

Your ref:

Our ref: SH/

Tel no:

Email:

Date: 13 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Central Bedfordshire special schools and pupil attendance during the Pandemic

Thank you all for your ongoing support in recognising the challenges being presented to us all in meeting the needs of local children and young people with SEND.

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

Since this was announced, staff in our special schools have been doing all they can to continue to provide face-to-face teaching to all young people with Education, Health and Care plans, as outlined in the Government's guidance.

Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more challenging to balance the demands of teaching in a school with restricted staffing capacity, facing an increasing amount of Covid associated challenges and needing to keep everyone safe. Headteachers and school staff really want to accommodate every child, but sadly this just isn't possible to do so currently. The special schools are currently operating with enhanced safety procedures, reduced staffing capacity due to sickness and/or isolation and additional workload such as implementing testing, managing remote learning and contact tracing processes.

We know that the pandemic itself is a worry and lockdown is a challenge for all parents but particularly so for parents supporting a child with SEND while accessing remote learning. None of this is easy, and unfortunately we are faced with needing to make some difficult choices to ensure that schools continue to operate safely while supporting those who are most in need. To minimise the potential for risk at our settings during this period, we need to ensure that our schools are working with an approach to prioritisation to help guide decision making and discussions with parents and carers, to determine which children

and young people should be prioritised to receive face-to-face teaching when schools are struggling with capacity. We also ask that if you are able to keep your children at home, irrespective of this approach, then please do so.

Through this approach we are aiming to create a fair, equitable and high-quality offer for all, whilst enabling the ongoing safety and viability of our special schools. To make this as fair as possible, we have worked with special school leaders and our local area key partners to develop the following approach to prioritisation to inform the conversations between schools and the parents and carers of their children.

This is not a blanket approach criteria but will help to guide key discussions. This is necessary whilst enabling our special schools to align with Department for Education (DfE) guidance, in the circumstance that our schools may have to make any needs-led determinations over which children and young people can attend.

The following approach to prioritisation has been agreed to help serve as a frame of reference to support parent discussions:

- Children or young people with a Child Protection Plan, Children with a Child in Need 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 of critical workers with no alternative childcare arrangements
- Families who would like their child to attend are encouraged to have a conversation with the school to explore their options

Transport arrangements will continue to be in place for these young people and can be accessed as usual.

We ask that you only take up the offer of on-site provision as and when you need it. Each school's capacity to take children will vary and will change on a day-to-day basis depending on availability of staff and the number of children attending.

The current guidance for children and young people who are deemed clinically extremely vulnerable is not to attend their school setting and to remain at home as much as possible. If your child is within this category, please liaise with your school who will continue to support you.

All children not attending school will be supported to remain at home through remote learning. If you have any concerns about your child's access to ICT, or the remote learning content, we encourage you to discuss this with your Headteacher in the first instance.

We appreciate that this is a difficult time for all families, particularly those who have children with SEND, and we would thank you for your continued support of

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Central Bedfordshire's special schools and our staff. Special schools value the communication with their families and will endeavour to contact you regularly throughout this National lockdown. It is important that you keep in touch with your child's school if you have any concerns – they are still here to help and support you and your family.

Together we all play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, protect the NHS and save lives.

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

Jointly signed by

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