



## Bolton Information and Advisory Service, SEND Weekly Bulletin – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Text for help- 07467943495

24 hour email- [iasoutofhours@outlook.com](mailto:iasoutofhours@outlook.com)

[www.iasbolton.com](http://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.

#### **What has happened this week?**

As we are sure you will be aware from the news, this week has seen things move quickly. The schools have closed to most pupils, families are at the start of the journey of being home with their children and juggling work/ schooling. The government have passed a new law to see us through this period, and the council have been stepping up their arrangements for supporting us all through this time.

#### **Update on school closures.**

There was some confusion on the back of the instruction from government to close schools- both for families, and for schools too. Further guidance has been released to try and clarify the situation. In essence:

- All children should remain at home, where it is safe for them to do so. Even those who have parents that are keyworkers, and those with EHC plans and those that are considered vulnerable.
- Schools however, should accommodate those children who sit in these categories, who cannot safely be left at home. This could be that there are two keyworker parents and no one at all to look after the child, or, a child who has

an EHC plan who would be at *significant risk* if they were not in school. Having an EHC plan does not give an automatic right to be granted a place in a setting in this time. This decision is made by risk assessing the situation, between school, parents, child (if appropriate) and the LA where necessary. The government allows the school to make these decisions at their discretion.

If you feel your child needs a place, and either; the school is closed, or, the school are not able to offer your child a place, you should contact the LA to discuss. The government says LA's should accommodate children where they cannot be safely kept at home. The contact number for the LA for this matter is 01204 337220.

### **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 new Act, the Coronavirus Act, 2020, which disapplies the attendance proceedings part of law that would usually come into force if you didn't send your child to school.

### **Update on the COVID-19 Bill**

The COVID-19 Bill was a proposed set of amendments to existing law, that is intended to help Local Authorities get through this period. This has now been passed and has become the Coronavirus Act 2020.

However, the Act hasn't changed anything for SEND at this exact moment in time. The Secretary of State has not given notice to allow LAs to relax their duties under the Children and families Act 2014 yet, and when this does happen, it will be for the shortest time period possible.

We would however, recommend a common sensical approach to dealing with all matters SEND at this time, and to understand that everyone is doing their best under very difficult circumstances. Everyone's top priority needs to be keeping vulnerable children safe and containing the virus.

When the Secretary of State does give notice, it will effectively allow LAs to postpone Annual Reviews. In some cases, LA's may well still go ahead if everyone is happy/able for them to do so, but the LA can decide to put them on hold, and this would be considered appropriate. The most recent Guidance also suggests that the Government will change the timescales on statutory assessment. We await further update as and when the Secretary of State gives notice. Then we will be able to interpret the full implications for you and deliver these in a further bulletin.

### **SEND Tribunals**

The SEND Tribunal is still operating- albeit on reduced staff and by different ways of working than they normally would.

Appeals can still be registered, and any scheduled hearings etc will still go ahead- although they will not be face to face. Cases are being heard either 'on the papers', or

by video/ telephone link. If you have an active case and need further support or guidance, please email [Cheryl-ppsbolton@outlook.com](mailto:Cheryl-ppsbolton@outlook.com), and we will talk you through your options.

### **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'. The coronavirus Act 2020 will be in force for the next two years. However, the government will only enforce certain parts of it when they feel they need to. It will also be frequently reviewed to see whether it is still needed in between times.

### **So, what support do I get in the meantime?**

We have been beavering away to try and bring you as much support as we can at this difficult time.

The IAS website, [www.iasbolton.com](http://www.iasbolton.com) now has a dedicated page on Coronavirus. Here, you can find:

- All the latest government, council, and IAS information and advice on what's happening
- A learning hub with downloads and links to different learning experiences, for both mainstream and SEND children
- Links to useful websites for parents and carers
- Social stories for children about the virus and changes
- Toolkits for managing at home
- Activity suggestions for children and young people

### **What other things do you have planned?**

IAS and BPC have planned a support package for parents and carers of SEND children in Bolton. This includes:

- Our weekly bulletin giving you all the facts and information on the situation
- Our '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- hosted by BPC with an IAS officer present at each one. These are held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 11.30am until 12.30pm. To find out more visit [www.boltonparents.org.uk/join-in](http://www.boltonparents.org.uk/join-in)
- Virtual workshops- again, using 'Zoom', Cheryl and Nan will continue delivering workshops- with some new and exciting updates and additions! Usual booking rules apply. After Easter, we have two dates set; a day time session on 17th April, and an evening session on 23rd April. Visit [www.boltonparents.org.uk/cv](http://www.boltonparents.org.uk/cv) for more information.

- 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](mailto:iasoutofhours@outlook.com) and we will call you back.

## **Updates from Bolton Council**

[www.bolton.gov.uk](http://www.bolton.gov.uk) has a daily update on the main webpage for local residents.

Bolton council have had to close all the respite services for adults and young people until further notice. This is in addition to the youth and play services also being closed.

The Start Well clinics for midwifery remain open at Harvey, Tonge, Farnworth and Oxford Grove- however are by appointment only.

If you, or someone you care for, have received a letter from the government about being in the highly vulnerable 'shielded' category, and you need support, please contact the council for help on 01204 337221.

For anyone not in this category, for all other support needs, please contact the council on 01204 333333. You may be able to get help with your council tax if you have had your income affected adversely because of coronavirus. You can also apply to the hardship fund for further financial support if you are struggling to manage.

We hope this is helpful. We will be back in touch every Friday with a weekly update. If you would prefer not to receive this, please just let us know. In the meantime, please do make use of the care package on offer to help support you through this time.

Stay well and look after each other,

Cheryl and the IAS team, and Nan and BPC