

SEN Roundup – w/c January 4th, 2021

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(Written by SENSible SENCO and shared with the Edukey/Tes group)

Text in Green are direct quotes from the DfE materials. Text in Blue provides hyperlinks. Text in Red is a personal interpretation.

Welcome back to the SEN Roundup! Your collection of DfE and government announcements and documents.

If you are new to the Roundups, then they are normally updated weekly (more frequently if the government makes rapid changes) and consist of a series of titles from the DfE/Government website with links to their most recent versions of guidance and a very brief summary of any changes. You will need to 'read' the first version of anything as this is only a summary of changes provided for convenience, without any interpretation. The Roundup finishes with links to useful websites or blog posts not provided by the government that we have been made aware of, along with any regional variations. Unfortunately, I'm based in England and unable to stay on top of all the changes for the devolved nations as well, but we do try.

On 4th January, 8pm the English government announced a return to lockdown and 'closure' of schools with a focus on remote learning to be in place with effect from today. This was following a similar announcement from the Scottish government some hours earlier. The Scottish government has opted for a full lockdown of all phases until 18th January, whereas the English government has opted for Nursery provisions to remain open but a longer lockdown period until the February half term, with a slight hint it may be extended beyond this.

This was followed by an email at nearly 11pm that night to Head Teachers telling them to open schools on the Tuesday to provide students with instructions on what will happen with remote learning... schools may or may not have opened! From Wednesday 6th, they will be open only for specific categories of student.

Unlike the first lockdown, there is currently no change to the statutory duties obliged by an EHCP. This means that those students are clustered under the vulnerable pupil's label and should be offered a place in school alongside the children of key workers and those who are LAC. It is unlikely that you will be able to provide everything required in an EHCP if the child is not offered a place in school. The requirement for key worker status only needs to be held by one parent. As a result, many schools are reporting a significant increase in numbers compared to the first lockdown – with cohorts of 30-50% of their school in attendance.

On Wednesday, 6th January, Gavin Williamson the Education Secretary addressed parliament with information about 'closures', free school meals, laptops and exams. Whilst the information was not elaborated upon, he did respond to questions afterwards that the exams are 'cancelled' and teacher assessed grades will instead be used (more information within the next 2 weeks) and that SATS are also cancelled.

He did not elaborate whether this included the phonics assessment and times tables test, but it is fair to assume that these too will be cancelled.

Statutory key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021, including the key stage 2 tests in reading and mathematics, will not take place.

With BtEC and vocational qualifications the decision has been put into the hands of the colleges delivering them for the January series. As it stands, schools are unlikely to reopen fully before 22nd February, and there are some suggestions that it could be April before we see a 'return to school' for the majority of pupils.

You can read the statement here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-statement-to-parliament-on-national-lockdown?utm_source=92199ad1-9033-45b1-9933-f7650572d117&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Given exams will not go ahead this summer, the department, with Ofqual, has worked up a range of contingency options, and the details of the approach will be developed in consultation with the exam boards and the sector. This will be based on teacher-assessment, with training and support provided to ensure grades are awarded fairly and consistently.

Assessments in some vocational qualifications can still take place in January, where schools and colleges judge it right to do so. The department is working with Ofqual on arrangements for those who do not take their January assessments, as well as for vocational and technical assessments scheduled for February onwards.

Statutory key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021, including the key stage 2 tests in reading and mathematics, will not take place.

Amidst all of this you may have heard the minimum expected offer of remote education each day and the involvement of Ofsted.

Strengthened minimum standards of remote learning: schools will be expected to offer pupils online lessons and a set number of hours of remote education for pupils – increased from the government's previous minimum expectations. Ofsted will play an important role in holding schools to account for the quality of remote education. The recommendation is 3-5 hours a day with a minimum feedback of once weekly.

The government expects schools to have a digital platform, such as G-Suite or Microsoft Education, and should provide at least some of their remote provision via video lessons – this can be done by school-led videos or using other providers like Oak National Academy.

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-outlines-plans-to-support-young-people?utm_source=63a83061-1c4c-4a55-97b4-f4b047d7b631&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

Collection

This link takes you to the government collection of guidance documents for schools during Covid.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-schools-coronavirus-covid-19>

If you scroll to the bottom you can see when the page was last updated and what those updates were. Ironically, it was last updated 18th December with the Asymptomatic testing guidance, (and two new documents around Ofsted added on the 30th) which means last night's announcement is very helpfully not stored in the same place. It is, however, worth bookmarking this link anyway as it is valuable repository.

General

This guidance refers to the whole nation – but is usually the first place to find out anything about education before the DfE get around to releasing their publication.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

The wording from this is very similar to that used in any press briefings or announcements so is a really useful place to check if you have heard something correctly. This was published and updated 4th January.

If you want to heavily rely on something quoted on these (for example when writing a policy or justifying a decision) it is worth downloading a copy at that point in time. Once the guidance is updated, the original versions are lost. The change of a single word could give a whole different view of what is being said and we have been caught out with this previously. Of course, we should always be working to the most recent version – but in our line of work we know that sometimes decisions are made on a Monday that guidance changes have an impact on by Wednesday.

Contingency Framework

This guidance provided the information around opening of schools following the Christmas break. It has not yet been withdrawn from the website despite the announcement yesterday – which means it is likely to be updated rather than completely withdrawn. There are links within there to getting help with remote education (technology) and requirements for DSL presence. The contingency frameworks were last updated on 1st January.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-contingency-framework-for-education-and-childcare-settings>

UPDATE

We knew it would happen. 2:30pm on 7th January this one popped into the emails and onto the DfE website. To be fair, most of it we know already but it is helpful to have information in one place (even if we do have to trawl through 61 pages to find it.)

