Written evidence submitted by the Rainbow Parents Carers Forum

UK Parliament Education Committee call for evidence May 2020
The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services inquiry

The Rainbow Parents Carers Forum welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence. Rainbow PCF is the official parent carer forum for Nottingham City local authority. Despite this, its membership includes neighbouring Nottinghamshire families representing approximately 50% of its members. This is a historic situation since the organization originated from a support group set up almost 35 years ago. During this time, it has been an independent voice of parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The method employed to gather this evidence was the use of an online survey. The questions were as close as possible to those set out in the call for evidence brief. The survey was published and promoted in the forum's weekly bulletin and social media platforms between 5th-26th May, 2020 (3 weeks) to meet the deadline of 31st May 2020.

We have reviewed the 55 completed consultations and our responses are as follows:

Section A - Access to Education

***Question 1* – Was your nursery, school or college open to critical/keyworkers?**

Table 1

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	45	83.33%
No	2	3.7%
N/A	2	3.7%
Don't know	5	9.26%
Skipped	1	-

***Question 2* - Was your nursery, school or college open to vulnerable children or those with EHCP's?**

Table 2

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	32	60.38%
No	10	18.87%
N/A	2	3.77%
Don't know	9	16.98%
Skipped	1	-

Section B - Support from Children's Services

***Question 3* – Did you need any support from Children's Services?**

Summary

The number of families needing support was less than 20% and was mostly considered to be helpful (70%) with a varied range of practicality.

Table 3

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	10	18.52%
No	38	70.37%
N/A	6	11.11%
Skipped	1	-

***Question 4* –What support did you receive?**

Responses included:

- None
- Nothing meaningful
- Supported accommodation
- Phone calls, video conferencing and emails
- Physio
- A buggy to get out and about with
- Referral to a disability social worker following further incident of telephone sexual abuse.

***Question 5* – Was this support helpful?**

Table 4

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	7	70%
No	3	30%

Section C – Nursery Provision

***Question 6* –Did the closure of your nursery have an impact on your child's development?**

This question was applicable to 8 respondents:

Table 5

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	5	62.5%
No	3	37.5%

***Question 7* –Did the closure of your nursery have an impact on your child's funded place?**

Table 6

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	2	25%
No	6	75%

Section D – Impact of Cancelling Exams

***Question 8* – Do you think the cancelling of exams will have an impact on your child moving into their next stage of education or employment?**

Table 7

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	12	22.22%
No	13	24.07%
N/A	29	53.71%
Skipped	1	-

Comments included:

1. My daughter had the necessary qualifications for the next stage already but has been negatively impacted due to poor early course performance.
2. My son is 23 years old and has been struggling with English and Maths. I am not sure what grade he will get, especially as English teacher changed after lockdown (he did do an online exam - not official) for his new teacher who luckily has worked with him in the past. This is making me reluctant to put him forward for Level 3 course if he has yet again to sit English and Maths.
3. Schools will grade pupils and it shouldn’t affect entry to college.
4. Not sure how the grades will be marked on. My daughter has had a difficult time and on 3rd placement. With disrupted education will mean that continuous assessment won’t be an accurate account.
5. Complete disinterest in the impact on the children's mental health and wellbeing by doing this.
6. Teacher assessed predictions will be reliable.

Section E - Contact from School

Summary

Answers	%
School had been in some form of contact each week	75%
Not contacted at all	4%
Other responses	21%
Contact solely to parents with young person or child not contacted	27%
The issues raised were resolved unsatisfactorily	40%
The issues raised were resolved satisfactorily	60%

Primary contact made through the parent was the dominant method, often chosen over direct contact with the child or young person due to the challenges of the individual or channels available to them. This is evidenced with respondents stating 27% of children or young people have not been contacted at all.

There is evidence of issues occurring and being recorded but only 4 out of 10 appear to have been resolved satisfactorily.

Where issues were resolved there has been evidence of prompt action, regular contact and support from known/trusted contacts at the school. Issues which were not resolved have high associations with contact, communication and understanding – invariably leaving the parent feeling isolated.

