

SEN information report update in light of COVID-19, school closures and SEND provision at Saint John Houghton Catholic Voluntary Academy.

Context:

Saint John Houghton Catholic Voluntary Academy, part of the Saint Ralph Sherwin Multi Academy trust, would like to provide the following information as an update to the published SEN information report to explain how COVID-19 measures will affect children and young people with special educational needs and or disabilities (SEND) at our school.

Please note that this document is based on information available from 30.03.20 and has been updated in subsequent weeks based on most recent government advice at the time, this information may be subject to change in the coming weeks.

What are we as a school doing differently:

- Consulting and involving pupils and parents:

All consultations are currently taking place remotely, either by email, txt or phone call. It is our aim as an academy to maintain contact with all of our students and their families throughout the period of school closure. You may receive a phone call from any of the following in the coming weeks: The Senior Leadership Team, Admin Support Team, SENCO, Safeguarding Team, House Leaders, Curriculum/Subject Leaders, Subject Teachers, Teaching Assistants/student's key worker.

- Assessing and reviewing pupils progress towards outcomes:

The progress made to date during the academic year is the first reference point in monitoring progress. Teachers and staff are continuing to monitor completed work online and to offer feedback where necessary. During regular contact with parents and carers, more information can be shared as to progress made against outcomes related to social and emotional development.

- Supporting pupils moving between phases and preparing for adulthood:

Transition points in years 6, 9 and 11 will continue to be supported and relevant information sharing with partner agencies and parents will take place as normal however this will now take place remotely. For students in year 6, more information will be published soon in regards to transition and indeed enhanced transition package available for students with additional needs.

- Our approach to teaching pupils with SEN:

Resources have been made available on our school website and are accessible for all students including those with SEND. Communication between teachers, parents and students can take place in a secure forum to request, ask questions about and to submit work. All tasks have been pitched at a level that provides challenge and success for each student and this can be altered based on discussion with class teachers. There is a significant focus on reading, and spelling. In some cases, differing resources or differentiated resources may be supplied in electronic or paper format. The SENCO is in regular contact with Curriculum leaders to support and guide practice.

- Adaptations to the curriculum and learning environment:

The expectations of the amount and quality of work are realistic based on the fact that parents are not expected to 'Teach' their children. It is accepted that consolidation tasks, information search, retrieval and presentation skills may be called upon and developed in the home environment. Adaptations to the learning environment will be shared with parents, carers and students when government guidance is published.

- Support for improving emotional and social development:

School have identified that this is a particularly difficult and stressful time for many students and their families. We have published a range of resources on our school website to assist families in maintaining a routine and signposted them to online resources, videos and publications. We have a member of staff on school reception every day to take calls and queries and forward them onto the appropriate staff members and there is a safeguarding officer in school each day to support where needed.

- Working with other agencies:

School continues to work with and liaise with all agencies on a remote basis. Referrals to appropriate organisations continue to take place where necessary. Unfortunately no face to face meetings or appointments are currently in operation however services can offer telephone or video calls where appropriate.

Frequently asked questions:

What are the entitlements of children and young people with SEND when schools are closed due to Coronavirus?

All schools have been ordered to effectively close, retaining a skeleton staff to provide education for the children of key workers, and 'vulnerable children.'

Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with an Education Health Care Plan (EHC plan). The majority of children with SEN, who receive SEN Support at school but do not have an EHC plan, would be expected to stay home unless they have a social worker or a parent/carer who is a key worker.

Do I have to send my child to school?

Despite schools staying open for some children, the guidance is quite clear:

'If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.'

If you feel it would be too high risk to send your child to school because they, or someone else in your family, is at particularly high risk, there is of course no requirement to send your child in.

Under the Coronavirus Act, the criminal penalty for parents failing to send their children to school is to be temporarily disapplied.

If my child has an EHC plan, doesn't the local authority have a legal duty to deliver provision?

From a legal perspective this remains the case. However, given the likely significant disruption to staffing, it may be very difficult for schools or local authorities to deliver precisely the provision in the EHC plan, particularly over the next few weeks.

The Government have just passed the Coronavirus Act 2020 which gives temporary emergency powers to the Government to issue a notice (a month at a time) that would modify the legal requirements on Local Authorities in relation to Education, Health and Care Plans. If this notice is issued it would be in relation to two key areas:

The absolute duty to make the provision in an EHC plan (section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014) is to be temporarily amended to a 'reasonable endeavours' duty. This means that during the specified period the LA needs to do whatever it reasonably can to put provision in place, but if they cannot do so they would not necessarily be breaching the law.

Flexibility of timing of annual reviews of EHC plans has been agreed so that the child or young person is at the centre of the process and can engage with the process in a meaningful way.

