

Topic of Importance – Lockdown and access to education for SEND children

England is now entering its third National Lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic as the number of cases are rapidly rising and a shut down of all schools, colleges and universities has been ordered. This news will have had an impact on all parents of school aged children as many are desperately trying to make plans for the coming months ahead. The government have stated that children with EHCP's are considered vulnerable and are still able to access onsite education. During the previous lock down many children with EHCP's did not attend their educational setting. This left many families feeling isolated at home with children with significant challenges and no access to face to face education.

- The L.A has a statutory obligation to ensure that children's educational needs are met through accordance of their EHCP's.
- The easements to EHCP's that previously were put into place have not been enacted this time and therefore the L.A. has a legal duty to ensure that children continue to get the provision provided for them in accordance with their EHCP's.
- The children's SEND may mean that they are already likely to be at a developmental disadvantage and in some cases their learning is already years behind their peers. They cannot afford to lose two months or more of education in addition to the 6 months lost last year.
- Some children with SEND thrive on routines and may not cope well with transitions. When considering children's education it is important to factor in the time lost from adjusting and readjusting to the constant changes that are occurring.
- Some children have needs that impact on their social communication and interaction. Through being at school they are learning vital social skills and engaging in therapies that will help their development and work towards them being able to realise their full potential. Months of isolation means they will regress with their social skills and are in danger of social isolation from being separated from the few friends that they may have. This will have a significant impact of children's mental health and wellbeing.
- Many SEND children will not engage with distance/remote learning and therefore they will be left without any provision for the duration of the lockdown period.
- Many of our children exhibit challenging behaviour due to their communication and emotional regulation difficulties. Through the lack of routine and educational stimulation they are likely to become more challenging for their families creating additional stress and pressure. This can push families to breaking point and with lack of wider support networks it has the potential for family breakdown.
- Children within Specialist Provision tend to have smaller class/school size it is easier to maintain the bubbles and ensure infection is limited.

What are parents telling us?

1. The thought of have having children/ young people at home during another lock down is extremely anxiety provoking
2. Some parents do not wish for their children/ young people to be in school due to fear of the virus spreading
3. Not all SEND children/ young people can engage with remote learning
4. For some SEND children particularly those with ASD "home is home" and "school is school" so they will simply refuse to engage in learning at home
5. Behaviours that challenge are starting to increase

6. Parental Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health is starting to be affected again – time with the child/ young person at school affords vital respite from caring
7. Parents want to be contacted and communicated with about whether a child/ young person should be in school or not – they feel it is their choice

Where we get our evidence from

Initial data has been gathered by a conversation started in the FVP Facebook chatroom by parent carers. This led to the decision to start a poll to look at numbers who wanted their children/ young people with SEND to be in school and to create a small survey via google forms.

Facebook Poll

If your child/ young person has an EHCP and as such falls under the vulnerable category as defined by central government, do you still want them to go school?

Yes – 13

No – 2

Undecided - 2

Comments:

- *It's very difficult as both my children have EHCPs but during last year's lockdown both attended school as mainstream had a place for them. This time my youngest is in a specialist placement but isn't seen as vulnerable but the oldest won't attend even if they offer her a place as her brother isn't going and both of them off means no work will be done as they both require 1-2-1.*
- *I wasn't even offered a place for my daughter. Having a meeting later today to see if she can at least come a few days a week. She's very black and white: school is school and home is home and 2 things cannot be mixed together therefore barely any learning is happening at home...*
- *that what happen with N last lockdown 😊. Which caused him Great distress and starting hurting himself. If it wasn't for you and a couple of others at the end of a message I would of gone round the twist*

Facebook Discussion

12 individual parent carers took part in a discussion relating to this topic and below are a snapshot of the views expressed:

P1

After last night's announcement I am wondering how many parents like me are concerned about their children with EHCP's losing out on education?

I feel that specialist education should stay open as our children are a lower risk due to smaller class/school size. My son has lost 6 months of education and cannot afford another 2 or more months. He is already years behind and he will not access education at home. The impact on his development is a cost I don't think he should bear.

Does anyone else feel the same? Should we be fighting to keep the specialist provision open?

This post is for those who wish for their child to remain in school to be educated. If you don't want your child to attend school then no-one is saying they should be made to just because they have an EHCP.

Look forward to hearing your views.

