



## Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 2370 Fax 020 7219 2370 Email: [educom@parliament.uk](mailto:educom@parliament.uk)

Website: [www.parliament.uk/education-committee](http://www.parliament.uk/education-committee) Twitter: [@CommonsEd](https://twitter.com/CommonsEd)

From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

Vicky Ford MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
for Children and Families  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

15 July 2020

### **The Impact of Covid-19 on young people with SEND**

Dear Vicky,

You will have seen our session on SEND earlier in July which enabled us to consider the impact of Covid-19 on those families and children with these needs. We write now with some questions following the evidence we heard.

Since we met, it is encouraging to note that the Government does not believe it will be necessary to renew the temporary easements that relate to EHC assessments and plans, should things remain the same. This is in line with all children returning to school in September. However, there appears to be a significant risk that, as schools return, those children with the greatest personal care needs are the ones who may well miss out, owing to a lack of staff and resource to support their safe return.

During our session, we heard there was a great deal of variability on what had happened on the ground under the relaxed legislation. In some cases, parents with children with EHC plans have had absolutely no contact with either their child's school or local authority and others have seen positive adaptations to the way support has been delivered. Given this variation, it would be helpful to see what assessment DfE has made of the way local authorities, health bodies and schools have exercised their duties in this period.

The Committee has written separately to the Minister for School Standards welcoming the DfE's catch-up programme. In respect of SEND, we would welcome information on what specific catch-up provision and funding the Government is putting in place to support children with these special needs.

We heard that many SEND children have missed out on specialist therapies during lockdown. We wish to hear what is being done to mitigate the impact of the interruption to these care and support packages. Also, what is being done to provide extra provision for those children who have developed mental health and emotional needs? How is DfE engaging specialist providers in these areas to support these children's recovery?

Providing extra support for children in transitional years with SEND was highlighted as being particularly important, especially for those waiting for an EHC plan to be finalised. What guidance is there to explain what should happen for those with SEND who are moving to a new school or going on to college in September?

In addition, there will some SEND children who will have felt much more comfortable whilst at home and are likely to want to refuse to return to the classroom. How will they be supported in their transition back to a school routine?

Another issue raised was school transport. What extra support and funding is being allocated to local authorities to provide the extra capacity that will be needed in connection with the additional distancing requirements on buses?

We have heard that there is a shortage in many areas of educational psychologists who are essential in assessing children's behavioural needs. What is Government doing to address this problem?

There are many children who do not meet the threshold for EHC support, but who have specialist educational needs. What guidance has been developed to support teachers and teaching assistants with these children's return to the classroom for September? In particular, can you explain what approach DfE recommends for remote and in-school support for young people with dyslexia and dyspraxia?

Finally, we are aware that our predecessor Committee invested a great deal of focus and time into an inquiry into SEND provision. Many hundreds of witnesses contributed to this work and so we would like to press the Government for its response, which is now over six months' late. Similarly, when will the Government's own response to its SEND Review be published?

Yours



**Robert Halfon MP**  
**Chair of the Education Committee**