

SEND MATTERS

Covid-19 Special Edition

The official newsletter
of SEND related issues
in Bedford Borough

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WELCOME from Chief Officer for Education, SEND and School Infrastructure - Ben Pearson

I'd like to warmly welcome you to the first ever edition of SEND Matters, our new eNewsletter to keep you informed of everything that is happening within the world of SEND in Bedford Borough. We had hoped to

be launching our first edition under different circumstances, however we also recognise that with the challenges faced with Covid-19 it is more important than ever for us all to keep connected and share information.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DURING COVID-19

We have collected 5 of the most frequently asked questions raised with our parent carer forum and provided updates below:



? ***We are really worried that we are not supporting our child's education and this will have a negative effect as he/she was already behind at school, can my child stay behind and repeat this year?***

Many parents are worried about the impact of the current absence from school. Research shows that, for the most part, holding children back a year isn't the best practice. The research reports that some children do better in school the first year or two after being held back. But it also says that this effect doesn't last. Also remember the school are able to differentiate work to support a wide range of pupils in each class (through working above and well below grade), therefore it is reasonable for a teacher to support a student who may have missed some schooling due to the current situation. Remember that all pupils will be in a similar situation. The practice of keeping a pupil back a year is not something that is seen as good practice. Please remember to discuss any concerns you have with your child's school, parents can also book a 30 minute telephone appointment with an Education Psychologist by emailing school.support@bedford.gov.uk

? ***What is an essential service? My child has a medication review for a controlled drug will the review still be going ahead?***

Medication reviews for controlled drugs are continuing within the Community Paediatrics service during the Covid 19 pandemic. For the majority this will be a telephone consultation unless there is an urgent clinical need to see a Child face to face. If you have a question regarding your child's appointment within community health services Please call our single point of access for all Bedfordshire children's services: 0300 555 0606

? ***Our direct payment was agreed for extra activities like swimming lessons, am I allowed to purchase a tablet and software to help with respite at the moment?***

Direct Payments are being used in lots of different ways at the moment. If your Personal Assistant is no longer able to support or you cannot go to the activities you had arranged, speak to the Direct Payment Officer Rosemary Phiri or your child's Social Worker. If there is a demonstrated need, the request for a redirection of the Direct Payment will be agreed. A number of direct payment recipients have used the money for play equipment for the garden or sensory equipment. The advice is to check with the Social Care Team before you buy.



BBPCF are the voice for Parent Carers of children & young people 0-25yrs with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities in Bedford Borough. We feed back your views to Education, Health, Social Care and other departments that provide SEND services. BBPCF are still working to reach families in Bedford Borough. We are listening to all parent/carers of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) aged 0-25 years.

We are signposting to usable information, sharing ideas and experiences, while still fulfilling our forum duties to listen to the lived experience of parent carers and feedback to the relevant services. We have an online membership form for anyone that is involved in SEND (a diagnosis is not required to join). You can view our NEW website at www.bbpcf.co.uk Follow us on our social media @ **bedsboroughpcf** on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. During Covid-19 we're hosting regular virtual get togethers to allow some face to face interaction for parents to chat as well as talk to different services.

A quote from a parent that joined a recent event, ***"It's great to speak to people that get what it's like for me."*** Our next one is on Wednesday 6th May at 8pm. For more information or to book a place please email us communications@bbpcf.org.uk

FAQs CONTINUED

? We are struggling like everyone at the moment, what family support is available for families that do not have social care and are struggling with well-being/anxiety?

My child with a SEND is getting very aggressive and his behaviour is having a really strain on the whole family. Where do I go for help? Families requiring additional support should contact Early Help via the Early Help Hub – Earlyhelphub@bedford.gov.uk. For anxiety and well-being young people can get support from Kooth Online or again young people and or families can contact Early Help via the Early Help Hub. A list of online support for well-being can be [found here](#)

? My child with a SEND is getting very aggressive and his behaviour is having a really strain on the whole family. Where do I go for help?

For parents who would welcome parenting support Early Help have a number of online options – please contact your school or the Early Help Hub and someone will have a follow up conversation with you to discuss the issues and the best way to support you at this current time.



Bedford Borough SEND Independent Advice and Support Service remains open during Covid-19 to support parents with any questions or queries they may have regarding what support their child with SEND should be receiving, advice regarding applying for an EHCP and any other education related SEND matter.

