COVID-19 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION GUIDE

April 2021

EDUCATION NOT SEGREGATION

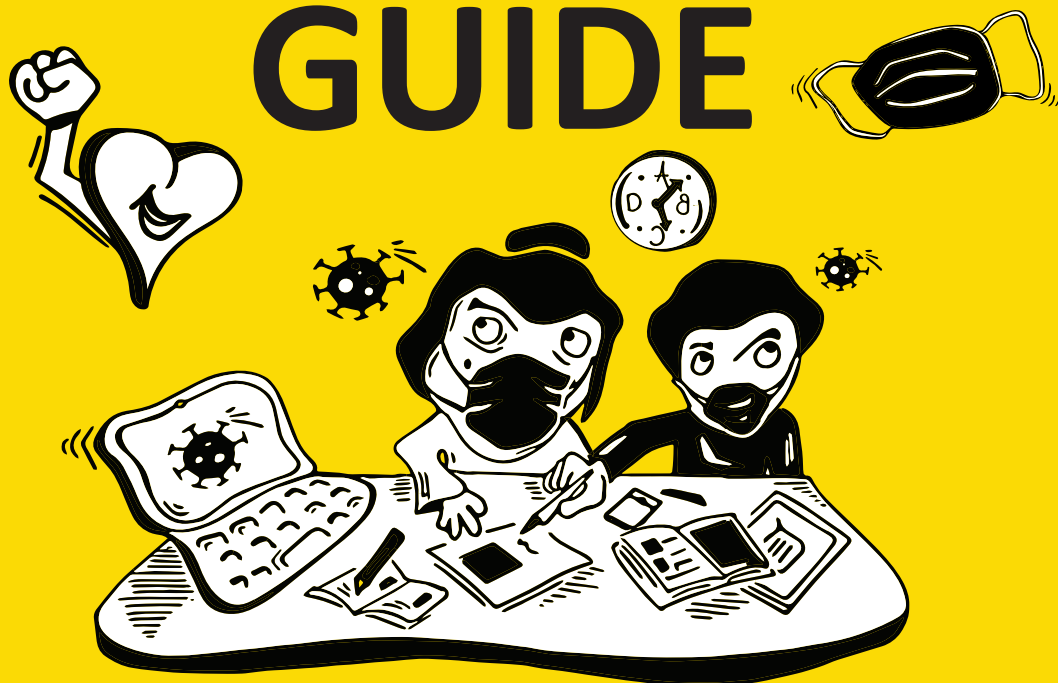THE ALLIANCE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

ALLFIE has co-produced this guide with help from parents of Disabled students and members from our Inclusion Champion Network to help Disabled students and their families navigate mainstream education during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as to respond to inquiries. The outbreak has provided us with a rare opportunity to consider what is important in inclusive education.

During lockdown, there has been a need for more contact between parents, schools and colleges. This has provided us with a real opportunity to develop stronger relationships between children, parents and education staff, with positive outcomes. We hope our guide will support these on-going good relationships, with the aim of obtaining a greater understanding of Disabled children and Young people's needs and rights.

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We have focused on the major Covid-19 issues, highlighted in **ALLFIE's Survey Report: The Impact of Coronavirus on Disabled People's Education**

This guide will cover:

1. The Social Model of Disability and inclusive education
2. Finding support to exercise your rights
3. Knowing your rights
4. Making good use of formal assessment procedures
5. Back to school and college
6. Blended learning experiences
7. Qualification assessments
8. Combating social isolation
9. Funding sources

1. The Social Model of Disability and inclusive education

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided Disabled children, Young people and their families with the opportunity to think, both differently and creatively about the removal of barriers that prevent access to **inclusive education.** This has been underpinned by the core principles of the **Social Model of Disability.**

2. Finding support to know your rights

During the pandemic, many of the rights that we take for granted have been temporarily suspended, some for long periods of time. Consequently, it's vital that you check all legal and policy updates, as they are reviewed regularly, depending on the Covid-19 outbreak situation.

Up-to-date information about all Covid-19 regulations can be found on the government website **(click here)**.

Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS)

Each local authority is legally required to have a free, impartial and confidential special educational needs and disability (SEND) information, advice and support service for Young Disabled people and their families.

