Hello everyone,

Welcome back to a new year - I hope it doesn’t feel like you never left!

I am on leave this week but wanted to get out quick holding briefing on the back of Friday’s guidance about local lockdown arrangements.

The guidance came out Friday evening and is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/containing-and-managing-local-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreaks/covid-19-contain-framework-a-guide-for-local-decision-makers> The guidance sets out tiered responses for schools, the key thing to note for special schools is that the expectation is that you stay open regardless! Over the weekend, there have been lots of discussions with other special school heads and organisational leaders to make representations to DfE about this. The key issues identified are about risk assessments and safety and about how special schools maintain safe staffing levels in areas where childcare may impact on staff in areas where most other schools close as a result of a lockdown. We know this was enough of a challenge during the first wave of the pandemic and will be very much more challenging alongside the expectation of all children now being back in school. We have also raised again the threat of local authorities withholding fees payments where children are not back in school full time. In the short-term, make sure that you have the agreement and support of placing LAs for any children who you are not planning to have back in school full time from the start of term.

I have been promised more detailed information from DfE this week about how independent schools will access catch-up funding. This has been allocated to LAs to pass on but there is no detail currently on which LAs get the funding nor when it will be distributed. We have no other information on this at this point but will update everyone when we do.

Last week the position also altered on face coverings in schools. This is currently only mandated for secondary schools in local lockdown areas when staff and students are in communal areas. In other schools, use of face coverings is at the discretion of head teachers and local authorities. Special schools have not specifically been mentioned at this point so until we receive further clarification and guidance from DfE, we’d advise leaders to use their own risk assessments to determine the relative pros and cons of using face coverings in their setting. We know it works well for some and very poorly for others. The guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-on-face-coverings-in-schools?utm_source=7e1c306e-4292-4b69-8a12-16d4458e30de&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily>

Last week GMB and Unison put out new joint guidance for schools. This is attached here. We have already flagged with DfE the mismatch between union and government guidance and would be interested to hear from you where you experience direct clashes.

The new Keeping Children Safe in Education is live from this week: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2?utm_source=936e83f0-b458-4d7d-82cd-3ce68cde0fdf&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily> If you have not yet updated your policies to reflect this, put it on your ’to do’ list!

There are some useful videos circulating from Greater Manchester about welcoming SEND learners back to school. These can be freely used and the link for the SEND video is here: [https://youtu.be/WQ\_gpNvcrnk](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2FWQ_gpNvcrnk&data=02%7C01%7CSuzanne.Farrell%40phe.gov.uk%7Cb67a181d7417494820e808d845a1aba7%7Cee4e14994a354b2ead475f3cf9de8666%7C0%7C0%7C637335908102324206&sdata=LUtbwGi8D9LxvGmpemBUZkCcy52f4f6UDgZOmX%2Fvvz4%3D&reserved=0)

At the recent roundtable meeting with Vicky ford and the scientific team, Matt Rooney, head of St Giles special school talked about his school’s risk assessment. Matt has kindly made this available to share and it is attached here. It’s a hugely comprehensive document and I hope schools may be able to select and adapt sections for themselves.

There will be a NASS News on Friday and I’ll be back at work on Monday 7th. If we do get DfE guidance for special schools this week we will put it out to members as soon as we can.

 Wishing you all a great start to term.

 Claire, Karen and Jenny