

My ref: Special School Re-opening 4
Date: 15th July 2020
Contact: Please contact your school
for more information



To parents/carers of pupils in
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Special Schools

People & Communities
Education Directorate

Dear Parents – Carers,

I am writing to update you about some of the recent COVID-19 developments for special schools and settings.

Firstly, may I take this opportunity to thank you for all of your support during the COVID-19 period. I do not underestimate the challenges that all parents and carers have faced during these last few months, especially for families with a child or young person with special educational needs. Many school leaders and settings managers have shared with me the difference that your help with home learning has made. These partnerships make it easier for teachers and supporting staff to help pupils to catch up, or keep up, with their learning when school starts again, for all, in September. If you have any specific issues to raise regarding your child's return to school, please get in touch with the school or setting and they will be able to help.

Opening over the summer holidays

The government is not asking schools and settings to remain open over the summer holidays. Schools and settings therefore will not be expected to open for vulnerable pupils and the children of critical workers over this period. Some school leaders and setting managers may continue to offer summer holiday activities over this period and we have given them details of the latest guidance for opening. Providers offering paid childcare or holiday activities will be able to operate over the summer holiday period. Parents should make arrangements with such providers directly.

Recent announcements: special schools and the autumn term

The government has issued schools and settings with advice about how they can open in September at minimal risk to pupils and to staff, now that the prevalence of COVID has decreased. Current restrictions on class sizes will be lifted, but schools and settings will keep children in 'bubbles' to minimise the number of daily contacts with others that each pupil has. Protective measures, such as regular cleaning and handwashing, will, of course, continue. Schools and settings, supported by the local authority, are putting rigorous procedures in place to minimise the likelihood of viral transmission, and respond to any positive COVID cases. Testing is widely available and schools and settings will alert parents should any suspected or confirmed cases arise, in line with the agreed Public Health England (PHE) actions and the NHS Test and Trace process. Appropriate actions will be taken in the case of any outbreak, and remote education will be made available to any pupils who might have to self-isolate.

Every school and settings' approach will be different and will reflect local context and circumstances. Schools and settings will work with the local authority to update their risk assessments and consider carefully their arrangements. This will reduce risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Your child's school or setting will advise you about any changes to routines, including for dropping pupils off and collecting them at the end of the day, or changes to school transport and access to the school buildings for families and visitors, which may be different from usual whilst physical/social distancing is in place. If individual schools or settings need to operate phased returns, or to alter or stagger the times of the day temporarily, the details of this and the reasons for it will be made before the start of the new school year.

Education, Health and Care Plans

The government has put in place interim arrangements to the legislation that has allowed the local authority to implement easements on the duty to provide aspects of an EHCP and make reasonable endeavours to provide as much support as possible. This was put in place to support schools, social care and health services focus on addressing the COVID pandemic. It is expected that this legislation will return to usual expectations and the provision outlined in EHCP's will be resumed as quickly as possible. However, some services will still need to be retained to support the pandemic, so there may still be a restriction on face to face support provided by health, therapy and other services. All services are working hard to continue to offer as much support as possible and, where appropriate, will offer remote support and interventions. I would like to thank you for your resilience and support and I know that special schools and settings will be supporting parents/ carers and pupils to return to school and understand that individual circumstances may require a longer period of phased return to ensure the safety of pupils. Please make contact with your children's school for specific details and again, thank you for your support and commitment.

Attendance from September

The risk to children of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low and we know there are negative, and sometimes lasting, health and educational impacts for pupils who are out of school and settings for long periods. It is with this in mind that the government's guidance states that pupils will be expected to attend their school / setting, as normal, come September. A small number of pupils will still be unable to attend because they are self-isolating and have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves, or because they are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19.

Shielding advice will pause on 1 August, subject to a continued decline in the rates of COVID transmission. This means that those pupils who remain on the shielded patient list can also return to their school or setting, as can those who have family members who are shielding. Some pupils who are not required to shield but who remain under the care of a specialist medical professional may need to discuss their care with that professional before returning to their school or setting. I would recommend that all parent carers have a discussion with their doctor / paediatrician to discuss the any specific risks and ask for advice about whether it is safe for your child to return to school. Please advise the school or setting if the guidance you receive is that your child should remain at home. Other than in these exceptional cases, or where a pupil's absence is otherwise authorised, it will be the school or settings' expectation that pupils attend as normal.

Transport

Officers at the Council are working hard on transport planning for September 2020 and this will continue well into the summer holiday period as we await further government guidance.

This is a complex process involving re-visiting all of the school routes taking into account the teaching bubbles the schools plan to operate, the availability of vehicles, drivers and Passenger Assistants and, when we receive it, updated government guidance. It may, therefore, be sometime before you are contacted by the transport team about arrangements for your child(ren). Please be assured that the safety and well-being of pupils on their journeys to and from school continues to be our priority and bear with us as we work through the arrangements with schools and settings. We will provide updates when we can via the Local Offer websites -

Peterborough Local Offer - <https://tinyurl.com/PboroLocalOffer>

Cambridgeshire Local Offer - <https://tinyurl.com/CambsLocalOffer>

Catch-Up Funding

You may have heard that the government will be providing funding so that schools and settings can provide additional tuition and other support to pupils. At the time of writing, detailed guidance has not been released about this. As soon as it has, we will work with schools to consider the best ways forward to support your child's individual needs.

Together with my colleagues in the local authority, we will continue to do all we can to support schools and settings and those who lead them to prepare for September – and beyond.

Thank you, again, for everything you are doing to help prepare your child to make a strong and safe start to the new school year.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Lewis
Service Director – Education
Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council