***Question 9* – How often and how did school/college contact you?**

Table 8

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Never	2	3.77%
Daily	3	5.66%
Weekly	8	15.09%
Few times a week	29	54.72%
Fortnightly	5	9.43%
Every 2 or 3 weeks	1	1.89%
When needed	2	3.77%
Twice	3	5.66%
Skipped	2	-

***Question 10* – How often and how did school/college contact your child or young person?** (49 responses)

Table 9

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Never	13	26.53%
Daily	5	10.20%
Weekly	13	26.53%
Few times a week	7	14.29%
Fortnightly	2	4.08%
When needed	2	4.08%
Twice	3	6.12%
Once	4	8.16%

Comments included:

1. None. They asked to speak to young person whilst on the same call. However, they need to find a different way to see individual young people possibly through zoom platforms etc. This needed to have been done earlier on in the pandemic.
2. Did not, expected my daughter to attend a webinar.
3. Weekly (she was resistant to engaging remotely and the school was not able to overcome her reluctance).
4. Initially no direct contact but over the last 2 weeks we now have direct fortnightly TA online mentoring session for 30 minutes with my daughter.
5. My child has learning difficulties, so it was appropriate that contact was through me. My son has now had one video call with a T.A.

***Question 11* – If you had any issues, did you contact school? If so, how was your issues solved?**

Comments included:

1. I did contact school by e-mail over an online support for my child being too high, however it was never resolved.
2. Couldn't get through to school.
3. Yes, prompt email response to my question.
4. Regular phone conversations and emails, all sorted immediately or within an hour or 2.
5. My son’s EHCP provisions were not moved to home and I contacted both Local authority and school. School said they contacted relevant parties Salt and OT. No reply from Salt and OT private provider has been furloughed. Local authority didn’t bother answering my emails. School however has allowed ABA therapy to move home but all responsibility was mine to deliver it to my son.
6. The school therapy team has been helpful, the educational side of things less so.
7. Yes. Not really resolved.
8. Asked for help 3 weeks ago but still waiting for response. 8 weeks in and have been asked if we have a laptop!!! The work that has been set isn’t differentiated and is

difficult and not tangible for the young person to attempt to do. There hasn't been any plan for when the work gets sent in as to how this is marked or returned. There are some subjects I can't help at home as the way it is taught at school is different to the way I know. I would like to have seen schools videoing how to teach the basics.

9. Was told they can't take my son because he has cerebral palsy, mild asthma, and incontinence and they can't cater for him, even though it's a specialist college.
10. In response to emails giving work emails and checking on our wellbeing I explained my son was struggling now in addition to his teacher calling to talk to him weekly, he also has a weekly call from a specialist TA for behaviour/emotional who he has a v. good relationship with to discuss how he is feeling. I feel the school has been extremely responsive to any needs and issues we have had and taken care to check on our wellbeing.

***Question 12* – Does your child have an Education Health and Care plan?**

Table 10

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Yes	37	68.52%
No	17	31.48%
Skipped	1	-

***Question 13* – Which local authority do you live in?**

Table 11

Answer choices	Responses	Percentage
Nottingham City	24	44.44%
Nottinghamshire	25	46.30%
Derbyshire	1	1.85%
Northamptonshire	4	7.41%
Skipped	1	-

***Question 14* – Is the child's school in the same local authority? If not please state which authority.**

Of the 39 responses to this question, 2 reported out of county placements.

Section F - Impact on SEND Pupils

***Question 15* – What do you think the effect has been on the pupils with special educational needs and disabilities?**

Summary

In most cases the removals of routine and structured daily tasks, especially those which are established, have proved significant obstacles for continuity of SEND pupil development.

Varied stimulus and social interactions are considered key for regulating the important structural elements of the pupil's day and has a much higher provision in a school environment. The removal of this element has elevated anxieties within pupils and heightened stress in the family environment. Behaviours have also seen inconsistencies, although some respondents have stated the benefit of 1:1 tuition in controlling this.

Primary concerns are inherently linked to reintegration and lasting impact of structural changes, with some respondents highlighting the risk of regression in their children.

When discussing the impact on SEND pupils, respondent sentiment is weighted heavily towards the cautiously negative. 'Routine', 'Structure' and 'Interaction' are all areas of significant concern to the parent, driving stress, anxiety and inconsistent behaviours. The inability to replicate the school environment through stimulus and external responsibilities (e.g. continuation of parent employment) has seen perceived development suffer.

There are, of course, natural outliers and positive sentiment comes in the form of benefits highlighted through 1:1 engagement as well as an upweight in wellbeing for a handful of pupils. This may be notable through the varied time resources and experience available to those respondents as well as the inherent link with previous and current support levels. Future outlooks are positive in some areas but there is a concern over developmental regression.

Overall, support and resources during reintegration will be essential to maintaining continued positive development of SEND pupils.

