



7 May 2020

Dear xxxx Minister / MP,

Support needed during lockdown and for return to school for SEND Families

As you may know, our organisations work across Sussex to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (CYP w SEND) and their families. We have recently undertaken snapshot surveys of parent carers to identify what additional challenges they are facing and what they need during the COVID19 crisis. Our key findings, from the 554 responses, are summarised on page 2 and 3 below, which we hope you find useful.

You will have also heard the recent coverage on the Today Programme regarding issues SEND families are facing. We write to ask that:

- *Our local MPs represent our concerns to Ministers and request these issues are discussed*
- *That there is cross-departmental action which addresses the following issues*

During lockdown:

1. Develop clearer guidance for schools and colleges to provide all CYP w SEND and their carers with the necessary, differentiated learning resources and equipment to support their learning.
2. Additional resource is allocated to local authorities to provide more opportunities for safe respite for families who risk falling into crisis as the lockdown continues. This needs to address issues of adequate staffing, clarity about increased access to testing and PPE and designated, safe outside space.
3. More resource is allocated now for mental health support for CYP w SEND, their siblings and parent carers and that schools and LAs regularly risk assess families to target this support at those who need it.
4. Government instruct the big supermarket chains to give families with disabled children the same access to online shopping, click and collect, and other priority time slots as other vulnerable groups.





In planning how to exit lockdown:

1. We understand this is hugely complex, but we urge you to ensure the Government develops a clear and specific strategy for CYP w SEND's ongoing education during CV19 – both the provision at home (as mentioned above) but also their safe return to school/college. It is essential that all children on both SEN Support and with an EHCPs, are carefully considered, in a person-centred and equitable way, with an option for those with SEND to return earlier 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.
2. The specific needs of CYP with more complex health/medical conditions/PMLD etc are considered so that they are provided with an equitable offer of education, health and care

so the provisions of their EHCPs are met in a safe and sufficiently resourced school/college. It will not be acceptable for these CYP to be left behind.

3. Pre COVID19, 50% of families with disabled children were living in poverty, with 76% of parent carers working less or not at all due to the demands of their caring role. We know this situation has got worse as more families struggle to hold down employment whilst caring for their CYP w SEND. The WSx survey found 48% of parents had lost income since the lockdown. Can you urge the government to increase levels of Carers Allowance or DLA/PIP at this time to help cover the additional costs of caring for their child 24-7 at home?
4. MPs to work with Local Authorities, School/College Leads, Leaders in Health and Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Parent Carer Forums to ensure there is scrutiny of the allocation of Covid-19 emergency funding and whether it is adequate to address the above.

Key findings from B&H and ESx reports:

	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
	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.
	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.
	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.

Key findings from WSx reports:

- 48% of families have lost income since the lockdown
- 43% of children with SEND are having significant problems with mental health
- 65% of parent-carers described themselves as suffering from significant mental exhaustion, 51% say they are physically exhausted
- 51% of parents say they have had a significant increase in anxiety and/or depression
- 67% of parents said they are having significant struggles with home schooling their children
- 34% of families say they are receiving support from their child's school
- Of those families who usually have paid carers, only 12% are still receiving support
- 47% of children who were due medical appointments have missed these as a result of the lockdown

- 67% of families are having significant problems with online deliveries, click and collect and accessing vulnerable time slots
- 90% of parents think the government should classify SEND families as a vulnerable group

The full reports can be found:

For Brighton and Hove <https://amazesussex.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Amaze-PaCC-BH-COVID-Survey-Report-260420-v3.pdf>

For East Sussex <https://amazesussex.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Amaze-E-Sx-COVID-Survey-Report-260420-v4.pdf>

For West Sussex <https://reachingfamilies.org.uk> (final report available from 11.4.20)

Finally, you might remember that we wrote to you back in March with our concerns about the Coronavirus Bill. Thank you to those who replied. We note that the statutory guidance as set out in the Children and Families Act, has now been relaxed, but this will be time-bound. Are you able to provide more reassurance by ensuring this is monitored centrally to see how local authorities and health bodies are following the guidance and meeting the original duties wherever this is possible?

Thank you for your continued support for this vulnerable cohort of families. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Travers
CEO Amaze



Fiona England
Chair PaCC
Brighton & Hove



Jo Nye
Co-Chair ESPCF
East Sussex

Brian
Brian O'Hagan
Reaching Families
West Sussex