

Families Directorate

SEND service, 1st Floor, Wood Street Clinic| 6 Linford Road | Walthamstow | E17 3LA

Letter to Parents and Carers

Ask for: Eva Gunkova
Email: Eva.Gunkova@walthamforest.gov.uk
Our Ref: EG/KR
Direct line: 020 8496 6548
Date: January 2021

Dear Schools and Parents/Carers

As you know, on Monday 4 January, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which has now come into effect. Full details of the lockdown restrictions can be found at [national-lockdown-stay-at-home](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home).

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

We understand how challenging it is for both you and your children to be in another lockdown, and that you may also be worried about your child falling behind in their learning. We want to do all that we can to support to your family at this time.

We must emphasise how important it is you follow the lock down guidance. The current pandemic situation is very serious, and there are now many more people in Waltham Forest who have, or are affected by Covid-19, than during the previous lockdown in March 2020. This means that many of the services that your child normally accesses will be affected. We want to try and support you to minimise the impact of these changes on your family life where we can.

You can find more information about what Waltham Forest is doing to support families during lockdown on:

<https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/service-categories/covid-19>

The purpose of this letter is to tell you about the changes to the government guidance for education. The Department for Education has published new national guidance about the arrangements for education during this period which can be found at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf

We are writing to you to summarise key points from the guidance, and how it is being used in Waltham Forest.

The national guidance states that “during the period of national lockdown, primary, secondary, alternative provision and special schools will remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers only”. The definition of vulnerable children and young people include children who have a social worker, an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or who may be vulnerable for another reason at local discretion ("otherwise vulnerable").

Children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

The national guidance states that all children and young people with an Education, Health and Care plan will be expected to continue to be able to attend their school or post-16 provider face to face on a full-time basis.

Exceptions: The following pupils with an EHCP should not attend face to face learning:

- Pupils who are self-isolating
- Clinically extremely vulnerable pupils are also advised not to attend school/college.

Children at SEN Support

Most children who have additional needs that are supported through SEN Support will be learning at home until February half-term; however, we recognise that some children receiving SEN Support may need face to face learning because of their additional needs and would be included in the new definition of “otherwise vulnerable”. If you feel your child meets the wider definition of vulnerable and should receive a face-to-face offer, please discuss this directly with your child’s school, who will consider all the factors you are raising as part of their risk assessment.

What happens if it not possible for my child to attend?

The new guidance states that: *“The requirement for schools to use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision called for by the pupils’ special educational needs remains in place. Schools should work collaboratively with families, putting in place reasonable adjustments as necessary, so that pupils with SEND can successfully access remote education alongside their peers.”*

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-remote-education#special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send>.

While the law has not changed regarding delivering the provision within EHCPs at this time, circumstances are far from normal, with the pandemic far worse than at any previous point, and while providers will do all that they can to make provision, there will be challenges due to staff absences and illness and safety considerations.

Schools are constantly reviewing their local situations, so it is important to remain in contact with your child’s school to see if there are changes to circumstances.

What will happen to my child’s learning?

We know that remote learning for children with SEND can be very challenging, and that is why it is important for your child to be in school if at all possible. SEND and school leaders are working together with health colleagues to make the remote learning as affective as it can be. Waltham Forest will continue working with parents and teachers to review and improve the existing remote learning offer.

The national guidance gives general information for parents about remote education which may be of help: “The remote education... will include both recorded or live direct teaching time, and time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently. The amount of remote education provided should be, as a minimum:

- *Key Stage 1: 3 hours a day on average across the cohort, with less for younger children*
- *Key Stage 2: 4 hours a day*
- *Key Stages 3 and 4: 5 hours a day*

If you have concerns about how this will work for your child, you can raise this with your child’s teacher or Head teacher. The professionals who work with your child and the SEND department in Waltham Forest are also available to try and help with ideas of how your child can engage in remote learning.

Statutory education, health and care assessments, annual reviews of EHCPs and the applications for specialist admissions to school places are all progressing as usual.

Specialist Services such as Health and Educational Psychology Services during Lockdown

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy & nursing teams are all open to referrals and delivering services, although this may be done in a different way from previously. Assessments, individual therapy delivery advice and programmes will all be delivered to parents or via school staff if the children are in school, using a combination of video calls and teleconferencing. The model of support may be blended with some face to face contacts if physical contact is needed for the assessment or delivery of an intervention for a child.

