

11<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

As you know on Monday 4 January, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which has now come into effect. Full details of the lockdown restrictions can be found at [www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home).

All children and young people on roll at a special school have an Education, Health and Care plan and so are defined as eligible to attend onsite, according to the DFE criteria. This places significant pressure on our special schools, who are also managing reduced staffing capacity due to sickness and/or isolation and additional workload such as implementing testing, managing remote learning and contact tracing processes.

Special schools will endeavour to comply with government guidance in ensuring children and young people can attend school where their parent/carer wishes.

However, the government guidance recognises that on occasion special schools 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, the government advises that schools should seek to resume as close as possible to, the child or young person's specified provision as soon as possible.

To plan for occasions when a special school cannot provide full onsite provision for all pupils whose parents/carers wish them to attend, special school leaders, the Essex Family Forum, Education, Children's Social Care, the Essex Clinical Commissioning Groups and Public Health colleagues have worked together to develop a prioritisation criteria for onsite provision. We aim to create a fair, equitable and high-quality offer for all, whilst enabling the ongoing safety and viability of our special schools.

If a child or young person meets any of the following criteria they would be given priority for onsite provision and can attend, if you/they feel this is best:

- Children or young people with a Child Protection Plan or those who are Looked After Children;
- Children previously on a Child Protection Plan or previously Looked After;
- Those with a special guardianship order;
- Children with a Child in Need Plan;
- Children of critical workers with no alternative childcare arrangements (see link below);
- Other significant concerns based on discussions with families and the school's operational capacity.

All other children will be supported to remain at home through remote learning; your child's school, and other professionals where appropriate, will work with you to ensure that the arrangements are appropriate for your child's needs.

The number of children and young people able to be onsite at any one time will differ from school to school and will be informed by a risk assessment of the school's individual context taking into account staffing capacity and ability to enable a safe working environment/infection control measures. Some schools may offer a mixture of full and part time provision or rota of provision, using our best endeavours to suit children and their families' circumstances and needs.

Transport arrangements continue to be in place and can be accessed as usual; each school will ensure that transport providers have accurate up-to-date information on which children are attending.

The current guidance advises that children and young people who are deemed clinically extremely vulnerable should not attend their school setting and should remain at home as much as possible. If your child is clinically extremely vulnerable please liaise with your school who will continue to support you. If your situation changes or you have concerns about your child's well-being then please contact your child's school. Any queries regarding your child's attendance should be raised with your school in the first instance. Thank you for your continued support of Essex's special schools throughout this challenging period. Together we all play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

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