

7<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear Parents, Carers, Families and Young People

**COVID-19: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)**

I hope that you and your family are well at this very challenging time. Apologies for the delay in our communication to you, we have been working through the initial emergency planning procedures and implementing the Guidance from Government which as I am sure you are aware is updated or changing daily!

I want to assure you that we have not forgotten our families and that we really appreciate your patience and support at this time while we work through this together.

I am also writing to update you on what we are doing to continue to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) continue to be able to access education during the Covid-19 pandemic. As you will know, children with SEND face particular challenges at the current time as do their families, and those who support them, care for them and provide the education opportunities they deserve.

I want to reassure you that we are here to support you as much as we possibly can through these uncertain times. We will continue to ensure that our systems and processes are still in operation, and that we continue to ensure that your needs are met as much as possible, whilst respecting the requirements of public protection.

Specifically, I want to outline the actions we are taking, in response to Government guidance, and the approach which is set out in the Minister's open letter, which is attached for your information):

a. **The SEND Team** – the team are working remotely at the moment. We will do all we can to continue to respond to queries and requests for advice, but please bear with us as it may take longer than usual for us to respond.

b. **Support** – We will be launching a website this week with lots of advice and guidance and we also have a specific number (01942 489018) you can call if you need any support.

SENDIASS and the Parent Carers Forum are still available to support and have some specific Facebook and WhatsApp groups that families may find useful;

Facebook Support Group: <http://bit.ly/WPCFParentPower>

WhatsApp (new) : <http://bit.ly/WPCFWhatsApp>

c. **Keeping as many schools open as possible** – we are working with schools to ensure as many stay open as possible to support the most vulnerable, and children of critical key workers, this is also during school holidays.

d. **Special schools staying open, and working together** – we are working with our special schools to retain their provision. Although Landgate had to close temporarily, we will continue to work with them to reopen as required.

e. **Ensuring the needs of children placed out of area are prioritised** – we are ensuring that we are in regular contact with all schools to ensure they continue to be providing the support our children deserve.

f. **Risk assessing and variations to EHCPs** – we are risk assessing each child and young person with an EHCP. This look at each individual child/young person need and will incorporate the views of the child or young person and their parents wherever possible. This will inform the decision about whether needs should continue to be met in school or college, or whether needs can be met at home safely. The Coronavirus Act 2020 allows the Secretary of State, where appropriate, to temporarily lift the statutory duty on local authorities to maintain the precise provision in EHC plans; with local authorities needing instead to apply 'reasonable endeavors' to support children and their families.

g. **Hop, Skip & Jump, Crossroads and Leisure 4 All** – we have been able this week to agree retaining the Hop, Skip and Jump service with support through the Council. They will aim to continue the delivery of this service when the current situation allows. We have also ensured the continue funding of Crossroads to enable them to continue to operate in Wigan. So, in the meantime they along with Leisure 4 All will be providing support where needed to families.

These are uniquely challenging times, and we need to continue to balance the need to operate as much as possible with the need to safeguard you, staff and partners. We are working hard to keep things moving forward and once things are calmer we will continue to prioritise the SEND transformation work.

I can assure you we are doing everything we can to ensure that you continue to receive the best possible support during this difficult time. We have attached responses to some specific questions that were raised by the Parent Carer Forum that I hope you will find useful.

Yours faithfully

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