Comments included:

1. Change in routine and structure has been the biggest issue, but less demand educationally has actually been a positive for my son.
2. Not had any effect on my daughter.
3. School has done their best. I have not had any communication from the LA. Support from them is poor generally anyway. Support from our respite carer and childcare providers has as always been excellent.
4. Child with autism and sensory issues much happier at home. Less headaches and constipation.
5. It has helped my autistic child by not being at school. His anxiety has disappeared and he is a lot calmer. He misses his Autism Group on a Saturday though.
6. My son is receiving excellent support and I am being given differentiated

curriculum guidance and a quick and dirty training in how to meet is educational needs. The school have been fantastic and provided us with loads of resources and the physical kit (chair and laptop) in order to meet most of his educational needs at home. We're lucky in that I was able to give him full time support and I haven't been poorly yet. This arrangement is working, but is not sustainable long term. My son is losing out socially and this will impact him more than his peers. He's also forgetting the routines of school that took us over a year to embed, which will further hinder his progress, assuming he ever returns to school. He could still die or have to be shielded for a decade. I am massively concerned that the EHCP requirements on LAs have been completely removed when they were useless anyway, now we have no legal framework to expect them to deliver and challenge if they don't. I think it's despicable at best and I hope it's proved to be criminal and that bit of the Covid law revoked.

7. We will have problems getting him back to school. As he finds it hard being off for long time.
8. Physical and learning regression.
9. Distressing do not understand why have to be at home not school.
10. Missing social interaction and struggling with focus and motivation. Areas he finds difficult have become more pronounced, such as questions that ask for his own opinion.
11. In my sons case the lack of social interaction has made him clingier.
12. We can afford our sons dinners but the result of the usual hot dinners not being available has caused detriment to our son’s routine and eating habits. He won’t eat cold meal like sandwiches/packed lunch therefore it’s been a struggle getting him to eat at school. School have done their best by adapting to our requests to try different things like microwave etc.
13. Increased anxiety blaming them self for not being able to do activities they enjoy as the feel they have been naughty, finding it difficult to understand situation can't understand social distancing, increased adverse behaviours. Extra strain on individual and the family Financial strain on some families My son is on a special diet without having meals at school it was very difficult to keep his diet under control which due to poor diet control increased seizures.
14. Just even longer being at home without an education as nothing had been put in place prior to the pandemic due to school saying they couldn’t fund it. It’s going to be difficult after so long being at home to get used to going to a place of education again. Transitioning to post 16 so will need a lot of support around this transition.
15. My son has missed out on his hard earned EHCP provisions. School was kind to allow ABA (applied behaviour analysis) therapy to home but local authority didn’t bother checking with us despite my emails for request to move SALT and OT home. However since Education Secretary has issued letter my local authority has emailed me back saying that ‘reasonable endeavours’ being done so no support. My son has been having hard time in particularly regulating his emotions. He was overwhelmed and bored. A lot of services like buses he loves to travel on for sensory reasons he couldn’t so his behaviours has been challenging. In absence of therapies, the worst fear of a parent is the regression. I felt let down by Government decision to relax EHCP provisions as my son’s needs are there they haven’t just vanished. Instead of supporting us more they have taken away hard

earned therapies.

16. It has been very difficult as the school essentially announced it was closing, even though all of its pupils have an EHCP, and only a few children were allowed to stay. My daughter has not engaged in any therapies or education remotely as her special educational needs make this very hard for her.
17. It has caused my child a lot of confusion and consequently stresses.
18. We are shielding, so children cannot attend school nor have carers or support workers in, although both parents are key workers and still having to work. Children are isolated, Losing out on sensory input as well as education, suffering increased anxiety and mood swings, already behind and struggles educationally, so even more so now, worse relationship with parents as we have to be teachers too, so now my son hates us for making him do school work when we are not teachers and we are not in a school building. We don't receive any school dinner vouchers which personally I think are overpriced as a free £15 voucher as my kid's school dinners that I pay are only £10 per week for primary school and £11 per week for senior school!
19. For all students who like routine this has been a real struggle. Anxiety levels were really high and have now risen again with the prospect of returning to school. It has been very hard for parent carers to juggle work, general housework and being the 1:1 support for children with additional needs with no additional support in carers allowances!
20. Loss if structure has been very disruptive to child with ASD. She thrives on strict routines and protocols which the home environment can't reproduce. The lack of social face to face contact has been tough for her too.
21. No motivation to produce work - especially son doing level 2 art course with no art materials available - mostly pencil drawings - not sure if he has done enough and the impact on his grades.
22. I think it's going to be very hard long term. My son is very literal so right now I cannot get him out of the house even for his exercise. He is scared because the way he sees it is people are dying and also he has really struggled not seeing people in his family who are close to him like his grandma, who is having to be shielded due to being high health risk. He won't even go in the car and go and talk to her at the end of the drive because he can't do want he would normally do. He won't even FaceTime her now. He says it feels like we are all splitting up as a family. It's the long term mental issues I am concerned about.
23. Less support, missed socialisation, limited physio input.
24. They have lost significant learning time. It has been practically impossible to get my son age 13 to do any schoolwork.
25. No additional support has been offered. It is difficult to balance learning with working full time at home but he is benefiting from 1-1 support that he doesn't get as part of his IEP at school. My child seems to produce work more consistently and is more relaxed not going into school (although has some worries about Covid-19). His social development is suffering and lockdown restrictions have increased his frustration with rules.
26. Their mental health has been a huge problem. Schools haven't done enough to help them through this. They haven't thought outside the box enough to use social platforms to meet up as a group to keep in touch which in turn will help