Find your local IAS Service | Council for Disabled Children

A number of other national organisations provide free independent advice and support for families, including:

(IPSEA) Independent Provider of Special Education Advice

SOS!SEN | The Independent Helpline for Special Education Needs

Communities Empowerment Network

Coram Children's Legal Centre - Home

These organisations should be able to provide specific advice to allow Disabled students and pupils to better understand their rights, including all aspects of the **Children and Families Act 2014** (CFA 2014 and **Equality Act 2010**.
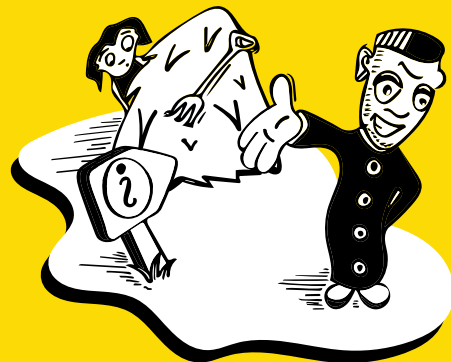
3. Knowing your rights

Children and Families Act (CFA)

The CFA 2014 is the law pertaining to children and Young people with special educational needs.

Last year, the Secretary of State for Education was **given the power** to suspend the legal duties of local authorities around the Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP process.

Whilst children and Young people have now had their rights reinstated as per the CFA 2014, it is important to remain vigilant of future changes.

Education providers have a duty to arrange special education needs and disability provision during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)**

Local authorities must arrange SEND provision within children's EHCPs. If schools or colleges are unable to arrange this provision, for instance, if a child needed NHS England (NHSE therapists, then the local authority must organise therapy cover, even if that means paying privately.

Similarly, if the school has a number of teaching assistants self-isolating after a positive Covid-19 test result, the local authority must arrange cover, for instance, by employing an agency.

Whatever solutions are proposed, parents, Disabled students and pupils must be involved.

Children with SEN support

Children with SEN support do not have an EHCP, but are receiving some SEN support in schools or colleges. In these cases, schools are still under a legal duty to use their 'best endeavours' to secure provision for children with SEND.
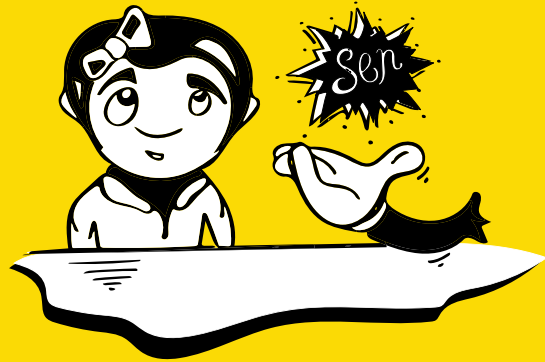
However, if the SEN support is insufficient, do request an Education, Health and Care Assessment, even if the child or Young person's needs have changed or intensified as a result of lockdown restrictions.

Click here for some tips on how to request an Education, Health and Care Assessment. However, local authorities and education providers may refuse the following:

- Asking for a speech and language therapist to undertake tasks usually undertaken by a physiotherapist

- Expecting Teaching Assistant(s) with a Covid-19 positive test result (even if they are not showing any signs of unwellness) to come into school to support a particular Disabled pupil or student

- Expecting in-person support if the Disabled child has a Covid-19 positive test result (even if they are not showing any signs of unwellness)

Disabled student's and pupil's right to remote education

Some parents and Disabled students or pupils have wanted structured learning time guaranteed throughout the week. As a result, the Department for Education published **guidance** stating that:

- Schools are expected to provide a minimum of 3 hours of daily remote education for key stage 1 pupils

- Schools are expected to provide a minimum of 4 hours of daily remote education for key stage 2 pupils

- Schools are expected to provide a minimum of 5 hours of daily remote education for key stage 3 and 4 pupils

Whilst there is no specific guidance for colleges and further education providers, the government is supporting these institutions to "deliver as much of students' planned hours as possible".

For more information, the government has provided "advice for parents and carers looking after children with SEND".

