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June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

**Children & Young People with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans)**

We hope that you and your families are managing as well as can be during what we know is a very difficult time for everybody.

This letter sets out how children and young people with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans will be supported during the wider reopening of schools and education settings in Bexley.

You may be aware that the majority of education settings have remained open during the pandemic for pupils of keyworker parents and vulnerable children which include those who have an EHC Plan (based on individual risk assessments).

**Risk Assessments and the wider opening of schools**

At the end of March, the Department for Education has asked Local Authorities and key partners to carry out a risk assessment for all children and young people who have an EHC plan. These risk assessments were undertaken by education settings with parents/carers, and where appropriate/required partners from health and social care. As education settings increase their onsite offer, risk assessments are now being reviewed and updated. This is to make sure the decisions made remain appropriate for the individual child/young person. The London Borough of Bexley and the NHS South East London Clinical Commissioning Group in Bexley (CCG) will continue to work with education settings, providing support and clarity where required.

Risk assessments will decide whether your child/young person’s needs can be safely met at school/in their education setting. They will also consider how the educational setting can continue to support pupils if they are not in their usual setting or are remaining at home during this time.

The Department for Education is asking that Special Schools to welcome back an increasing number of pupils, based on an assessment of need and risk for the individual. Schools and educational settings will also need to consider their capacity as well as Government guidance as part of their decision-making process to ensure that the offer is safe and sustainable. We are working with educational settings to support parents to feel confident about returning to school.

**Requirement to make reasonable endeavours to deliver the provision listed in the EHC Plan.**

There have been temporary changes to the law, taking into account that not all of the provision in your child or young person’s EHC Plan can be delivered or that it has to be delivered in a different way.

The government has advised that reasonable endeavours need to be applied with regards to the delivery the provision listed in your child’s EHC Plan (section F and G). For example, there may be situations where schools or health services have not had enough staff to deliver the provision in the same way and services may be using different ways of delivering provision, such as video consultations. These situations are likely to continue for some time, however, the local authority and the CCG will work with all providers to ensure reasonable endeavours are applied in delivering provisions to your child and that these reasonable endeavours and changes to the delivery of the EHC Plan are discussed with you. Across the local area, there have been some innovative ways in which therapy has been delivered to pupils using videos and other methods, such as workshops for parents on sensory processing and we hope that this has been of support.

**Annual Reviews and new school placements**

There have been no changes to the law on Annual Reviews of EHC plans. Annual Reviews should therefore still go ahead, although in a different format. Meetings will be held virtually or via conference calls or video links rather than in school. Some reports from professionals may be delayed but our aim is to have them available in time whenever possible. We also know that some families have said they do not want to go ahead with the Annual Review during the pandemic and we will of course respect these wishes.

The law related to further statutory work such as placement consultations and securing a new school placement has also not changed.

**EHC Needs Assessments**

EHC Needs Assessments continue to be carried out even though the assessments have to be done differently and much more assessment work is taking place in the ‘virtual space.’

**Engagement from educational settings for children working at home**

For children and young people at home, staff from their usual education setting should be in contact at least once a week. This will be to provide work or activities, suggest other resources or support and to check on progress. This may be via email, telephone, or via video link. The organisations who provide our health and therapy support for children and young people in Bexley are continuing to contact families directly to organise and provide support.

**Arrangements for transition**

For many children and young people with Special Education Needs or Disabilities, returning to their nursery, school or college will be another transition and we know that this will be an anxious time, given the current situation. Settings must make reasonable adjustments to accommodate those with Special Education Needs or Disabilities to ensure they can re-integrate safely and effectively. Staff will continue to work hard and plan the best way to provide learning and support whilst following the government’s current advice to ensure social distancing. This may include either a delayed, phased or part-time return. Please keep talking with staff at your child’s school or education setting to ensure you can prepare your child or young person for the changes that will be in place.

We are also thinking carefully about children and young people who are due to start new schools or colleges in September 2020, and for whom preparation for these changes may be disrupted. Schools and settings as well as support services such as our Specialist Advisory Team continue to work on a wide range of resources to support the transition process, ensuring we are making this important step of transition as positive and as smooth as it can be for your child/young person.

**Support for families**

We have been listening to young people’s and families concerns during this difficult time and understand that levels of anxiety have increased for many. We are doing additional work to plan for those children and young people, whether they have an EHC plan or not, who will have found the current events particularly difficult for their emotional wellbeing. We recognise the impact that this may have on returning to a school routine, when that happens.

The Local Offer has a range of information and resources that you may find helpful including information on emotional wellbeing and transition. These can be found at:

Bexley Local Offer - [http://www.bexleylocaloffer.uk/#](http://www.bexleylocaloffer.uk/)

Bexley Local Offer – EHC Plan Section - <http://www.bexleylocaloffer.uk/Services/category/270>

Bexley Local Offer – Coronavirus dedicated update page - <http://www.bexleylocaloffer.uk/Page/16954>

We would also like to thank you as parents/carers for doing your very best to support your children and young people during these difficult circumstances. We know and appreciate it is a demanding time for you and your family. Education, health and social care staff will continue to work creatively with families, as well as children and young people to do what they can to provide support, regardless of where and how education is being accessed at present.

If you have any questions about the support your child is receiving during this time, the best place to contact is their nursery, school or college. After you have done this, if you still have any questions please make contact with your allocated SEN Case Officer or email the SEN business support team via:

senadmin@bexley.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY NHS SOUTH EAST LONDON CCG**

 

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