



# Bolton Parent Carers & Bolton Information Advisory Service

## *Working together for Bolton's SEND families*

Joint Bulletin 19 - January 2021

We know that last week was quite a confusing time for families since the national lockdown was announced on Monday evening, it's been confusing for us to! Today we are going to try and un-muddy the waters for you.

Last Monday night, we had Boris Johnson on our screens telling us that all schools were immediately closed to the majority of pupils, but that they would remain open for vulnerable children, including those with EHC Plans.

We, as well as schools and local authorities waited for guidance which would include the necessary details about how this affects pupils with SEND. The announcement needed to have guidance issued to explain to schools, colleges and local authorities what they were to do next.

We know everyone's family situation is different and we really needed this guidance to help us to help you work out what would be best for your family. We know that some families would prefer their children at home, and we know that some families would like their children to be able to attend school. We are also very aware that families have lived through this once before, and this time, you are making your decisions based on prior experiences. This is the message we communicated to local SEND leaders last week.

Finally at the end of the week the guidance landed. In the midst of numerous pieces of guidance coming out every hour from the government came the one we were waiting for!

Normally what we would then do is break that guidance down for you so you know exactly where you stand. However, this week things seem a bit different and we don't feel that that would be the most helpful thing we could do. This week we feel our most useful support for parents is to try and explain why things **still** seem rather confusing.

So - we would like to start by explaining what *guidance* actually means.

We have **laws**, we have **statutory guidance** and we have **guidance** – these are all different.

The **guidance** that has been issued is not law, it isn't at this point even statutory guidance; this means that settings need to read it, understand it and where possible follow what it says. Within the guidance, all the recommendations for settings use the word "**should**." "**Should**" is quite a soft word in terms of guidance, it isn't a "**must**." If you have ever been on one of our workshops, you will know we talk a lot about should's and must's.

A **must** – is quite simply that – the person, or setting responsible **must** do what is expected of them.

A **should** – is as good as a **must** – **but** if the person or setting can show that they have a proportionate reason for not being able to follow the recommendation, then they do not need to do what is being asked of them.

**With this in mind, all the guidance for settings that has been issued as of the time we are writing this, are *should* recommendations.**



We know that this is confusing based on the fact that there is a consistent message coming from the government and the media saying that schools are open for vulnerable pupils.

So, why does that not seem to be the case?

As well as the guidance that has been issued about schools and pupils attending, there is also a raft of guidance being issued to local authorities and settings to advise them on how to control the current increase in covid cases. Much of this guidance uses *must* recommendations.

Therefore, local authorities and settings are having to try and balance *all* the various recommendations, and this is understandably proving very difficult – not just in Bolton, but nationally.

We have seen a week of continual change of expectation upon settings as to what they are being asked to provide for their pupils. We anticipate that this could more than likely alter over coming days too. You'll know our last bulletin covered in a lot of detail the staggered opening of schools – which became redundant within 3 days! We are conscious that the guidance dated Jan 7th – could more than likely be expanded upon or updated by the government. Based on this, if we were to do an explainer, step by step of the guidance, we feel it may be unfair as the situation is changing rapidly. Add to that the fact that the guidance only has *should* recommendations, there isn't a lot we can detail for you currently on what your specific rights are to your child's provision. We hope that over coming days this will become clearer.

We'd like to share with you what we feel was the main issue schools were facing last week, that is staffing. By staffing we mean teachers, teaching assistants, cooks, cleaners, playground supervisors, caretakers, office staff and more. We are finding that lots of schools are unable to fully open to all the children who want a place because of inadequate staff numbers to be able to open and be able to meet their health and safety duties. This is a very difficult situation for everyone involved, parents, schools, local authorities and local public health teams, however we know that local authorities and schools will want to work together to find a way forward.

It is important to consider that we are currently in a bit of an unknow position in terms of being able to see what is going to happen with local covid cases. Therefore many decisions being made are having to assume there will be an increase locally.

If you would like to read the guidance, [click here](#). The first half very much details the public health duties on schools, it's page 25 onwards that provides the guidance regarding running schools. This particular guidance is for schools. If your young person attends a further education setting, the guidance can be found by [clicking here](#). There has been no specific guidance issued for specialist settings, so currently this is the only guidance that all school settings have. We do not know if there is the intention of the government to issue anything additional for specialist settings.



## **Remote Learning**

If you are now in the position that you are now 'remote learning,' we are aware that this week there has been a lot in the media about the remote learning expectations upon schools. We know that for SEND pupils this can create many barriers and this is referred to in the guidance, however it doesn't really suggest a remedy – this may change. So, we have the same message as always, there is no duty for you as a parent to make sure that your child is accessing the remote learning, although we would encourage you to try it. If you are having any difficulties, in the first instance please do speak to your child's school. It may be that the lessons online aren't differentiated, it may be that as a parent you are fighting a losing battle to get your child to engage, it may be that you don't have the right technology, it may be that if you are working from home you simply cannot provide your child with the support they need to be able to access the online learning– please don't suffer in silence, speak to school.

The government has provided more updates on providing schools with ways in which families can access laptops and also have additional data for internet connectivity – we would recommend speaking to school if this would help you.

We hope that this helps you understand the current situation.

We can assure you we are ensuring that the local authority are updated with parents' experiences. We are also ensuring that through our national networks for both Parent Carer Forums and the Information Advisory Service, we are relaying the same messages nationally.

Should you need advice on your personal situation, please don't hesitate to contact IAS.

Current methods of contact can be found by visiting [www.iasbolton.com](http://www.iasbolton.com)

Naturally we will be back as soon as we can offer any further explanation of the current situation,

*Nan and Cheryl*