Social media has probably raised your awareness of a few points but just in case here are the key ones related to SEN.

Page 4 – the guidance applies to ALL schools, from independent to LA and academy, from mainstream to PRU and special.

During the period of national lockdown, schools, alternative provision (AP), special schools, colleges and wraparound childcare and other out-of-school activities for children should allow only vulnerable children and young people and the children of [critical workers](#) to attend (recognising that the characteristics of the cohorts in special schools and alternative provision will mean these settings continue to offer face to face provision for all pupils, where appropriate). All other pupils and students should not attend and should learn remotely until February half term.

Early years provision should continue to remain open and should continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours. This includes early years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites. Only vulnerable children and children of critical workers should attend on-site reception classes. This is the default position for all areas irrespective of national lockdown restrictions.

Page 5 – through recognising the characteristics of pupils in special schools and alternative provisions it is likely they will continue to offer face to face provision. In addition, all nursery classes (regardless of whether private or maintained, or childminders) should remain fully open. Although only KWV children should attend reception classes. [KWV – Key worker and vulnerable]

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance applies to all schools in England, including:

- schools maintained by local authorities
- academies
- free schools
- alternative provision schools including pupil referral units
- special schools, including non-maintained special schools
- independent schools
- boarding schools

Page 17 – supply staff and external support staff can still be used and should be providing interventions as usual.

Schools should continue to record attendance in the register. Schools should follow up on absences of the pupils who are expected to be in school but where a parent wishes for their child to be absent, we expect schools to authorise the absence during this national lockdown period. Absence will not be penalised.

for them to be absent then they must be marked as an authorised absence and not penalised (fined or otherwise.)

Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and other temporary staff can move between schools. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. They should also participate in schools' rapid testing programmes where these have been established. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for pupils with SEND should provide interventions as usual.

Page 25 – Attendance must still be recorded and where places in school are expected to be offered but a parent wishes

Page 25 – definitions of critical workers and vulnerable. Only ONE parent needs to be a critical worker and they might be working from home. There is no limit, therefore in some schools' classes may be at full strength. Vulnerable as a definition includes all children with an EHCP, a social worker or may be vulnerable for another reason at the school's discretion. Families of these children are encouraged to take up the places.

Page 26 – attendance. Should be coded as X for all pupils not expected in school. Where a place has been offered (interestingly it suggests the places must be full time) but the family decline then it has to be coded as an authorised absence C unless an alternative absence code is more appropriate.

My interpretation, of the above, is that you are expected to offer full time places to children of key workers (even if there is only one parent who fits the category and they are working from home), anyone with a social worker and all children with an EHCP. If they decline the place, that is a family decision, but they must be marked as absent [C] and not as an X. Rotas are not allowed, nor is the wider opening of a class to anyone who doesn't fit the criteria.

Page 28 – wrap around clubs (breakfast and after-school) should both continue to run.

Page 34 – a flexible deployment of staff is required. TAs can be asked to cover classes under the direction of a Teacher but not at the expense of supporting the students with SEND.

Page 38 – Funding. SEND funding will continue to be paid to the local authority and therefore devolved to schools. Where a school pays for AP or other SEND

services this needs to continue so that staff in those placements can continue to be paid. Where this term's contracts have not yet been agreed schools' should fund on the basis of past patterns.

Page 46 – remote education. Remote education will include both recorded or live directed time and time for pupils to complete tasks and assignments independently. The minimum requirements are 3 hours for Key Stage 1 (with a variance meaning that 3h30 in Y2 would be 2h30 in Y1), 4 hours for Key Stage 2 and 5 hours for Key Stages 3 and 4.

Parents who are unhappy have been advised to contact the school in the first instance and then raise an issue with Ofsted, which may trigger an inspection.

- School are expected to use a digital platform.
- Where pupils have difficulty engaging with remote education they can be classed as vulnerable and therefore offered a school place.
- Schools must have daily checking systems whether pupils are engaging with work
- School must publish, online, their remote education provision by 25th January.
- Lessons can be pre-recorded and might not be provided by the school (eg Oak National Academy)

Page 49 – EHCPs remain best endeavours. Unlike the relaxation to reasonable endeavours of last time, this time the EHCP remains legally binding.

Where a pupil has provision specified within their EHC plan, it remains the duty of the local authority and any health bodies to secure or arrange the delivery of this in the setting that the plan names. However, there may be times when it becomes very difficult to do so, for example, if they are self-isolating. In this situation, decisions on how provision can be delivered should be informed by relevant considerations including, for example, the types of services that the pupil can access remotely, for example, online teaching and remote sessions with different types of therapists. These decisions should be considered on a case by case basis, avoiding a one size fits all approach.

Page 51 – the Catch Up funding and provision is still available and should be used appropriately.

Page 55 – Statutory assessment (KS1 and 2) has been cancelled. However, there is a clear instruction that pupil attainment will need to be reported on in the Summer term and that some form of assessment across all year groups will need to take place.

Page 56 – GCSE, AS and A level exams will not go ahead as planned. **It should be noted that this paragraph does not say cancelled.**

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950510/School_national_restrictions_guidance.pdf

(Correct as of 13:30 on 8th January, 2021)