with re-integration.

27. Anxiety disruption on learning steps back in terms of being settled and learning.
28. No respite and sudden stop in his routine. He and the rest of the family have found it very stressful. Going back will probably be stressful too.
29. This has affected my son very badly, his anxiety is at a high, he doesn't understand what is happening, it is having a huge impact on ourselves, I am in a wheelchair, this is impacting on us both.
30. I think some settings have chosen to ignore the fact that they are vulnerable and not offered the support they should have and this will impact on trust for the future.
31. Lack of social interaction so more insecure Routine changes so more anxious Slower progress Online learning Reliance on parents no independence, less play/activities so more stress.
32. Catastrophic. The interruption, without preparation, to routines (commonly required in Autism diagnoses) has had a big effect.
33. Increased anxiety due to loss of routines and uncertainty.
34. Disruption of routine and not finishing off an ongoing situation that we had a meeting for planned.

Section G - Suggestions for Future Plans

***Question 16* – What do you think should be included in any future plans in case of any further national emergency? Please comment.**

Summary

Commentary from respondents on future planning is inherently linked to personal experience but some key themes have emerged.

There is a distinct requirement for structured and appropriate guidelines for parents, carers and school staff. Clarity and delivery are key here and this must relate to the most vulnerable families and children.

It is extremely important that any information or communication channels are accessible by all. IT upskilling and provision of tutorials or resource assistance is a predominant highlight. Assumptions should be avoided on this so that the channels remain inclusive and as communicative as possible. Short, structured group sessions were also championed by some respondents, but these must be linked to individual requirements as well.

It is essential that the essence of future planning should revolve around a balance of empathy, with both parent/carer and child, and consistent reassurance through appropriate lines of communication and contact. Inclusion of these parties in the design of future plans is also essential for understanding specific requirements and contingencies that might well differ case to case.

Comments included:

1. A coherent plan of how to protect vulnerable children. Effective suspension of the legal requirements of EHCP provision was a disgrace. They were legally enforceable for a reason...
2. Learning disabilities have not been taken into account with social distancing rules etc
3. Contingency planning co-produced with parents and young people.
4. Earlier responses and actions, more clarity.
5. SENCo should contact parents on regular basis to check how they are coping and keeping parents up-to-date.
6. Accessible information for all. Not everybody is IT savvy and has the IT equipment for virtual meetings etc. Information needs to be available in different formats. Guidance was too late and not clear enough.
7. Ensure all contact with parents is made by people who are genuinely concerned for their child's welfare.
8. Plans to ensure children can get outside. At least some days attend school could use play area grass areas to engage with some activities. Have few small groups.
9. Making sure that families of children with disabilities have all the support they need in place at all times and in a timely manner to reduce their stress and trauma as they are dealing with this level of stress on a daily basis anyway national emergency or not. Make sure their work as Carer is always acknowledged and we

are properly rewarded. Continued contact with them. We have had a social worker call us every week during the crisis which has helped us to feel that we are not alone or isolated and helped greatly with our mental health. Continue panels where decisions on support to the family are made and give the decision even if it cannot yet be implemented. Don’t keep delaying support to these vulnerable families. Always support us, we deserve it!