For more information please contact us on Telephone **01234 276 267** or E-mail sendiass@bedford.gov.uk

UPDATE ON HEALTH SERVICES



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, community health services, GP's and CAMH's have had to reorganise certain aspects of their services in order to deliver the best possible patient care at this time.

As a parent you have great instincts, it is important that you listen to them. If at any point you feel that your child is unwell, or you are unable to care for them, seek medical help. GP's A&E and NHS 111 are all still open and safe to use. For more information on where and how to seek help when your child is unwell [please click this link for more information](#).

Community Health Services - [Click here for latest updates](#)

Bedfordshire Community Health Services moved to the delivery of 'Essential' health services as per National guidance from Monday 23rd March 20. The Specialist Children Services have risk assessed their caseloads to ensure the needs of CYP and family needs are met. Where possible, delivery of services has been moved to online or telephone based support.

Please call our single point of access for all Bedfordshire children's services: **0300 555 0606**

Parentline, our confidential text message service connecting parents and health visitors, will continue to be available to text on 07507 331456.

[ChatHealth](#), our confidential text messaging service for 11-19 year olds will continue to be available to text on 07507 331450.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) - [Click here for latest service update](#)

During Covid-19 our focus is to continue to provide essential and critical services, and we have temporarily suspended therapeutic intervention for non-urgent cases. An Integrated Critical Response Team (ICRT) has been developed in order to prioritise urgent and emergency (RED) cases. The team will operate via a rota system covering new extended hours:

Monday – Friday 09:00-21:00
Weekends / Bank Holidays
10:00-20:00

Assessments and Interventions during this period will primarily be delivered via Telephone, and where possible Video links, in line with local information governance standards.

UPDATE ON HEALTH SERVICES CONTINUED

New CAMHS Referrals / Open CAMHS Cases

The Front Door Team will continue to review new referrals based on risk and complexity. We are currently ensuring that every young person under our care is RAG-rated (Red, Amber, Green) based on risk and mental health need, with associated plans to ensure young people are managed in a safe way through the crisis. All new referrals received into the service will receive a telephone triage assessment.

During this period, we will consider all self-referrals to the service, which can be made via the website of CHUMS, our Tier 2 Emotional Well-being partners. All referrals, will receive a telephone triage to assess risk and need. If appropriate for CHUMS, the young person will be accepted and receive an acceptance letter. If not appropriate, psychoeducation and selfhelp advice over the telephone will be provided, together with a follow-up letter.

If there is an escalation in concern with any cases, young people and their families can contact our usual clinic telephone number: **01234 893300/1** between the normal working office hours Monday – Friday 09:00-17:00. If the allocated clinician is unavailable, calls will be escalated to either the Clinician of the Day or Clinical Team Lead.

TOP TIPS FOR FAMILY WELL-BEING DURING LOCKDOWN

Being out of school for what is an open-ended period, with restricted access to their usual social spaces, is likely to be difficult for many young people and families. Schools, parents and carers can take steps now to manage this difficult period, look out for signs of stress in young people, and meet their needs over the coming months.

Stress and anxiety in such an unusual and unpredictable situation is normal. Children can sometimes believe that they are responsible for events that are beyond their control – reassure them that it is the adults' job to keep them safe. Normalise the experience for young people by reassuring them that there are lots of other people in the same situation right now. Having a routine and structure helps children to feel secure in uncertain times, and involving them in creating this structure, perhaps visually, can be particularly helpful. Don't put too much pressure on doing academic work. Parents and carers aren't teachers, and it is important to also spend time building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children.

ONLINE SELF HELP

Across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes, clinicians have created an information sheet to bring together resources and phone apps that may be useful to maintain mental well-being during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond. These resources are free to use unless otherwise stated. Phone apps are available for both Android and IOS (Apple) operating systems unless otherwise stated. Some resources are area specific. These resources have not been tested by the compilers of this information sheet. To see the full list of resources please read this [Information sheet](#)



- Young people may be concerned about the announcement that exams will not go ahead as planned. Acknowledge the uncertainty, but reassure them that a plan is being put together to make sure that everyone gets the qualification that they have worked towards
- Play is fundamental to the well being and development of children of all ages, and a great way to reduce stress in adults

It is important for parents to ensure they are in communication with the child's school should they have any concerns about work being sent home. Schools are still there to support you and your child, especially during this time of uncertainty. Bedford Borough Educational Psychology team are offering 30 minute drop ins on the phone to offer advice and guidance to parents on their child / young person's well-being. To access a 30 minute phone slot, parents can email school.support@bedford.gov.uk detailing their name, telephone number, and brief description of query / advice needed. We will email back with forthcoming available slots for parents to book.

