



22nd May 2020

Dear Head Teachers and SENCOs,

Re: Key suggestions from parent carers for schools/colleges working to support their CYP with SEND during CV19

We are hearing from parent carers about some really positive things some schools are managing to do to support CYP with SEND at this time of crisis. We also recognise how difficult this particular period must be for all of you.

Amaze and PaCC are in touch with many families accessing our services and support and via our social media channels, so we have access to up to date views of this community of families. We also carried out a snapshot survey in April and the findings are detailed at the end of this letter.

From this we would like to share with you our key messages or suggestions for continuing to provide the best support to these vulnerable families.

1. Provide specific communications to children/young people (CYP) with SEND and their families

We stress the value of empathetic and targeted comms to the SEND community from school leaders at this time. Please note PaCC and Amaze are happy to help co-produce comms re. SEND if that is helpful at any stage (and we can be quick to respond!). Some specific asks from parent carers:

- Articulate the commitment of the school to support your CYP with SEND and siblings at home
- Include information around available support, differentiating work, resources a CYP with SEND may need (including any tech support)
- Actively promote the school's (and other community-based) mental health and wellbeing service/support that is available for CYP
- Acknowledge parent carers may need support from the school, BHISS, therapists to support their CYPs learning profile and how to access this
- Acknowledge CYP with SEND benefit from direct, regular friendly contact with familiar school staff- teachers and support staff (see below)
- When making phone calls to parents to 'check-in' or undertake risk assessments, precede these by a text to alert them to say why you are calling and when.
- When communicating about any return strategy address the increased levels of anxiety and offer a range of solutions e.g. buddy systems/resources/videos to (re)acquaint pupils with a school setting, in particular for those at a key stage transition point.

2. Provide differentiated learning resources, including video contact

As lockdown continues for most, we ask that all schools and colleges provide CYP with SEND with the necessary, differentiated learning resources and equipment to support their ongoing learning and development at home. This includes working with health partners to deliver the necessary therapeutic support and also providing support for parent carers with strategies for CYP avoidant of home schooling, emotional support etc.

We have had really positive feedback about regular live video contact with school staff and other pupils, promoting feelings of connectedness and improving CYP motivation. We are aware this is not being encouraged by some teaching unions but many schools are providing this and have found a

way to counteract the safeguarding concerns. We ask the equity of this provision is looked into and video use encouraged for SEND CYP wherever possible.

3. Complete regular risk assessments

We ask that the risk assessments being undertaken by schools and LAs are completed for all EHCP CYP, in coproduction with, and signed off by, families. We understand completion rates remain relatively low as there is limited capacity to do these. But we know many families who might have been coping at the start of lock down, are now really struggling, so it may be necessary to repeat risk assessments where home circumstances have changed due to cumulative impacts over time. Families suggest calls to them are preceded by a text to alert them to say why you are calling and when.

4. Prioritise SEND children to return to school

We understand this is hugely complex, but we urge you to prioritise CYP on SEN Support or with an EHCP, in order to avoid the significant risks of isolation and the 'attainment gap' widening. This could be either opportunities for returning to school to access learning, or enhanced input/support for off-site learning. Any return strategy needs to address the increased levels of anxiety and develop a range of solutions e.g. buddy systems/resources/videos to (re)acquaint pupils with a school setting, in particular for those at a key stage transition point.

Some suggestions from families for video content include:

- i. Welcome (back) to our School - from Head/SENCO – we're looking forward to seeing you soon. Recognition it's hard not having been in school for such long period of time but this video to try to help (remind you) show you what this school is like to help you on first day
- ii. Meet your class teacher
- iii. Tour of main school building/rooms (entrance, reception/office, classrooms, hall, dinner hall, sports hall/changing room, toilets, playground)
- iv. Reminder of key values/ethos of the school e.g. inclusion?
- v. What's a typical school day like here? (Different subjects/lessons)- playtimes/breaks for the older cohort
- vi. Some exciting extracurricular stuff you can get involved in
- vii. Describing the uniform
- viii. Describing the food
- ix. What extra help you can get e.g. SEND resources, quiet room etc
- x. Be great if you could get key worker CYP to come up with the script and front the videos?

Families have also suggested the idea of making a 'goodbye' video for those leaving key stages.

5. Outside space

We understand all B&H schools have been sent a letter asking them to consider opening up access to their playing fields to local families who might not have access to a garden, or other safe outside space. We urge you to consider a way this can happen, as we have heard from many families where this is becoming more of a concern, as some lockdown restrictions have been lifted, and local parks are much busier.

Finally, we hope this information is useful for your CV19 planning. Please do share our suggestions with your wider team and let us know if you have any feedback, or if we can help with any of your comms with families.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Travers

&







Fiona England

Key findings from B&H and ESx reports:

Our letters to MPs and full reports can be found in at

https://amazesussex.org.uk/amaze_news/brighton-hove-parent-carers-experiences-of-covid-19/

The summary findings are below:

	<p>High levels of stress and anxiety: COVID19 is clearly causing a high degree of anxiety and worry to both children and young people with SEND and their parent carers about a wide range of issues such as: contracting the virus, keeping their family safe, not being able to support their child with learning, coping without PAs/respite, child's worsening mental health or behaviour, worrying about loss of income/employment, impact on siblings etc</p>
	<p>Worsening of child and family mental health and wellbeing for most: Having CYP w SEND at home 24/7 is exhausting and challenging, especially without access to other support services, respite, the outdoors or other activities. This is impacting negatively on many children's (and their parent carers') wellbeing and behaviour. This is coupled with anxiety as to how child(ren) will re-integrate back in school after lockdown.</p>
	<p>Parents need more help to support home learning: Many parents said they are not getting the support they need from their child's school. Some parents said they don't have the capacity or skills to support their child's learning, or that the work the school is sending home is not differentiated or appropriate to their child's needs.</p>
	<p>Concerns about their child's progress or plans for the future: Several families said they are lacking access to (Speech and Language, Physiotherapy, CAMHS and Occupational) therapies or contact with other health services. They are concerned about the impact of delays to their child's diagnosis or assessments and therefore referrals into services. Some families are concerned that their CYP w SEND will be falling (even further) behind in school which may make re-integration back into class harder. Parents also cited worries about their child's transition to a new setting in September 2020.</p>