

Questions from Sheffield Parent Carer Forum to Sheffield City Council

Responses received 1 April 2020

Q: Schools are risk assessing all children with an EHC Plan. Is this based on the child or the whole family's circumstances?

John Macilwraith: The government has asked the council and schools to consider the risk of all children with an EHC Plan being at home. The government expect that children should be at home unless they are not safe to do so, even if they have an EHC plan. Schools are being contacted to provide a response on this. In Sheffield we've taken a simple approach where children are rated on a traffic light system for risk known as RAG rating. The school is being asked to consider this as they are the professional that know the situation best. In thinking about this they are looking at the potential impact of the child not accessing special educational provision, including their knowledge of the home situation. Each case will be different but their starting point will be the impact on the child. We know that many schools have already had discussions with families about their concerns.

Q: What should families do if they were initially classed as 'Green' (so ok being at home) but their situation changes?

John Macilwraith: If a parent is concerned about their child's special educational needs they should contact the school to discuss how they can be supported in the first instance.

Q: When will parents know how they've been risk assessed?

John Macilwraith: We won't be contacting parents to give them the outcome of the risk assessment, but will be working with schools to support the most vulnerable.

Q: If a family doesn't have access to technology to access learning what should they do?

John Macilwraith: This isn't an issue specific to those with SEND and particularly EHC Plans, so we'll raise this with our schools partner, Learn Sheffield, to offer advice to schools on how they provide access to learning activities when families are struggling to access provision online.

Q: How can vulnerable families who have to self-isolate access help and support?

John Macilwraith: Lots of people are having to self-isolate and are getting help and support from their local community, for example access to food shopping and getting medicines. This is a starting point for families to go to. There is lots of activity taking place with the voluntary sector to co-ordinate support across neighbourhoods. As information about support for the vulnerable during this time is available it'll be available through the council website: www.sheffield.gov.uk

Where the help and support relates to managing their child's Special Educational Needs then the school is the best starting point to discuss support. Our specialist SEN services will be working with schools to support them in helping families.

Q: Can there be a flexible approach around the employment of personal assistants during this time when PA's are not available due to self-isolation?

John Macilwraith: At the moment we haven't explored this but will look at how we can address this point.

Q: Where provision such as supported internships have ended early due to the coronavirus, how will this impact on their EHC Plan?

John Macilwraith: At present we're not sure what the government's specific expectations will be about special educational provision in the coming months. The Coronavirus Bill has now been passed as a law and we have been told that we'll have more guidance about EHC Plans shortly, including areas such as annual reviews and securing provision. Once we have this we will be in a better position to answer questions like this and will provide more details for parents.