EHCP UPDATE

During Covid-19 Bedford Borough Local Authority is still accepting Education, Health and Care assessment requests. The SEND team is holding SEND panels virtually every fortnight and is still requesting information and advice from partner agencies across Education, Health and Social Care. Due to social distancing measures there will be an impact on certain services' ability to conduct face to face assessments for children not known to their service, however wherever possible technology is being used to support with assessments. Parents will be informed should there be any issue with gathering of advices during the EHC assessment process.

EHCP Annual reviews should still be taking place virtually if possible, however some parents or carers may wish to delay the annual review meeting until it can be held face to face. If this is the case then please contact the SEND team so that this can be noted.

The government issued guidance relating to EHCP's and Covid -19 on 30th April 2020. For more information please read this summary of changes document.

The SEND team is available to be contacted should you have any questions about the EHCP process during Covid-19.

LOCAL OFFER CORNER



On the Local Offer you will find service updates and up to the minute guidance regarding how best to support yourself and your family at

this time. All of the information regarding covid-19 has been pulled together into a [dedicated page](#) which is regularly updated. Please also follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) where we share lots of useful resources and information.

We are keen to have young people with SEND, their families and those that work and support them involved in ensuring our Local Offer is as useful, relevant and interesting as possible.

If you have any ideas as to what you would like to see on our Local Offer then we would love to hear from you! Contact us at local.offer@bedford.gov.uk

OFSTED AND CQC SEND REVISIT

During the SEND revisit of February 2020, OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) agreed that the local area has made sufficient progress in all previously identified areas of weakness. For more detailed information please read the [full revisit report](#).

This is an excellent result that is testament to the hard work of so many people across Bedford Borough. Thank you to all staff across the local area for their ongoing commitment to support children and young people with SEND and their families.

The result of this inspection does not mean that the focus and emphasis on improving outcomes for children with SEND will change. The Council, Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum have all committed to continuing to work together to further improve outcomes for children and families in line with our current Joint SEND Strategy (covering the period from 2019-2022).

We will be hosting a series of engagement events through the summer to develop the next stages of our improvement journey and hope you will be able to join us. Watch this space for more details.

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

Update from Sue Riley and Jon Foster, Teaching and Learning Advisors for SEND

We have been impressed with the team spirit, which has developed between the SENDCos during these difficult and challenging times. We have set up several different ways to communicate and share the good and effective practice that is going on. There is a regular newsletter where we are able to share communications and updates from the DFE, local authority and other outside agencies. Resources have been shared to support the four areas of need, Communication and Interaction, Cognition and Learning, Physical and Sensory and Social and Emotional Mental Health Needs.



"We have been impressed with the team spirit, which has developed between the SENDCo's during these difficult and challenging times."

We have embraced the new technology and have put together a list of online training opportunities for all teaching staff. We are continuing our "school visits" in the form of telephone calls offering support and sharing ideas and answering questions. A WhatsApp group have also been set up to discuss webinars focusing on the role of the SENDCo. This has produced a lively discussion and a further sharing of practice. A primary and secondary group are working on developing transition materials to help Early Years pupils starting school and year 6 pupils starting secondary school with the remit to support pupils and parents with this transition. In the next couple of weeks, we are embarking on several virtual coffee mornings with parents and other outside agencies.

You can view our latest newsletters for SENDCos here: [SENDCo Newsletter 7 April](#), [SENDCo Newsletter 15 April](#), [SENDCo Newsletter 22 April](#), [SENDCo Newsletter 6 May 2020](#).

KEEPING IN TOUCH

If you would like to receive emails directly into your inbox relating to SEND and general Children's Services updates in Bedford Borough we would love for you to sign up to our [Gov Delivery System](#). Visit the Gov Delivery website, enter your email address and then select 'Your Child and You' to subscribe. If you have any suggestions as to what content you would like to see in future editions of SEND Matters then please email us your ideas to sendprogramme@bedford.gov.uk.