Again, if there could be a risk to the child or young person's health, wellbeing or safety if they do not receive a particular provision or intervention, raise this with your school and Local Authority without delay.

What is the advice from the Secretary of State for Children?

On 24th March 2020, the Secretary of State for Children, Vicky Ford, issued an open letter to children and young people with SEN), their parents/carers and families, and all others who support them.

In this letter, the Minister makes clear that:

'... nurseries, schools, special schools, colleges and other training providers should undertake a risk assessment to establish the individual needs of each child or young person with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. This assessment should incorporate the views of the child or young person and their parents. This will inform the decision about whether they should continue in school or college, or whether their needs can be met at home safely.

If needs are best met at schools or colleges, we will support their school or college to meet their needs, wherever possible. For those on SEN support, schools, colleges and local authorities have discretion to use the same risk judgement to decide whether home or school is the safest setting for these children. It is, however, important that as many children as possible remain at home during this time in order to help reduce transmission rates.'

My child was due to have an annual review. What will happen now?

Under the Coronavirus Act, the requirement to carry out annual reviews has been temporarily relaxed. More flexibility of timing has been agreed and all annual review of students at Saint John Houghton will be completed before the end of the academic year. This will of course need to be carried out remotely and you will be contacted first about how this will be managed to ensure that the contribution of parents and children/young people are at the heart of the process.

If you feel there is an urgent need to amend the provision or placement in the child or young person's EHC plan, speak to the school and the Local Authority about this to see what review mechanisms could be put in place.

My child is still attending school. How will my child's learning be supported at school?

It is important to note the school will not be providing a full curriculum, At Saint John Houghton Academy, we will be providing care for the children and incorporating education provision and a range of activities, but this will NOT be fully in line with their EHC provision.

How can I support my child's learning at home?

If a child has an identified SEN (EHCP or SEN Support), each subject teacher will take account of their needs when planning for and providing work to be completed at home. This may include:

- Suggesting different ways in which children can present their work;
- Giving more detailed instructions;
- Providing parents with suggestions to make tasks more practical in nature;
- Providing alternative work which is targeted at their level of need where they may not ordinarily access curriculum subjects at age expected levels.
- Allowing additional time to complete tasks
- Providing tasks with a range of outcomes
- Identification of celebrity / other online learning and wellbeing resources

School has a number of resources available to help you support your child at home during this period.

Please log onto the school website and access the year group folders where weekly learning tasks are available, you may also access the wellbeing documents, e-safety documents, and other documents which will guide and support your home working. The 'Show My Homework' portal also contains weekly work for students to complete to a level which is appropriate and manageable. There will be timetabled consolidation weeks where students may '*catch up*' or have a break from the normal working week.

How can I help my child cope with the changes?

We understand that this is a significant change for many families. Please give yourself time to adjust to a new routine and above all, do not place too much pressure on yourself or your child to complete schoolwork. Maintaining positive mental health and emotional wellbeing is very important. We have provided some initial information and documents in our wellbeing and SEND folders which we are happy to share.

Who can I contact?

We realise that these are difficult times for everyone. If you have any immediate concerns or queries please contact school reception on: 01159 322896 and your request will be forwarded to the most relevant member of staff. As an academy, our main priority is to assure the safety and wellbeing of our students and their families at this time, we have agreed to maintain contact with our students and families throughout this time. You may receive a phone call from any of the following in the coming weeks: The Senior Leadership Team, Admin Support Team, SENCO, Safeguarding Team, House Leaders, Curriculum/Subject Leaders, Subject Teachers, Teaching Assistants/student's key worker.

During a telephone conversation we may ask if everyone is well, if you are able to access and complete some work, if you are encountering any issues with the online tasks, if you are able to get some exercise and fresh air and how everybody is coping with all the changes. We may ask to speak to the students and it would be really helpful if this could be done using 'speakerphone' facility and that an adult remains present during the call and is aware of the conversation. It may then be appropriate to share this information with appropriate staff from the academy to improve any of the identified areas/concerns for your child. For students with an EHCP, the Local Authority has also delegated some officers to maintain contact with families and school so they may be in contact with you directly or they may contact school for an update.

Is the school maintaining contact with relevant agencies?

Currently, the academy is maintaining contact with the relevant agencies whom we work in partnership. All agencies have been advised to work from home where possible and for meetings and conferences to take place remotely. Where a support service has direct involvement with your child, they will send out information as to their operational changes and contact information for the coming months. As this is a very new situation that we find ourselves in, operational systems are being reviewed every few weeks and new information and feedback are received.

Safeguarding remains our number one priority at this time. The academy will continue to be available to support safeguarding and there is a member of the safeguarding team at school every day to respond to any concerns, maintain contact with families and to make referrals to appropriate support agencies where necessary.

Other links: Open letter from Secretary of State for Children 24.03.2020