

Guidance for young people, and parents/carers of children with SEND in mainstream schools/settings

22nd January 2021

This guidance has been prepared by Calderdale Council (Education and Inclusion Service) in collaboration with:

- Public Health
- Unique Ways and Family Voice Calderdale
- Social Care services
- Calderdale Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

Calderdale Council and its partners recognise that these are difficult times for everyone. We want to reassure you that services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities continue to be at the forefront of any considerations and decisions made.

Further guidance from the Department for Education has now been made available (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf), which sets out how education settings and authorities should accommodate children and young people in school or college during this lockdown period. The guidance states that “schools are expected to allow and strongly encourage vulnerable children and young people to attend. Parents/carers of vulnerable children and young people are strongly encouraged to take up the place.” At this point, we know that there is a high demand for places for children of critical workers, and those who are classed as ‘vulnerable’. Where demand is high, we know that schools, early years and post-16 settings are struggling to accommodate all pupils who have requested placements, whilst maintaining stringent safety measures to reduce transmission and keep their children, staff and communities safe.

We know that this situation is not unique to Calderdale, and that authorities, schools and settings around the country are facing similar issues. We are confident that the approach taken by Calderdale Council, working in partnership with local settings, is the best we can possibly do to maintain the balance between keeping children and young people, families, staff and communities as safe as possible, whilst providing access to robust education and support.

The default position that everyone possible should remain at home.

This includes those with EHC plans, if it is safe and appropriate for them to do so. Where there are more children in schools and colleges, there is a greater risk of the transmission of COVID-19 within the setting and the community, and a greater risk that bubbles will be ‘burst’, leading to increased closures, increasing risk for those who require the highest levels of support, and limiting the availability of critical frontline workers to respond to the pandemic.

There will be some children and young people with an EHC plan across Calderdale who are not accessing on-site learning, either by choice, or on occasion as a result of Public Health advice or where settings are in excess of their safe levels of occupancy. This guidance therefore sets out how schools, settings and the council intend to provide as close as possible to children and young people’s specified provision whether they are accessing on-site or remote learning.

Children accessing on-site learning and support

- Schools and settings are working hard to provide on-site learning for as many ‘vulnerable’ and ‘critical worker’ children as possible, within safe levels of occupancy. Schools and settings have worked with parents and carers to look at individual circumstances, such as the levels of support required, health needs, working patterns, job roles, and access to other services to determine how to prioritise children for on-site learning.
- Where families would like to access on-site learning we are working with schools and settings to try their best to accommodate these wishes. Where this is not possible due to Public Health advice, the local authority and the setting are working with parents/carers on an individual level to identify what alternative options may be available. This may include, for example, a temporary place in an alternative school, or additional provision from health or social care services. If you would like to discuss this in more detail, please contact your head teacher or ben.allchin@calderdale.gov.uk.
- Schools and settings will continue to review their arrangements in light of updated government guidance or resulting from any changes in the rate or spread of COVID-19. This may increase or decrease the capacity to deliver on-site learning for pupils. Schools and settings will keep parents/carers and young people, up to date with any changes as they occur.
- Specialist teaching and support teams, therapy and health services continue to provide support across schools and settings for children who require it.

Children accessing remote learning and support

- All children who are not receiving full-time on-site learning will receive a package of remote learning and support from their school or college. This will incorporate a range of activities that enable the child/young person to continue to access their curriculum and provision. Teachers and/or support staff will continue to maintain close links with you/your child so that teaching is in line with the child’s normal curriculum as far as possible, and to monitor and measure their progress. Schools and settings will provide information about their remote learning offer to parents/carers directly.
- Where children would normally access support from therapy services such as Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy, they can continue to do so remotely either through clinic or home appointments. Whereas in the first lockdown we know that there were some difficulties accessing therapy support, the council is currently working with the CCG to ensure that those who need therapy services continue to be able to access them. Therapists can also arrange for delivery of any therapy equipment needed in the home. For further details please contact your child’s therapist/s directly.
- Council education services, such as specialist teaching and support teams, sensory needs teams, the ASD team and the Portage and Early Years Support Team, continue to provide remote support and intervention for children on their caseload who are remote learning. They will contact you directly to arrange this.
- We know that many parents/carers of children and young people with complex needs are concerned about a lack of respite support, and worried about having the capacity to provide supervision and stimulation throughout the day. We are working with colleagues to look at the possibility of providing opportunities for short periods of respite for parents/carers and their children with SEN to access throughout the week. We will provide more information about this to you once plans are approved.

Health services

- Many health assessments and provisions, such as the neurodevelopmental pathway and CAMHS services, are currently continuing to run face to face clinics. Of course, adaptations will be made within these clinics to adhere to any necessary safety measures. We are working hard with colleagues across health services to mitigate any impact from COVID on waiting times, although there is likely to be some delay.
- It is important to be aware that there may be occasions where NHS staff are required to be redeployed to critical COVID-related roles. There is work ongoing nationally between the Department for Education and the Department of Health to try and prevent this occurring. However, if this does happen it is likely that access to some health services could be impacted.

Social care services

- Social workers and early intervention services are continuing to work closely with families and children/young people as normal. For any information about this, please contact your social worker directly.
- Overnight short breaks are continuing as normal wherever possible.
- Where Direct Payments have been agreed, these will continue to be paid. Many Personal Assistants (PAs) are continuing to work as normal, although they may ask you to help in conducting a risk assessment of their work. Whilst some activities are currently not allowed, there are some which are exempt from lockdown, such as *“for respite care where that care is being provided to a vulnerable person or a person with a disability...”*. For further details around Direct Payments and PAs please contact the lead professional of your child’s plan.

Further advice and support

- Any meetings or reviews relating to your child’s education, health or care provision will continue to go ahead as planned whether they are accessing on-site or remote learning. These will go ahead using remote technology such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams.
- If you are concerned about your child’s access to provision stated in their EHC plan, please contact your SEN Officer at the council, or email SEN.Team@calderdale.gov.uk to let them know. We will work with you to ensure that we can provide as close to the stipulated provision as possible.
- We are working on a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document for parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. If you have a question you would like to be included in our FAQs, or would like to provide feedback on your experiences during this lockdown, please send it to: family.voice@uniqueways.org.uk
- The council will continue to review its position in light of updated guidance from the government and Public Health colleagues. All updates, and access to further sources of support including resources to assist with remote learning, will be included on the **Calderdale Local Offer**: <https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2/residents/education-and-learning/local-offer/send>