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 is the law, which sets out 9 protected characteristics, including protecting Disabled people from discrimination within educational settings, among other contexts.

The Equality Act has been retained during the coronavirus pandemic. However, what are considered to be reasonable adjustments will now be considered within the Covid-19 pandemic context.

What are reasonable adjustments?

The Equality Act recognises that achieving equality for Disabled people may mean education providers need to make changes so that Disabled pupils and students can learn alongside their non-Disabled peers within mainstream education settings.

The Equality Act's reasonable adjustments also cover Disabled staff working in educational settings. Some examples of how education providers have made reasonable adjustments during the Covid-19 pandemic include the following:

- Providing a blended learning experience for Disabled pupils or students for whom attending an on-site school or campus environment is having a negative impact on their learning

- Providing clear face coverings that allow teachers and Deaf pupils/students, as well as their peer group, to see each other's lips to facilitate communication

- Allowing Disabled pupils/ students to benefit from on-site learning if they find remote education an unsuitable substitute

For more information about the Equality Act and disability-related discrimination in education visit **IPESIA** and for information on reasonable adjustments, **click here.**

Do:
- Keep up to date with the status of the CFA 2014

- Use the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal service** to utilise appeals, mediation and county courts to secure SEND provision and mainstream school/further education placements

- Seek advice if schools and local authorities are still suggesting any changes to the EHCP arrangements, be they the assessments or plans themselves, or have failed to arrange the SEND provision in the EHCP
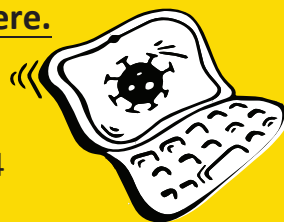
4. Making good use of formal assessment procedures
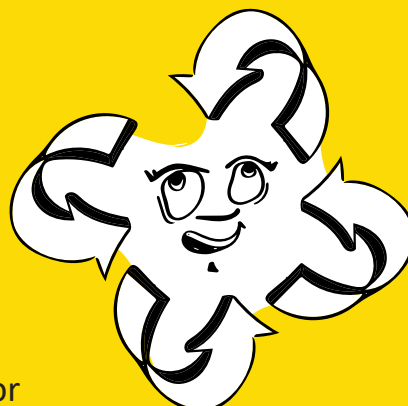
Use formal education assessment procedures to secure the appropriate equipment and support that Disabled students require to be educated at home or on-site.

"In the first lockdown, the school asked parents what equipment families needed. And they provided them. For my child I needed a specialist chair, iPad, sloping desk, a special tomato chair and multi-mic. My child probably would have had a laptop if he had needed one." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"I have to sit with him the whole time he is learning to keep him on task. Rather than Google Classroom, some kind of FaceTime with a [learning support assistant] or teacher would help, we need proper support to teach new concepts." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

If you do not ask for it, you will not get it!

Ask for face-to-face assessments if a remote assessment places the Disabled person or their parent(s) at a disadvantage. **FLARE's Top Tips for Professionals** can help to make meetings inclusive for Young people.

Whilst some Disabled students will be able to attend on-site learning, this will not be the case for all, particularly those who are shielding or need time for hospital treatment and recovery.

Do:

• Request an Education, Health and Care assessment or reassessment from the local authority

• Request amendments to the EHCP at its annual review by the local authority and school/college

• Ensure you have specifically asked for the provision to be made available for Disabled students, both on-site and remotely.

More information about all aspects of assessments, reassessments and EHCPs can be **found here.**

Do consider what equipment and support Disabled students require to learn effectively and comfortably, both on-site and remotely in the following areas:

- • Enable on-site attendance
- • Blended learning
- • Learning support
- • Assessment arrangements
- • Combating social isolation
- • Statutory funding

Who can I ask?

There are often lots of practitioners involved in a Disabled student's education. As a result, it is vital to identify who has the power or influence to secure the support required as quickly as possible.

If the child or Young person is under 25 years old, then request an Education, Health and Care assessment from the local authority and, if possible, have a conversation with the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), the college's Disabled students service or the course leader.

If the child or Young person has an EHCP, then contact the school's SENCO/college's Disability Services Manager to arrange an annual review meeting, where discussions can take place about education arrangements.

