**NASS Update (26th May 2020)**

Hello everyone,

The expected DfE guidance for special schools has landed today. As we anticipated last week, it does not contain significant changes from previous guidance and should not result in any major changes to any plans you have in place. Hopefully it won’t cause too much disruption to any half-term breaks you were hoping to get!

**Supporting children and young people with SEND as schools and colleges prepare for wider opening** is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance> It is intended to replace the previous guidance on risk assessment and SEND and is an evolution of that guidance to give a new message of gradually increasing numbers of children attending schools over the coming weeks. There is no change to the key messages - risk assessments will continue to be central to decision-making about who it is safe or not safe to have in school, schools should increase numbers gradually, focusing on transition rather than year groups and PPE is NOT routinely needed by staff.

I think the guidance could have been more helpful - particularly on issues such as PPE, social distancing and transport, which we know cause some of the greatest practical difficulties in school. However, it’s possibly helpful to have had this consistency of message for some weeks now and for schools that choose not to routinely issue staff with PPE to know that they are not in breach of official guidance. We await the response from the unions. Guidance was issued on Monday to both primary schools:  <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-primary-schools> and secondary schools: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-secondary-schools> about helping them to prepare for wider re-opening. The current plan is still for primary schools to go back next Monday as planned for reception, year 1 and year 6. From 15th June, secondary schools have been asked to provide more face to face time with year 10 and 12 students. These pieces of guidance do not specifically apply to special schools but there may be elements that you find helpful. Overall, I’d say that this guidance is more confusing than that for special schools - we may finally have found an advantage!

I think the current suite of guidance available to schools is unlikely to change hugely before 1st June. The SEND guidance does still give school leaders a good level of control over who can or cannot be offered placements from next week. As you plan, please be careful about making blanket policy decisions based on specific behaviours or characteristics that children might display. For example, a blanket policy that you won’t have any child back who spits or who may require restrictive physical interventions could well bring you into conflict with LAs and parents. Whilst there may well be some young people who it is not safe to have in school because of specific behaviours, these should be decisions taken on the basis of individual risk assessments and due consideration of any possible mitigating actions that you could take to reduce risks.

As next week unfolds we will get a sense of what this means for schools on the ground. We are braced for a range of reactions from local authorities and parents. The only group of children that the guidance is really definite about needing being in school is those with EHCPs and social workers. Beyond that, it’s for you to make the best decisions you can based on the needs of the child and your site and staffing circumstances. In case there’s any doubt, there has been no change to the message DfE has given to local authorities on continuing to fund placements in full, although we fully expect we will find that at least one LA will claim that if you now don’t offer a placement you won’t be paid. As ever, we will manage those situations as they arise.

If there’s anything else this week, we'll be in touch again. The staff team is in and working so do drop us a line if we can help with any queries.

Wishing you as calm and restful a week as possible,

Claire, Karen, Jenny and Kate