

Kirsty Williams AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: KW/03192/20

Kat Williams  
Director

Willow Holloway  
Chair of Directors

Autistic UK CIC

[kat.williams@autisticuk.org](mailto:kat.williams@autisticuk.org)

8 July 2020

Dear Kat and Willow

Thank you for your letter of 15 June regarding the provision of information relating to education provision during the current pandemic, for children with additional support needs attending mainstream schools.

I appreciate that the uncertainty arising from the unprecedented circumstances we are facing is particularly challenging for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) such as autism, along with their families and those who support and care for them. This situation is not one that any of us would ever have wished for, and I am committed to doing everything possible to support learners with ALN and their parents and carers during this difficult time.

Since schools closed for the statutory provision of education on 20 March, they have been repurposed and have been open to those most in need to enable them to follow their own school's learning online, as they would if they were at home. To ensure social distancing can be maintained, in-line with the scientific advice on limiting the spread of Covid-19, schools and hubs have only been available to a very limited number of children, namely vulnerable children and children of critical workers. For the purpose of this provision vulnerable children include those with a social worker and those with statements of special educational needs. The most vulnerable of these are prioritised by local authorities according to children with most need for the provision and schools have been working closely with colleagues in children's services to identify those who require access to this provision. Each learner is considered on an individual basis to ensure that the hub can safely offer suitable provision and meet their specific needs.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Our definition of vulnerable children for the purpose of the school and hub settings is unchanged for the summer term. It includes those with a social worker; those with a statement of special educational needs; and other vulnerable children on the edges of receiving care and support if they are known to be vulnerable by the school or family support services.

In April we published '[Vulnerable Children and Young People: coronavirus](#)' which set out expectations that local authorities undertake a risk assessment to determine the needs of all children and young people with a statement of SEN. The purpose of undertaking assessments was to determine whether children and young people with a statement of SEN would be able to have their needs met at home with support provided remotely or whether they would need a childcare placement at a hub due to their vulnerability. The guidance advises the assessments should include parents and carers, take a multi-agency approach, where appropriate, and be undertaken by local authorities or education settings, dependent on which is best placed to undertake the assessment, noting that the duty to secure provision remains with the local authority.

We will be soon be publishing SEN Risk Assessment Guidance to support schools in assessing the needs of pupils with SEN in the context of the increasing operations in schools and settings. The guidance will set out that risk assessments should be revisited to review the support children and young people with SEN, particularly those with statements of SEN, require to attend their education setting or continue remote learning, as appropriate to the needs of the individual child or young person.

The guidance will relate particularly to children and young people with a statement of SEN on the basis that these learners' need hands-on care or their behaviours mean there are likely to be more nuanced risks to be managed than for the majority of children and young people with SEN. Where, having discussed risk with a pupil's parents, a school considers a risk assessment is necessary for a pupil without a statement of SEN, then the school should consult the local authority. Some of these children and young people attend special schools, specialist colleges and other specialist settings but the guidance will also apply to any mainstream settings providing for these children and young people.

Safety is a primary concern in schools and childcare settings. We recognise that some learners with additional learning needs (ALN) have a physical disability or underlying medical conditions which may mean the safest place for them is at home. Provision to support the health and social care needs of all learners, whether they are in school or at home, will continue to be based on assessment of need. Alternative ways of providing this support, such as virtual contacts, are being encouraged and resources to support this are being developed across Wales.

To support all those children and young people learning at home, schools and colleges are making a considerable amount of educational resources available online. This includes resources for learners with ALN. There are a range of digital tools and approaches available across the education system to help ensure continuity of learning for children and young people. This includes resources available through Wales' learning platform, Hwb.

As part of our Continuity of Learning Plan '[Stay Safe, Stay Learning](#)' we are mobilising support for digitally excluded learners in maintained schools. Digitally excluded learners do not have access to an appropriate internet connected device to engage in online learning activities from home. Where there is no current provision in place from their school or local

authority we have established a technical solution which enables local authorities/schools to repurpose existing devices from within schools. Where required, local authorities also have access to a centrally procured service to provide digitally excluded learners with mobile connectivity (MiFi).