P2

*..... as I understand it our children are deemed vulnerable if they have an EHCP??? My son wants to go to school - he hates home schooling as he's been excluded a few times and I've worked his socks off during those times so he kind of sees it as a punishment.
I guess a lot will depend on staffing?*

P3

*I would like to stay in education as he has already lost a year!!
He has an ehcp but isn't in a special school so hopefully find out today if he can stay at school!
I completely agree that our kids should be allowed to stay at school if the parents are for it!*

P4

My son needs school because we don't have a safe outside space for him. He needs the routine and space away from his equally demanding sister! And as selfish as it may be school is the only respite I get from him. He's incredibly hyper at the moment not sleeping, he has no understanding of covid or why things are closed and we can't go anywhere

P5

I've just emailed the headteacher of my son's school to check they are "happy" for him to continue to go in.

P6

*The dfe website says that specials are to remain open
I thought all schools shut then saw someones post about Special schools staying open. Just rung our school as wasnt going to send him in tomorrow but then thought may be I should be !! They seemed to think at the moment it just keyworker and vulnerable although to be fair poor receptionist seemed a bit confused by my ramblings.*

How have FVP responded

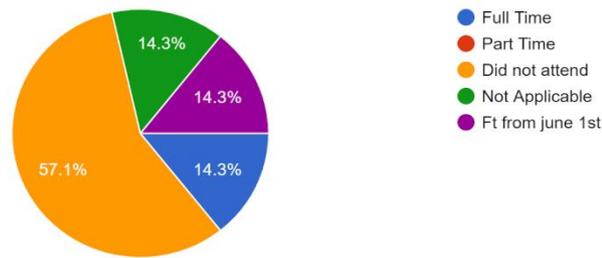
Following on from this a small scale survey was developed to be shared more widely and ascertain other views. At the point of creating this Tol there were 7 responses detailed here.

1. Areas of need represented are; SEMH, ASD, ADHD, Epilepsy and Downs Syndrome.
2. 5 CYP are male, 1 female and 1 preferred not to say
3. The main age group was 5 to 10 years
4. Setting represented are; Maintained primary, secondary and special, Academy secondary and special, independent

A series of questions were asked based in part on the points being raised on social media

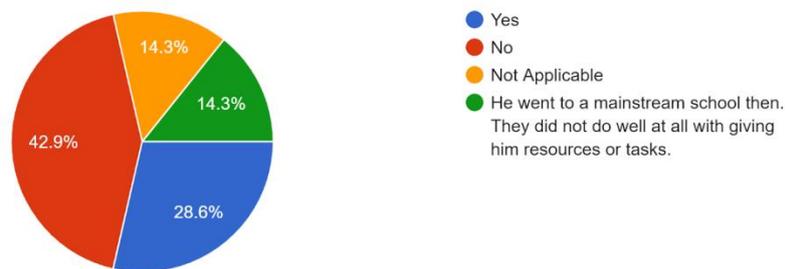
Did your child/ young person attend their educational setting during the first lock down?

7 responses



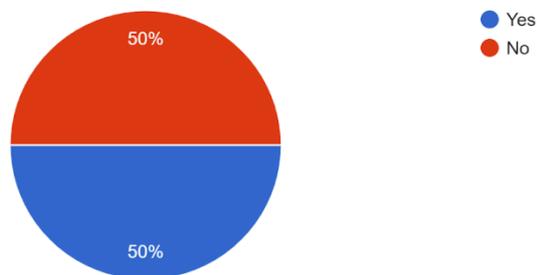
Did you have contact from your child/ young persons educational setting to discuss whether they would receive onsite education during the first lock down?

7 responses



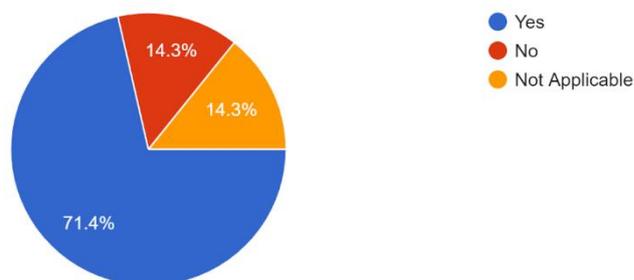
Do you feel that your child/ young person is able to access education virtually?

6 responses



Do you want your child/ young person to still attend school during this lock down?