5. Back to school and college

Since Monday 8th March 2021, schools and colleges **reopened** for all their students and pupils. Schools and colleges have their own Covid-19 health and safety policies that may impact upon the Disabled child or Young person's attendance. Schools and colleges have welcomed feedback and suggestions made by parents and Young people.

"The [teaching assistant] has a clear mask so [my son] can lip-read. However, it is uncomfortable for people to wear them because the plastic masks steam up. The school was not aware of it, but they are open to feedback and happy to cooperate." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"My child's school is not enforcing masks for SEND children or forcing testing for anyone - that is voluntary for all. My son doesn't have a problem with either but there are other kids in his mainstream attached unit who do and [there is] no discrimination there." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"Social distancing: it worked well. They made reasonable adjustments, and fortunately, no one had Covid-19." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

**Do** consider the following for Disabled students during the pandemic:

- The level of risk involved in returning to School or College

- Social distancing arrangements

- Hygiene and handwashing procedures

- Face covering and mask wearing policies

- Covid-19 testing arrangements in schools or colleges and at home

- Behaviour and discipline policies

- Classroom and course bubble arrangements

- Education institution campus and classroom set-ups, including ventilation and seating plans

- Access to relevant facilities

- School or college transport availability

- Staff arrangements, including cover for those who are self-isolating

- The impact of the unpredictability of another Covid-19 outbreak

- In-place SEND provision, including appropriate pastoral care to combat social isolation

- Timetable flexibility

Before making any decisions on a Disabled student's attendance, do speak with schools or colleges about:

- The implementation of Covid-19 secure guidance, which will vary across educational institutions. It's worthwhile checking the suitability of procedures and policies for the Disabled student in question

- The implementation of behavioural and discipline policies that consider any behavioural and emotional issues arising from the lockdowns

- Do not forget that education institutions' Covid-19 legal exemptions and the Equality Act 2010 reasonable adjustments may need to be arranged for Disabled students, including precautions like face coverings

- Flexible arrangements options, such as part-time school-based timetables, that balance the child's/Young person's need to be on-site against the risks of Covid-19

The government is aiming for the full attendance of children in schools as soon as possible. Nevertheless, parents will have different views about the risks involved in sending their children back to school or keeping them at home.

The school guidance states that children who are labelled as "vulnerable", including those with EHCPs, are entitled to attend school during school closures.
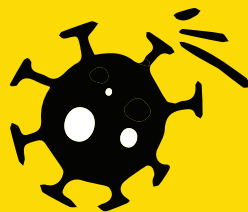
6. Blended learning experience

Blended learning is the combination of in-person and online learning provided by schools and colleges. It provides opportunities to accommodate the degree of flexibility required to enable students and pupils to continue with their studies during the unpredictability of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Parents who have difficulty reading and understanding English (not just because English is an additional language) are likely to experience added barriers supporting their child in home-based educational situations.

In this case, parents should request support from their child's school/college. Some schools receive additional funding from local authorities based on the number of pupils where there are barriers to understanding spoken and written English. Central government money is distributed to individual schools through local authorities and school forums.

Whilst blended learning may not be suitable for all, it can nevertheless be a positive experience for some students or pupils who find attending school or college full-time difficult because of their impairment.

Consequently, returning to school or college could be made less stressful for some Disabled students and pupils by continuing with some form of blended learning. This is why a social model and intersectional approach towards education is necessary; to address different types of barriers that shut communities and individuals out of mainstream education.

"In a formal classroom setting, I find the size and structure difficult to cope with. This causes barriers which impact on how I work in groups and communicate with other pupils in the classroom, including forming relationships… With remote learning, I find it easier and less stressful because I don't have to deal with the school processes and structures." **(Disabled pupil)**

"I have my own desk with my laptop and phone to do schoolwork. As a result, I now spend the week working on subjects which I do well in, which makes me happy and I feel motivated to do more work in my own environment... Remote education gives me control over what I'm doing with my learning and motivates me to dig deeper into the topics I have learnt." **(Pupil)**

Creating a comfortable learning environment
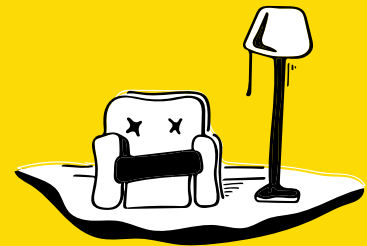
There are a range of technologies and applications on the market that could make online learning a more rewarding experience for a child or Young person.