Educational Psychologists are working and delivering a service to schools although face to face assessments may not be possible at this time. We continue to offer a free monthly drop in service for parents and carers which will be carried out by zoom or telephone whilst the current restrictions are in place. Please see below for appointment details.

All models of support for individual children and schools will be agreed on a school by school basis between the relevant health professionals and the school, and through discussions with parents. The way the services are being delivered is under constant review, so that it is done in the most effective and safest way possible for children, parents and the staff themselves.

Contact details for the services are as follows:

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: Duty service on 0300 555 1247, between 9-5 and Mental Health Direct 0300 555 1000 outside of these hours
Special schools nursing or the Wood Street nursing team: 0208 430 7930

Physiotherapy: 0208 430 7980

Occupational Therapy: 0208 430 7960

Speech and Language Therapy: 0208 430 7970

Educational Psychology: educationalpsychologyservice@walthamforest.gov.uk
0208 496 1732

Testing for COVID

We are encouraging all Waltham Forest residents, and especially those with caring responsibilities and those who cannot work from home, to get themselves tested for COVID regularly, with or without symptoms, at one of our local test sites. Please go to the Council Website for more details on which tests sites are available, and which would be suitable for you.

https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/node/9569?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=

Children and Young People with EHCPs Attending Special Schools, Specialist Units or Pupil Referral Units:

Our special schools, specialist units and pupil referral units are faced with a particularly challenging situation during this lockdown period. For these settings almost all their pupils will be included in the vulnerable category and therefore the Government's expectation is that they will be offering a fulltime, face to face offer for most or all their pupils. At the same time, our special schools and pupil referral units in Waltham Forest are experiencing high levels of staff absence which means they cannot open safely for all pupils to attend at the same time.

A gradual approach has been agreed with parents at the schools to ensure children at special schools are safe in line with the guidance here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952443/210114_School_national_restrictions_guidance_FINAL_14012021.pdf

The national guidance reminds all school leaders that: *“Schools have a legal obligation to protect their employees, and others, including children, from harm and should continue to assess health and safety risks in the usual way.”*

It also provides guidance to headteachers about what they should do if this situation arises: *“On occasion special schools/ alternative provisions may encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with vital specialist training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to the child or young person's specified provision as soon as possible.”*

This means that at different points in the lockdown period some schools and pupil referral units may have to reduce their offer so that some or all of their pupils have a mixture of face to face and remote learning, or if things become very serious, they may have to close for a short time. This will vary from school to school, as the situation is different for each one.

We have written to Headteachers of our special schools and pupil referral units asking them to work closely with each child's parents and carers individually to make a suitable plan if this situation arises. We will be working closely with our special schools and pupil referral units to monitor the situation and review the offer for each child.

Waltham Forest Council is undertaking a case-by-case review of the offer being made to each child and young person with an EHCP. We are reminding providers that it is vital that they work closely with parents and carers to agree reasonable solutions that will provide the best possible support for children and young people, given service constraints at this difficult time.

Other Services supporting Children and Young People with SEND

Option for parent to decide their child should not attend: Schools will continue to record attendance in the register for pupils with an EHCP, but if you would prefer your child to learn remotely during the national lockdown period and not attend face to face, you should advise your child's school/college and they are expected to authorise this absence. You will not be penalised.

Assistance with Travel arrangements continue to be in place and can be accessed as usual.

Short-break offer has been varied in line with the previous lockdown offering the opportunity to purchase stimulating learning equipment against the hours assigned for the year.

Parents would need support with their own Mental Health: IAPT services are also available for parents. Parent's can self-refer to Waltham Forest Talking Therapies by phoning 0300 300 1554 Option 4 or self refer online <https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-waltham-forest-iapt>

Waltham Forest SENDIASS are continuing to offer a full service and can provide impartial information, advice and support service for children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers. wfsendiass@citizensadvicewalthamforest.org.uk or tel: 0203 223 0251

There is no doubt that the coming weeks will be very challenging for us all, and we thank you for your support and forbearance through this challenging period. The vaccines have started to roll out so hopefully that will bring us all the chance to live more normal lives as we move into spring and summer. In the meantime, together we can all continue to play our part to protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS.

Yours sincerely

Eva Gunkova
Assistant Director, SEND

Cc
David Kilgallon, Director of Systems and Learning
Heather Flinders, Strategic Director