Placement Decision Making during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Buckinghamshire iSEND Service Guidelines

Introduction
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the guidance from UK government regarding school closures and social distancing means that elements of the decision making process will not be able to be conducted in the same way. The main principle underpinning all of iSEND’s decision making in relation to placements is make the most appropriate decision, in line with legislation, utilising the most accurate, reliable and comprehensive information possible, given the constraints in place.

SEND Placement Panel
The purpose of the SEND Placement Panel is to provide professional guidance that enables transparent, consistent and focused decision making, in line with the legislation for the educational placement of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans. Cases will only be considered and outcomes gathered, when full information has been received from the setting / family as part of the annual review and in consultation with preferred / possible settings.

Expectation for SEND Panel Members
The Panel will continue to ‘virtually’ meet on a monthly basis on the last Thursday of every month. Papers will continue to be circulated one week in advance of any panel discussions. It is expected that all Panel members read the relevant paperwork to their area (guidance in relation to this will be sent out with the paperwork for panel) and provide advice to the Chair on each case during the meeting.

Decision Making
The Panel will be responsible for providing professional guidance to the Local Authority to enable consistent and appropriate decision making, in line with the SEND Code of Practice 2015;

If a child’s parent or a young person makes a request for a particular nursery school or post 16 institution within these groups, the Local Authority must comply with that preference and name the school or college in the EHC Plan, unless:

- It would be unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or SEN of the child or young person, or
The attendance of the child or young person there would be incompatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources

SEND Code of Practice 2015 (9.79)

This means that Panel members will need to consider:

- Parental preference for children under 16
- Young person preference for those over 16
- A significant change in the child or young person’s ability, aptitude or SEN
- The setting and the other students that currently attend there
- The use of LA resources

The final decision in relation to placement remains with the Local Authority.

It is important to note that the Local Authority’s decisions do not have to be made following guidance from a Panel. To enable efficient decision making, decisions will be made as early as possible within the Local Authority, following consultation with proposed settings, without always needing a Panel’s advice. The Panel’s main purpose is to offer guidance and consistency where decisions require further professional advice. This will also enable advice as to an appropriate way forward to support the child and the setting following the Local Authority’s decisions. This is why we are continuing to run panels ‘virtually’ given the important advice that they can provide.

**Panel Outcomes**

Decisions will be recorded during the Panel meeting. An outcome summary sheet will be sent to all attendees following on from the Panel. It is important that all attendees are mindful of GDPR regulations and do not share information unless explicitly permitted to do so.

Decisions made regarding placements of children and young people will be communicated to families and settings (where possible for the latter) via the allocated EHC Coordinator. Please note all new placements agreed will be for September 2020 at the earliest given the current circumstances.

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1 Please note all guidance produced by the iSEND service in relation to statutory timescales and assessments are subject to change as further advice is provided by the DFE.