. We have asked Headteachers of our special schools and alternative provision, to work closely with each child's parents and carers individually to make a suitable plan if this situation arises. We will be working closely with these settings to monitor the situation and review the offer for each child.

Provision for children and young people with SEND

The new guidance says: *"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."*

While the law has not changed regarding the provision within EHCPs at this time, circumstances are far from normal, with the pandemic far worse than at any previous point, and while providers will do

all that they can to make provision, there will be challenges due to staff absences and illness and safety considerations. This means that all education, health, and care providers will need to prioritise their services.

We continue to work closely with [Herts Parent Carer Involvement](#) (HPCI) the parent-carer forum for Hertfordshire that represents the experiences and views of families with SEND, to address this and other challenges. It is our expectation that where schools and other services face challenges in delivering the full provision in an EHCP, there is an open conversation with families to co-produce what services are possible to deliver and what alternatives can be put in place.

Services supporting Children and Young People with SEND

All providers are doing their best to maintain services during the national lockdown, however all face-to-face services are experiencing staff shortages, and some, increases in demand.

Health services recognise the importance of the continued delivery of support for children, young people and families and will endeavour to provide what is expected. However, the impact on health services is significant and changing fast. Any changes that need to be made to delivery will be discussed and planned with families to ensure there is a plan.

Statutory education, health and care assessments, annual reviews of EHCPs and applications for specialist admissions are progressing according to statutory timescales.

Advice and support can be sought through the following helpline numbers

Educational Psychology Service	01992 588574	Weds 2-4pm
SEND Specialist Advice and Support (SAS) Service	01442 453920	Mon 9:30-12pm Tues-Thurs 9:30-4pm

Children with SEND without EHCPs may also belong to a vulnerable group and schools will consider requests for placement against their own risk assessment processes. again, the Local Authority will offer support and advice regarding the children and young people and their families through the advice lines detailed above. Further guidance can be found re guidance on shielding and those that are extremely vulnerable can be found at the gov.uk website - [Guidance on shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable persons from Covid-19](#).

SENDIASS are continuing to offer a full service and can provide impartial information, advice and support service for children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers. They can talk through any questions or concerns about SEND and in relation to the current lockdown measures, school closures or remote learning. You can contact them directly at: 01992 555847 or via sendiass@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Short Breaks Local Offer continue to offer their services at present, Physical SBLO sessions are running with reduced capacity due to social distancing measure. Virtual SBLO sessions are available with some providers. Updates or changes re Short Breaks can be found : <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/shortbreaks>

As we have learnt over recent months, the situation changes very quickly. The best way for you to find out about local updates, supports and services is to log onto our local offer online at : <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronavirusupdateslocaloffer>

or our social media updates at:

Twitter: @SENDEHerts

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/hertsadditionalneedsdatabase/>

There is no doubt that the coming weeks will be very challenging for us all and we thank you for your support and forbearance through this challenging period. Together we can all play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS.

Yours faithfully,

Jenny Coles

Director of Children's Service
Hertfordshire County Council



Carol Kelsey

Herts Parents Carers Involvement Coordinator
Herts Parents Carers Involvement



If you would like to join Herts Parent Carer Involvement you can find out more here :
<https://www.hertsparentcarers.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-member/>

Key documents have been linked in this document, and full text web links are available below:

National Lockdown Stay At Home guidance full link - <http://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

School national restrictions guidance full link -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf

Herts Parent Carer Involvement forum website - <https://www.hertsparentcarers.org.uk>

Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are extremely clinically vulnerable full link -
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