"Autistic people usually have calming mechanisms such as engaging in a favourite activity or something which is physically comforting, like hand flapping, rocking or getting away from sensory overload [to] a quiet place." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"Specific areas in the house could be identified for school/college work. These should be minimally distracting and comfortable. It may be useful for the autistic pupil to wear their school sweatshirt while doing schoolwork but only if this makes sense." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

These pupils and students explain how having the right technology has facilitated such blended learning:

"My school normally sends work for me to complete via an app

called Show My Homework and I complete it and send it online. I have also had live lessons (on Microsoft Teams), for these I need to use two screens so I can see what the teacher is sharing as well as following my BSL interpreters. The technology is simple for me, but it needs a lot of energy to concentrate." (**Deaf pupil**)

"My tutor sent me work sheets and coursework via email. I would complete this and then return it to my tutor for marking. Because we could not meet in person, my interpreter met me on Zoom twice a week for a two-hour session. My interpreter would also scribe for me, ensuring that my answers were captured and typed out on the computer. I use a communication aid (Dynovox) to communicate, as I have no verbal speech." (**Disabled student**)

Do consider the suitability of requesting an assistive technology or furniture assessment that will help to identify suitable equipment and applications for the Disabled person. This includes:

• Technological aids such as joysticks, eye trackers, large keyboards, computer/laptop mice, printers and other hardware devices

• Assistive applications, such as screen readers, zoom text, speech-to-text and mind maps. These applications will assist with reading, writing and organising work

• Use of Apple and Microsoft Office packages, including accessibility functions such as speech-to-text

• Adaptive physical and sensory environments, including furniture like adjustable tables, desks, chairs, lights and document holders

• Creating a calming learning environment that includes having control over the sensory stimulations and removes the pressure of classrooms

• Energy levels affecting concentration and participation in a home learning environment

Timetable, online curriculum and teaching

Teaching is different online than on-site. It is therefore worth considering whether the Disabled student is able to access the virtual learning platforms, online lessons, textbooks, materials and online experiences.

"Live teacher led lessons should be offered remotely and these are continuing even after school has resumed in person; this enables the LSA [learning support assistant] to support a student both within the classroom and remotely as the LSA can be part of the class, can add comments in the chat, and can create breakout support classrooms, as well as providing 1:1 support with learning through videos, video and phone calls and direct communication via the chat." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"I would find it really helpful to have the pre-recorded lessons sent out in advance, with the answers and a guide to be able to support my son during the lessons. Also, to have the answers before getting to the lesson. I need to know where the lesson's teachers are going before they start the lessons." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"We would like our daughter to receive learning support assistance to help her understand what is being discussed in the class and to support her engagement in small group work with other students in the mainstream classroom (rather than working in isolation just with a learning support assistant). Whilst this is harder to achieve online, we think breakout rooms with groups of pupils and the teacher are possible and the learning support assistant can do some pre-learning with our daughter to enable her engagement in the classroom or breakout room session." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"Whilst at school, students would be provided with a weekly or termly timetable containing lessons and break-times. For some students, maintaining a routine can help them engage in the blended learning experience as they will know what lessons will be happening in advance." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"When creating a new routine, it might be useful to use visual timetables and to involve the whole family in the process. School/college work could be included in a daily timetable which also includes other activities..." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

Do consider that pre-recorded and live-streamed seminars, lessons, workshops and tutorials are supported by the school/college's subject teachers, an LSA and other staff. Other areas that could be altered to suit the child or Young person's requirements include:

- Inclusive learning methods

- Online platform accessibility functions

- Follow-up conversations with lecturers and teachers

- Accessible supplementary curriculum materials and activities

- Differentiated curriculum
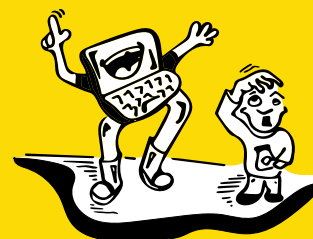
Do consider the suitability of online interventions for effective learning. Whilst online support is positive for some Disabled students, this will not always be the case. Consequently, think about how each Disabled student is responding to online interventions in the areas of:

- Curriculum delivery

- Pastoral care, mentoring and coaching sessions

- Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy

- Development and maintenance of relationships and rapport

- Counselling, emotional wellbeing and psychological support

Alternative curriculum arrangements

Not all Disabled students will be able to engage in remote education. Some students can only learn with in-person support within a structured educational setting. In these cases, it's very likely that these students will have EHCPs and would be allowed to enter schools or colleges during education closures.

However, if the child or Young person is shielding, then the school and local authority should be working together to develop an alternative curriculum, either by differentiating the curriculum or by developing learning activities that can be carried out safely at home.

In-person and other forms of human support

Holistic support combining all aspects of learning will contribute to the quality of remote education experienced by the Disabled student.

"Online support and contact newsletters, with additional resources and ideas. Occupational therapists and speech and language therapists' ideas, etc. Mental health [and] well-being has been at the forefront of the thinking of our school." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"My teachers of the Deaf have regular video conversation[s] with me to ensure that I understand the work and to go through some topics, which is really helpful for me." **(Deaf pupil)**

"[My son] would have Speech and Language Therapy and a TA in another room to reduce contact when in school. She would come at the end of the session to talk with him. As a consequence, he became more independent." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

Do consider, for remote education, the support needed to learn at home with Disabled students and pupils.

This includes:

• Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy

• Developing independent living skills, including daily routines

• Developing specific disability-related interventions, such as literacy, numeracy, physical, cognition and other study skills, as well as producing social stories

• Emotional and behavioural coping strategies

• Class/lecture note-taking

• Providing physical assistance with education, such as sitting comfortably, helping with handwriting, finding curriculum content online, setting up and completing learning activities, typing and other similar tasks

• Assisting with health and social care tasks, such as taking prescriptions, personal care and mealtimes

• Maintaining social contact and relationships within and outside timetabled lessons and lectures

• LSA, pastoral support or other assistance from education staff

• Assessment arrangements

7. Qualification assessment arrangements

GCSE and A-Level assessment arrangements
The government has **cancelled** all GCSE and A-Level summer examination sittings. Teachers and lecturers will be awarding candidates their GCSE and A Level grades based on past work.

Vocational qualification assessment arrangements
The government has released guidance to arrange the assessment and awarding of vocational, technical and general qualifications in 2020 to 2021. As there are thousands of vocational qualifications, many requiring on-the-job assessments, it is necessary to check what alternative arrangements are in place for candidates.

Teachers and lecturers must assess the Disabled candidate by taking into account any disability-related reasonable adjustments. For example, this could include Disabled candidates completing their course assignments or examinations without access to the right technology.

Do:

• Use the student's learning assessment (i.e., EHCP) as an opportunity to revise course assessment arrangements that include any disability-related reasonable adjustments and special education provision needs to be in place to complete work at home

• Confirm teacher/lecturer grades, including any GCSE/A-Level or professional examination board approved reasonable adjustments

• Check that any disability reasonable adjustment application requests have examination board approval

• Have a conversation with your SENCO, headteacher and teachers/lecturers on how they will assess and award your child's grades

• Consider agreeing upon the way forward, which may include alternative forms of assessment including GCSE/A-Level/vocational set examinations

• If the Disabled candidate is unhappy with the lecturer/teacher's GCSE/A-Level subject grade(s), then follow the appropriate appeals process

8. Combating social isolation

Disabled children and Young people reported increased social isolation from peer groups during lockdown. Some families expressed a need for balance between supporting Disabled children's learning and social contact with their friends. Indeed, a number of parents have become pro-active in developing ways of ensuring their children remain visible.

