



2020-0060604VFPO

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Julia Scott
Chief Executive, Royal College of Occupational Therapists
By email: benjamin.powick@rcot.co.uk

13 November 2020

Dear Julia,

Thank you for your letter of 26 October, about the position of therapy for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within winter planning of health services during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. I would be grateful if you could share a copy of this reply with your co-signatories.

May I begin by wishing you and your co-signatories well in these challenging times. We are very grateful for all the work that your organisations are doing to support children and young people with SEND, now more than ever.

We recognise that, for many children and young people with SEND who require health services such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and other community health services, limited or altered provision throughout the COVID-19 outbreak will have been extremely challenging for them and their families and carers. Young people, their families and carers, and the professionals working with them, may be particularly concerned about the national restrictions that were introduced from 5 November, and will also be seeking further reassurance on the continuation of services and support.

As you will be aware, NHS England (NHSE) published guidance over the summer period so that community health services, including therapies for children and young people with SEND, could be restored as quickly as possible. On 7 August, NHSE published guidance on implementing phase 3 of the NHS response to the COVID-19 outbreak, which emphasised that the restoration of community health services needed to be prioritised and, furthermore, that focus should be given to improving and addressing health inequalities through service delivery, responding to the needs of the most vulnerable, including children and young people with SEND. A copy of the guidance can be found at: tinyurl.com/Yxctwne2.

In my open letter of 9 November to children and young people with SEND, their families and carers, and those who work to support them (copy attached), I emphasised that during this period of new national restrictions, it remains very important for children and young people to continue to attend their education setting, with the exception of a very small number who are clinically extremely vulnerable and who have been advised to stay at home. Education settings have implemented a range of protective measures to make them as safe as possible and the latest medical advice from senior clinicians is that school is the best place for children and young people to be.

Accessing medical services is specifically allowed under the new national restrictions, whether they are delivered at home, in an education setting, or in the community. Therapists, specialists, clinicians and other health professionals working with pupils with SEND are expected to provide interventions as usual and are able to deliver provision within and move between schools or education settings or, for example, in the setting named within a child or young person's education, health and care plan.

We are, however, highly aware of the challenges presented by the redeployment of health professionals and specifically with regard to therapists for children with SEND. The department's clear expectation is that therapists should not be redeployed. NHSE's medical directorate are the professional lead for therapists and the department continues to work closely with them and Public Health England as they plan for winter and through this period of new national restrictions to ensure that the needs of children with SEND are appropriately prioritised. NHSE are liaising with the Chief Allied Health Professional team on this matter. We welcome the fact that the Chief Nurse and the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health have already circulated advice on redeployment separately, as have mental health and learning disability services. I strongly encourage that a similar, clear message is given on the redeployment and prioritisation of therapists for children and young people with SEND.

Working with partners, we remain committed to ensuring that children and young people with SEND receive the therapeutic provision they need throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.

Thank you for writing about this important matter. We will continue to communicate with you about developments in this area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families