10. Home education package including technology. Virtual lesson using Zoom with known adults. Differentiated lessons for those with EHCP’s.
11. Nothing, I think the Government has handled it all brilliantly!
12. Family circumstances noted for shielding of those family members and health-vulnerable individuals so it identifies which children cannot attend school despite it taking vulnerable children so as extra support can be identified early on and put in place. Schools need to have an idea of family structure and support networks written down to identify vulnerable families much better- my daughter's school is asking her about girls that are not what she identifies as her friends but they believe are, so clearly don't know her as well as they believe. National voucher lunch meals schemes don't seem to have been smooth and so have affected the most vulnerable children so this really needs to be sorted out to ensure children are fed in any future events, maybe via school giving out vouchers directly to families for the nearest main supermarket to the school (from the local authority).
13. Solid and mandatory learn from home contingency plan for all children who can safely and effectively stay away from school whilst staying on track if such a crisis where to happen again (Even if this means providing the equipment). This wouldn’t work for my child due to his vulnerability but it would keep the School clear of most children whilst maintaining a sufficient education.
14. Discussions about how it could be coproduced with kids, making sure facilities meet requirements i.e. enough washing facilities separate areas. Teacher training making sure they are aware of ‘at risk’ students in terms of ‘challenging behaviours’ but also families that may find it difficult to provide support and meals.
15. Slack in the system in terms of TA/teacher cover. Each school should have funding for an excess capacity in case if illness or incident (and in the process save ££ on substitute teachers) I'd like to see a more organised parent support network so schools can get information and supplies circulated quickly if the main site is unavailable for any reason.
16. Clear plans and access to relevant information, in order that services can reassure parents around safety concerns and access to additional equipment is seamless.
17. Ensuring that everything can be delivered in the EHCP.
18. Better plan. Forward thinking and not to penalise the most vulnerable of the society, by not reacting to the situation but instead being proactive.
19. A very clear message about who the schools have to remain open for would be helpful. Also, schools seem over-anxious about the need for chaperones on video/ audio calls making it difficult for therapies to take place or for keyworker support, for older young people who don’t want their parents involved in these discussions. Some safeguards for staff and guidance in this area would perhaps help.
20. More access to technology for deprived students. More planning for bio-weapons. Better PPE stocks. Disabled people to be considered as vulnerable households but

children with anxiety and sensory problems given options as to online/home tutors. Many children with Autism have other complex health issues. Not being considered by mainstream education settings. Move SEN kids into smaller, safer SEN schools! More outdoor schooling.

21. Childcare provision for those of us who are Key Workers.
22. The government guidelines is that people with learning difficulties, autism etc and who have an EHCP should be shielded as they are classed as vulnerable but they won't give a shielding letter as they say it is a mental disability and not a health disability. I am the main carer for my son and if anything happened to me or god forbid my son and either we got the virus or worse still we ended up in hospital my son would not cope at all in this situation. People under this umbrella only have a very small amount of people who truly know and understand them and know how to deal with their needs. The problem with not having a shielding letter is now the government is asking people to go back to work so how can we shield them. I am not working as I work self-employed but my partner has been asked to go back to work. They won't furlough him any longer as everyone is back at work. We have raised our issues with his work and about him being classed as vulnerable but without a shielding letter we can't do anything so he is now taking time off unpaid. If this occurs again they should been seen as vulnerable as they do have a disability whether it is mentally, physically or health related. They should all be classed the same.
23. SEND funding saved during closures must be ring-fenced and reallocated for SEND purposes when schools re-open.
24. More robust funding, a mechanism that allows parents to suggest support that might be required and the schools /local authorities to agree what is possible.
25. Agencies/services setting out plans for what they will do to help at a certain time. For example, short breaks haven't informed any of their families that they can still access short breaks during Covid. They haven't helped families to become creative with the way they can spend their direct payments at all. There needs to be a greater transparency to all of this!
26. Clear ways to keep in touch.
27. The government should not keep messing about with our children's mental health they should be accountable for all disabled people who have been affected by covid19,they should make sure that our young people are taken care of. Don't mess with EHC plans make funding available for all special needs pupils, do not leave vulnerable people to have to fend for themselves.
28. EHCP and those with SEND at school action plus must be prioritized
29. I think video calls/short interactive group lessons would be helpful. Currently these are not allowed due to safeguarding issues. Plans to allow special schools to continue with less students/going in part time. Access to 'hubs' is not appropriate for most special school pupils, so I would be extremely reluctant to send my son to a mainstream setting. If I were a frontline worker, as a single mother this would be very distressing for both myself and my son to send him to an unfamiliar school.

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