"He wants to join in, but he does not know the answer, and he is not given enough time to think as the other students are quicker. His mother tells him the answer so he can raise his hand and participate. Teachers do not like this, but I find that it is very good for him. I have decided that it is more important for him to be visible than learning algebra. It is more important for him to be able to speak and to communicate." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"Reduce the number of classes and transform some into friendship groups, allowing them to talk and socialise. For example, Scouts are brilliant: watching a film together, making a cake, quizzes online, having fun together." **(ALLFIE Parent)**

"I developed a small friendship circle, which is very important to me. I believe all Disabled children should have the opportunity to mix, to learn together, which increases our friendship circles, so nobody is segregated from the experiences of community life." **(Disabled pupil)**

It cannot be assumed that Disabled children are members of social media friendship groups.

Parents may therefore need to think about how their children can continue to contact their peer group.

Do:

• Ask the school/college if they can set up a social media group consisting of their peers who attend a SEND/nurture group

• Set up an online circle of friends

• Establish a peer group inviting the child's friends

• Find online hobby groups, such as gaming

• Organise activities that friends could do and share online

• Organise telephone calls with the child's friends

For many Disabled people, remote contact is no substitute for face-to-face contact. The government's guidance for **making a support bubble with another household** may help with arranging play dates with other Young people and their families.

9. Funding sources

There are various funding sources that should cover the additional and different sorts of assistance to support Disabled students' home learning.

The government are providing financial support to cover the cost of purchasing online devices, internet access and mobile data usage.

Do consider applying for funding from the following funding sources:

• SEND children and Young people's grants

• Further education grants, including the application process, which can be found on the **further education webpage**

• Higher education grants, including the application process, which can be found on the **higher education webpage**

The Department for Education has made **over £42 million available for children with SEND,** to provide extended support for both local authorities and schools through grants and extending contracts.

The Department for Education is also **providing laptops and tablets** to trusts, local authorities, schools, 16-to-19 academies, colleges and other further education institutions to help pupils and families access remote education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Department for Education will also be **helping children and Young people from under-resourced backgrounds who need an internet connection** to get internet access and increase their data allowances.

Grants for SEND children and Young people
Disabled students and their parents can **apply for local authority funding and grants to help with remote education.**

Additional and varied support with home-learning
Funding for Disabled children and Young people for additional home-based educational support ought to be provided through the school's own budget, the local authority's high needs budgets and direct payments.

High needs budget
Local authorities' high needs budgets cover additional Education, Health and Care provision for children and Young people still in school or college. If a child or Young person needs more than £6,000 worth of SEND provision, then their school or college should receive additional funding from the local authority. If there is an EHCP, then the local authority will be responsible for arranging SEND provision for the child or Young person.

However, if a child or Young person needs extra support, then request an Education, Health and Care assessment and plan from the local authority. **(here's how)**

Direct payments for information

Disabled and SEN children and Young people can now request **direct payments** in lieu of special education needs services provided by the local authority, school or further education institution.

Normally, the Young person or their parent(s) will need the local authority and educational institution's permission. Having a direct payment for SEND provision could help with employing professionals, such as private therapists and disability specialists, until the Covid-19 pandemic is completely over.

If the Young person or their parent(s) have any direct payments covering social care, then it would be worth asking for increased funding to employ staff for additional hours during this period of remote education.

If the Young person or their parent(s) want to increase or change the existing arrangements for the delivery of SEND provision, it is worth asking for a direct payment during the assessment or review of the EHCP. So, for example making a request to employ a private therapist for one-to-one sessions on a fixed-term contract whilst the school's therapist is deployed elsewhere within the NHS.

Family Fund
Parents can apply for a **Family Fund** grant to cover equipment, such as online devices, for their Disabled children to use during lockdown.

Further education grants
Further education institutions are required to make reasonable adjustments for Disabled students, even though they are participating in online learning at home.

The **Education and Skills Funding Agency** allocates a fund to help colleges cover the cost of reasonable adjustments for their Disabled students, so it's worth asking about this fund.

Additionally, further education institutions have their own bursary arrangements to cover the purchase of online devices and equipment that Disabled students require to engage in remote education. More information can be found here.

ALLFIE wants to thank everyone who has contributed to and reviewed this guide.

For more ALLFIE information resources please visit **www.allfie.org.uk** or contact us on **info@allfie.org.uk**