



Bolton Information and Advisory Service, SEND Weekly Bulletin – 20th March 2020

Text for help- 07467943495

24 hour email- iasoutofhours@outlook.com

www.iasbolton.com

COVID-19 and Bolton SEND- what's going on?

We wanted to keep you up to date with what we know about how the recent pandemic is affecting SEN here in Bolton and nationally in terms of law and processes. We also wanted to let you know how IAS and BPC are linking up more than ever to help you through this incredibly stressful time.

Why are some children in school and some aren't?

On 18th March, the government issued notice that all schools and other settings must close to all pupils except those in the 'key workers' list, and 'vulnerable' children, which included those who are disabled, and those who have an EHC plan. Then, on 19th March, the guidance about this was released. The guidance states that wherever possible, children should be kept at home to reduce their risk and keep them safe- this applies to those with key worker parents, and those who are disabled/ have an EHC plan. The discretion to make this decision was given to the schools, on a child by child basis. There is no formal route of appeal for this decision. We are in unprecedented times and are all trying to pull together to make decisions to keep each other and ourselves, safe. Children told to remain home are children who are considered to be in a safer position at home. The government has stated it will support schools making these decisions.

But I am struggling and I don't agree that the school have made the right decision. You should talk to the school and explain why you feel your child would be safer at school than they would at home. If the school still won't take your child/ have closed, you should contact the Local Authority for help.

What happens to the EHC plan and help that they get in school?

For children attending a setting, any help they get through an EHC plan is unlikely to be delivered in full. If your child isn't in school, the EHC plan remains in place, but for the current time, will not be delivered.

My child is going through an EHC needs assessment. What will happen?

The assessment should still continue- however there will be delays and the timescale of 20 weeks is unlikely to be met. The SEND assessment service is still operating as fully functionally as they can given the circumstances. We would ask that whilst this team tries to manage the workload, you direct any queries and concerns to us first, to see if we can help you.

My child's annual review is due. Will this go ahead?

This is likely to be postponed until a later date.

I don't want to send my child to school- do I have to?

No- the government believe in most cases, children are safer at home. There is also a 'Coronavirus Bill' due to go through parliament to be made temporary law. This bill includes the disapplication of the part of law that allows criminal proceedings for failing to send a child to school.

I've heard of the Coronavirus Bill. What is it?

It's a temporary set of amendments to existing law. There are some parts relating to SEND and education. It hasn't been passed through parliament yet, but it's likely to be agreed. It means that the laws relating to what our children get and need, will be 'relaxed' to allow Local Authorities to manage the COVID-19 disruptions to our children's education. This includes things like changing the LA 'must' duties, to a reasonable endeavour's duty instead. It also would affect things like reassessments for EHC plans, free travel arrangements to and from school, to provide things like 6th day education for excluded children. When this Bill has been passed, we will send out a further bulletin.

How long is all this for?

In reality- no one can put a definitive date on when everything will return to some kind of 'normal'. However, its likely to be several months, as opposed to several weeks.

What support do I get in the meantime?

As this is a very fast moving situation, there has been very little time to plan or prepare for something this disruptive to all of our lives. It is also considered safer that we all maintain social distance and have as little non- essential contact with each other as possible. Therefore, it would be sensible to presume that groups/ clubs for our SEND children will all be cancelled until the government advice changes. This is why the Information and advisory service SEND (IAS) and Bolton Parent Carers (BPC), are seeking to do whatever we can to support you through this difficult period.

What do you have planned?

IAS and BPC are currently planning a support package for parents and carers of SEND children in Bolton. This will include;

- Weekly bulletin giving you all the facts and information on the situation
- The implementation of the 'natter and listen' service- whether you just need some adult conversation, need to let off some steam, want some advice or reassurance, or just someone to call a friend to talk about your day, we are here. Simply text 07467943495 and we will arrange a call back for you whenever you want to talk.
- Virtual coffee mornings- using 'Zoom' to connect a group of us together at a time- BPC will release dates in due course. Timings and frequency are being worked on.
- Virtual workshops- again, using 'Zoom', Cheryl and Nan will continue delivering workshops- with some new and exciting updates and additions! Usual booking rules apply. Please check BPC website for details.
- The usual IAS service- although we are all working from home, we can continue to offer telephone and email support, advice and guidance for anything SEND related- whether you've got EHC forms to complete, want to know about anything education, health or social care related, or to chat through your concerns for when the schools go back, get in touch using our 24 hour email address- iasoutofhours@outlook.com and we will call you back.
- A new page on the IAS website full of learning resources/ educational games/ outdoor activities/ things to do/ helpful hints for having children at home for prolonged periods.

We hope this is helpful. We will be back in touch every Friday with a weekly update.

Stay well and look after each other,

Cheryl and the IAS team, and Nan and BPC