7 responses

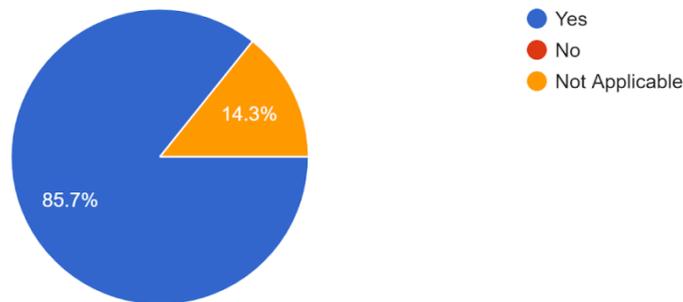


please tell us why you want your child/ young person to still attend their educational setting

1. He is absolutely thriving and catching up academically and socially at a rate of knots since September. It is also good for his mental health as he is losing interest in leaving the house over christmas.
2. He doesn't have laptop
3. To make sure he doesn't miss out on education. Nathan is not mentally challenged enough at home and needs school.
4. So that I can continue to work, which is impossible when providing 24/7 care
5. Because he did cope last time. Started to self harm. All regressed so so much. Very black and white about home is home and school is school

Has your child/ young person been offered a place at their educational setting during this lock down?

7 responses



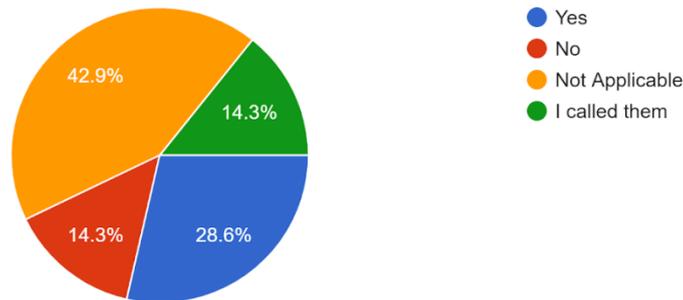
If your child/ young person is still attending their educational setting how do you feel about this?

5 responses

1. As someone who is CEV, I am extremely anxious that he will catch the virus and I won't be able to look after him as I normally would - I'll have to keep a distance between us but also in case I catch it and he ends up without a parent - the one who advocates for him and will ensure he has a positive future.
2. Great he is happy
3. Very happy.
4. We feel great at home
5. Happy it's the right place for him to be to help him.

Have you had contact from your child/ young persons educational setting to discuss with you whether they should receive educational support onsite?

7 responses



Is the lock down going to cause any challenges for your family?

1. My own anxiety is heightened so small issues seem worse than they really are.
2. No if the children are at school
3. Not as long as he attends school. If he does not go to school we would be having a lot of tantrums and he would probly have a regression on what he has already learnt
4. No, Only positive feelings, we have been searching a lot of recourses
5. Yes still two children at home who are on the vulnerability list not being offered help from their school. Home Internet not coping. Plus my health needs are making it hard for me to help them.
6. Internet, technology, emotional

Please use this space to tell us anything else and expand on any points in previous questions.

Our experience with the school and offers of support have been pretty positive and I'm grateful of the offer of a school place. We declined to take it up as my daughter has reduced immunity. This is not the easy option for us. It's difficult to manage the expectations from 3 schools which are all using different technology and platforms whilst my husband works from home so Internet is stretched to the limit. On the whole we are grateful for the school and LA support.

Final Points

1. Generally parent carers want the children/ young people in school and want the choice as to whether their children/ young people attend school.
2. Parent carers in a number of cases have had to initiate communication with their child/ young person's school to establish their attendance.
3. Parent carers do not necessarily feel that remote learning is suitable to their children's/ young person's needs

Where FVP have shared this talking point

1. FVP Website
2. FVP Social Media Channels
3. FVP E-News
4. Peterborough City Council Decision Makers

Next Steps and Areas for Consideration

1. For FVP to develop for those parent carers who feel they need it a set of tools to enable them to raise concerns/ request support to have their child/ young persons needs met
2. For the LA to work with settings and help them see the importance of communication with parents
3. For parental choice to be supported where possible
4. For the LA to communicate openly with parents on this topic and provide as much guidance and information as possible as to all factors.

Timescales

1. Response within one week