



Northumberland County Council

**All Chair of Governors and SEN
Governors**

Your ref: SEN Governor Update 2
Our ref: NT/GO/040520
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Dear SEN Governor

You will recall that I wrote to you in February this year as the first step in keeping you, as SEN Governors, informed as to the work underway within the Local Authority relating to our learners with special educational needs and disabilities across the county, and the support we are offering our schools.

Since then, we have all found ourselves in unprecedented times. The challenges facing our communities are immense as families experience changes in life as they know it and, sadly, many face bereavement and high levels of anxiety. There has been extensive coverage nationally about the increased levels of risk to the most vulnerable in society. Schools have become key players in supporting the national approach to managing the Coronavirus pandemic.

Government guidance issued on April 19th 2020 gave a steer on what was expected in terms of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans, as 'vulnerable learners' for whom schools should continue to provide care. There were two pieces of guidance which were relevant to schools:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance>

Over the weeks, we have been working with schools to support the completion of the risk assessments which informed decisions for each individual learner. A [template](#) was provided, and the offer of support was made if any schools would like to discuss any aspect of it. We note that many families have been weighing up risk themselves and making decisions about the offer of a school place. The underlying message was, and remains, that the decisions should be reached bearing in mind an individual consideration of each learner and their specific needs, and should be the result of conversations between the school, the family and, importantly, any other professionals involved. This is the team around the child that is best placed to understand the risks involved in a

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child coming into school, and those that might emerge due to a sustained period of time being away from school.

As the ultimate responsibility for risk assessing learners with EHCPs lies with the Local Authority, we have set up a system whereby we are asking schools to submit a weekly safeguarding return which informs us of the decision reached around attendance for each learner, and whether social care colleagues have been part of the decision making, where they are involved. Schools have responded well to this request, and we thank them for cooperating as we seek assurance on the monitoring and safeguarding position of our most vulnerable. This exercise is continuing as we move into the next phase of the government strategy.

We have been in a position of being able to offer 'hands on' support to our schools who are making provision for children and young people. We have deployed a significant number of SEN Support staff into a number of schools across the county; and this offer is still open. All schools have been made aware of this, and the way in which they can request it via the Director's daily [5 O'Clock Update](#). We are receiving very positive feedback about the way this is helping.

We would like to reassure you that we are planning for recovery. This entails anticipating the short to medium term impact of this period of time on SEN learners, their families and our schools and planning how we can support a return to business as usual. We are planning for the ways in which we can support reopening schools with their SEN learners. The government, on 30th April, granted a temporary relaxation of the timelines around statutory processes around SEN:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus>

We are making efforts to continue with EHC needs assessments **as far as possible**. Schools are being advised to conduct Annual Review meetings if they are able to and, together with parents/carers, feel that it is appropriate to do so. This applies whilst schools are open in a limited way, and beyond June 1st when the reopening is scheduled to begin. Where other professionals are involved e.g. from health or social care, there may be limited chances of obtaining advice and, in those cases, it may be advisable to delay.

We are also sighted on the work underway as defined in our post inspection improvement plan, the Written Statement of Action. We both continue to make good progress and to be monitored by the DfE and NHS England, whilst expecting some relaxation in the original timelines for re-inspection.

Finally, thank you for the considerable interest in the SEN Governor Conference that we scheduled in April. We will endeavour to rearrange this as soon as timeframes around large gatherings are confirmed nationally. In the meantime, can I remind you that we have an on-line interactive training package '*Understanding SEN Support and EHCPs*' which is accessible to schools with a Learning Together account. In addition, there are a number of resources available through the [Governance](#) section of the [Northumberland Education](#) website. On the website you will find a host of resources related to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if we can be of any assistance.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Jackson', located in the upper left quadrant of the page.

Dean Jackson
Service Director, Education and Skills