

## Guidance for Parent Carer Forums on January national lockdown

4 January 2021

With the announcement of a new national lockdown this evening, the NNPCF has prepared a briefing paper that outlines some of the key messages for national and local government and key learnings from the experiences of families of children and young people with SEND from the first national lockdown.

In this scenario, the role of local parent carer forums is paramount. Because local forums have contact with local council and school leaders, they are well placed to monitor, report and influence local developments. They have an increasingly important role to play during this period in which decision making is becoming more fragmented.

Previous lockdowns have had a serious impact on families of children with SEND. We do not feel the need to describe this impact – this is well understood by all parent carers. The result is that many families are already “on their knees”

There are some key messages that we will continue to give national leaders. These are the same messages that we believe local parent carer forums should be sharing with local leaders.

### Partial or full school closures

1. **School places must be made available to vulnerable children and young people including those with EHCPs.** During the first round of national school closures, many families reported that they were not being offered school places based on school focussed risk assessments. The DfE and local areas must ensure that all vulnerable children who want / need a school place should be offered one.
2. Conversely, **we do not support mandatory attendance at school** for vulnerable children. This decision must be coproduced with families. The particular needs and circumstances of families must be taken into account in making these decisions.
3. There needs to be an increased **focus on children and young people on SEN support.** Throughout this period, there has been a great deal of attention on CYP with EHCPs, but little focus and provision for those on SEN support who have often had little or no additional support. The new definition of



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- “vulnerable” has the flexibility to include pupils on SEN support – parent carer forums should ensure this is implemented where appropriate
4. We must ensure that **remote education** provided for CYP with SEN is differentiated and that the appropriate support is provided. Schools should work with families to ensure that innovative solutions can be put in place for children who require specialist or 1:1 support. This should also include access to any specialist materials and any necessary IT equipment.
  5. We must ensure that any system that replaces **exams** this year does not further disadvantage children and young people with SEND. The impact of factors such as anxiety, lost learning, missed therapy sessions and illness must be taken into account when assessing learners this year.
  6. **We do not support the return of “reasonable endeavours” powers** under the Coronavirus Act. If it is impossible schools and other services to deliver all the services in an EHCP there must be an open an honest conversation with families to coproduce what services are possible to deliver and what alternatives can be put in place.

### Social Care and Health services

7. If schools are closed for any extended period of time, we know that **the need for social care services will be increased**. In particular, local areas need to work to ensure that respite services continue to be available for families – they may also want to look at increased respite care provision if schools remain closed for an extended period. The creative and flexible use of personal budgets has been successful in some areas and should be enabled and encouraged.
8. **Clarity and flexibility on support bubbles for families** with children with SEND. Because of the increased amount of support that families with SEND require, it is essential that there is some flexibility and discretion around support bubbles for them. This may be additional family members or carers being enabled to provide support within a bubble.
9. **Health services should continue to be available to families** through this period and the health services out children rely upon should not be redeployed. Where appropriate, services and consultations should be delivered remotely – many families reported satisfaction with remote occupational, speech and language and physio therapy services.
10. **Mental health support needs to be stepped up**. The emotional impact on children of missing school is well recognised. Many CAMHS services have reported an increase in activity and acuity following the first round of school

closures. We would like CAMHS services to be prioritised and resourced appropriately.

## Testing

11. **The messages that testing is not mandatory to attend school needs to be reinforced.** We have heard of some isolated cases where a different impression has been given. There are many reasons why a family may not want their child to be tested and these must be understood and respected.
12. **Reasonable adjustments must be made to enable children to undergo testing** where necessary. These may include performing swabbing at home in familiar surroundings and swabbing performed by a parent or other trusted adult. Parents should be trained and enabled to support testing where necessary. There will need to be a clear plan about how testing will be carried out when children are not physically in school.

## Vaccinations

13. We would like to see **children with SEND given a higher priority for vaccinations than other children.** We understand that children (even those with underlying health conditions) are rarely ill as a result of contracting the virus but vulnerable children are often disproportionately impacted by the response to covid (e.g. lockdown) and so protecting them and enabling them to continue to access services must be a priority.
14. We also believe that **teachers** of vulnerable children and other staff that vulnerable children rely upon (e.g. special schools teachers) should be **prioritised for vaccination.**

## Coproduction

15. **Coproduction is more important than ever** (as supported by the recent Ofsted and CQC report following local area visits during the pandemic). National and local government, school leaders and staff must continue to work strategically with parent carer forums to ensure services are delivered in the most effective way. Moreover, schools, teachers, NHS and social workers must coproduce with individual parent carers and young people to ensure that services are delivered in way that is effective for each individual family.



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Parent Carer Forums should continue to share their experiences and intelligence with their regional steering group members and we will continue to feed back and coproduce with national government and the NHS.