

Thursday 7th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Happy New year. I hope you remain safe, well and enjoyed the Christmas holiday.

In light of the government's announcement that the UK is moving into a National Lockdown until mid-February, I am writing to outline our response for provision at Medeshamstede.

Although clear guidance for special schools is still to be shared, I have been liaising with the Trust, other special schools and the local authority. I have taken the last few days to process and action a robust strategic plan in order that we continue to deliver a high quality curriculum and EHCP provision for all.

Thank you for your speedy returns to our survey. Some parents/carers have made a decision to keep children at home where they are safest and others wish their child to continue attending the school setting where possible. We are sympathetic to parents' individual decisions to do what is right for their own family's circumstances and needs during the Lockdown.

Whilst there continues to be conflicting media messages whether special schools are to remain open or not during the National Lockdown, this is causing some anxiety amongst our learners, their families and our staff, and against this we also have a number of our staff who are unable to work in school and will work from home.

We will remain open to pupils **where it is safe to do so**. We aim to put the needs of all children at the heart of our response. However, for reasons of health and safety we need to limit the number of pupils we can provide for on site at this time.

Therefore, we will prioritise places in school for:

- our **most** vulnerable children
- children of key worker and critical worker parents
- then allocate places to continue in school provision for children whose parents wish them to attend and where it is safe to do so.

As you will understand, we cannot have all children in school at this time and must mitigate risk. Factors we must consider within risk assessment on a daily basis, to keep the whole school and wider community safe, are the number of staff able to be in school, physical space to socially distance which limits contacts to reduce mixing and spread of the virus; maintaining the integrity of class and wider bubbles.

As we will not be able to offer full-time face to face learning for all learners we propose to move to a "blended learning" approach that will enable us to have those pupils in school that need to be in, either because their parents are key workers or they are deemed most vulnerable.

Our younger pupils and pre-formal learners will find it most difficult to access a remote learning offer at home and so after key worker and the most vulnerable children, we will continue to offer full time education to these learners where it is safe to do so.

The oldest children in key stage 4 are our most independent learners and the majority will access their education remotely from home. Therefore, pupils in Kingfisher, Robin and Falcon classes will continue their learning remotely at home, unless they have a key worker parent or are among our most vulnerable children. Your child's class teacher will liaise with you in the first instance regarding this.

This approach will enable us to remain open for as many learners as possible, **where it is safe to do so**, alongside the preparations for rolling out the lateral flow testing for secondary phase pupils who remain in school.

Unlike the first lockdown in the summer term of 2020, schools are expected to offer learning that is commensurate with that which they would have received in school. We are fully aware that this is different for our learners due to the specific needs they have. Our primary focus will always be on supporting mental health and wellbeing. However, there is a fundamental change that unlike during the first lockdown, the statutory duty to deliver the provision to meet a child's outcomes in their EHCP is still in place and therefore our blended learning approach includes provision and support for meeting our learners' EHCP outcomes. A blended approach supports working with our partner agencies, for example speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists to ensure individuals continue to receive the support and programmes in EHCPs. Therapists will continue to work in school, where it is safe to do so, following operational procedures and risk assessment.

Our Remote Learning Offer

Each week we will send out a timetable with a 'menu' of learning sessions for 'stage rather than age' of learners. Pupils will be able to select and access their chosen activities and subjects via Microsoft teams throughout the day and week. Sessions will be live as well as recorded to revisit and to access as required. Key stage four will have a more formal academic timetable to access their learning face to face with their teachers.

The menu will offer a broad and relevant curriculum, including academic for cognition and learning needs as well as our core offer for therapeutic EHCP provision e.g: Attention Autism, We Thinkers and Think social for communication and interaction and 'Zones of Regulation' curriculum as part of occupational therapy, sensory, physical, social, emotional and mental health needs. Our PE coaches will offer remote physical development activities.

The blended learning offer will be:

- Full time in school for:
 - Children of a key worker parent
 - Children whose parents' work is critical to the Covid response (latest government guidance)
 - Our most vulnerable children who may have social care provision or may not be able to access learning remotely
- Part-time in school:
 - For some children to support their access to learning activities
 - To support those children and families who may be vulnerable
- Full-time at home
 - For children for whom it is safer to be at home

When teaching children remotely, the government expects schools to:

- **set assignments so that pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects** – *as a special school our first priority will be meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of our learners, providing activities (for stage rather than age) that are fun and engaging whilst meeting the needs of the child's EHCP and personal aspirations. For example, this could be TEACCH activity packs including sensory play, painting or a treasure hunt around the house. However this also could mean remote learning activities following an exam accreditation syllabus for the government's proposed teacher assessment.*
- **set work that is of equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school** - *our pupils access learning in different ways to mainstream schools, hence their need for specialist provision and therefore there is a higher level of support required and so no expectation for length of learning through the day*
- **provide frequent, clear explanations, delivered by a teacher or through high-quality curriculum resources or videos** - *for those pupils who can access learning remotely teaching may be via online resources, however for some activity packs with clear instructions will be provided. Teachers will also produce and record 'how to' videos for parents/carers such as setting up a workstation at home or how to support your child to read, write, etc. School staff will communicate clearly with home in regards to the learning ensuring expectations are appropriate and clear*
- **have systems for checking, at least weekly, whether pupils are engaging with their work, and inform parents where engagement is a concern** - *school staff will maintain contact with home to ensure learning is appropriate and engaging to:*
 - gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks, and provide feedback, at least weekly, using digitally facilitated or whole-class feedback where appropriate
 - enable teachers to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding

Finally, school have received your many emails, messages and good wishes this week and I would like to thank parents for your kind words of support and appreciation which have been most gratefully received in what has been a challenging week for all.

Stay safe and please do contact me with any questions or concerns you may have as we go forward.



Warm regards,
Mrs Ives