Since the decision to close schools for statutory provision, our understanding of the Coronavirus and its longer-term impacts has continued to develop. The needs of children and young people, particularly those with ALN and the most vulnerable, have been and remain at the forefront of our considerations across Education. We understand that such a long period away from school, friends and the classroom can have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing and learning of many children and young people, including those with ALN. It is for this reason I announced that from 29 June all children in Wales will have the opportunity to check in, catch up and prepare, before the next academic year starts in September.

Schools are adopting a phased approach to welcoming more pupils back to the classroom. To ensure that appropriate social distancing is in place in schools, it is expected that no more than a third of pupils will be present at any one time. Schools will use the remaining weeks of the summer term to ensure that pupils, staff and parents are prepared, emotionally and practically for this different classroom experience when they return in September.

We continue to follow the latest scientific advice and guidance, and ensuring the health and safety of all our school staff and learners is paramount. Planning for September is already underway and a key part of the decision to increase capacity in schools from the end of June is to enable schools and learners to test and experience the new operations and use it to inform next steps for the autumn term. Schools, parents and carers will be kept informed of updates.

As learners transition back into schools and settings from the end of June, the distance learning support that is currently being provided by education providers will have a continued role to play alongside on-site provision. In order to minimise the impact this may have on pupils' learning, progress and wellbeing we have developed a Continuity of Learning Plan, [Stay Safe, Stay Learning](#), which was published on 20 April to support schools and teachers in guiding the ongoing learning for all children and young people, including those with ALN. Information for parents and carers, on ways of keeping children learning has been published on [Hwb](#), which includes information for parents/carers of children with ALN. Inclusion is one of four cross-cutting priorities that apply to all aspects of the plan and will help ensure our vulnerable and disadvantaged learners continue to receive appropriate support for their wellbeing and learning at this incredibly challenging time.

In developing this plan, we have worked closely with directors of education in Wales, the regional education consortia and Estyn to ensure that the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, including those with ALN are met as well as is reasonably possible. Local authorities have provided information on how they have adapted their services and outlined the challenges that they face.

We recognise that this unprecedented situation means most support systems are not currently operating as they normally would. We are encouraging a practical and flexible approach to meet individual needs and that wherever possible services are provided remotely. We have liaised with a number of stakeholders specifically in relation to learners with ALN and in the very near future will be making temporary amendments to statutory duties of local authorities. An over-riding principle of these amendments is that local

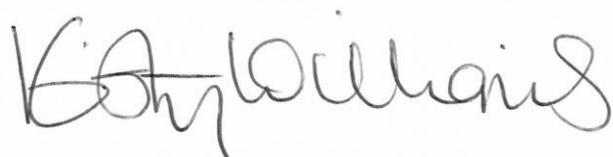
authorities are not released of their statutory duties and the importance of meeting the needs of learners with SEN and their families.

I am committed to addressing the emotional mental wellbeing of all our learners, including those with ALN, and in the next few weeks I will be consulting on our whole school framework on emotional and mental wellbeing. The framework provides guidance for schools and their partners across local authorities, health boards and elsewhere in developing and implementing their own whole school approaches to meet the wellbeing needs of all their learners. It is intended to promote consistency of provision and equity of access, ensuring those who need to access both universal and more targeted interventions can do so in a timely fashion. I hope you will take the time to contribute your views during the consultation process. Supporting the framework the Minister for Health and I have been pleased to provide £5m jointly from our relevant portfolios to ensure the framework can be implemented effectively. Funding will enable teacher training on child mental and emotional wellbeing; develop resources on issues such as child development and neurodiversity; enable schools to implement both universal and targeted interventions; and support an expansion of our school counselling service. I hope this demonstrates the importance the Welsh Government places on ensuring learner wellbeing, recognising that learners need to be emotionally and mentally prepared to engage in their learning.

In addition to information and guidance on [Hwb](#) and our [Coronavirus Education webpages](#), local health boards are also developing and providing information, and we are collecting and sharing good practice wider wherever possible. The [ASDInfoWales](#) website has links to a range of Covid-19 related resources which include a [returning to school guide](#) for parents of autistic children. The [Children's Commissioner for Wales](#) has also established an online hub for information on COVID-19 and we are working to ensure as much of this information is made available in formats suitable for young people across Wales.

I am committed to an inclusive education system and wish to reassure you that we are working hard to ensure that no learner is disadvantaged in this period because of where they live, their age, their language, or their additional learning needs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

**Kirsty Williams AS/MS**  
Y Gweinidog Addysg  
Minister for Education