

Barnet Education and Learning Service
2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, NW9 4EW

First Floor, Building 4, NLPB
Oakleigh Road South
N11 1NP

28 May 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Therapies: Speech and Language Therapy; Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy

I am writing to update you on the situation regarding therapies, including Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy.

It has been an extraordinary 14 months, and there is no doubt that the pandemic has had a profound impact on so many children and families.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Health services were re-directed to support hospitals in the treatment and care of patients with Covid-19 and have been required to give ongoing support to help deal with the pandemic. This has reduced the capacity of some of the services in health, including therapies to deliver on their core duties.

On the 30th April, 2020 the Secretary of State for Education issued a notice under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to modify Section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014. This is the duty to secure special educational provision and health care provision in accordance with the child's EHC Plan. The temporary modification to Section 42 was changed to give local authorities and health bodies more flexibility in responding to the demands placed on services by Coronavirus, and the duty was changed to "use reasonable endeavours" to secure the provision in the EHC Plan. This temporary modification of the legislation came into effect on 1st May 2020 and ceased on 31st July 2020.

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) leads and jointly commissions, with the local authority (including BELS), North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) to deliver therapies in Barnet. Like other providers, NELFT have had considerable difficulties with capacity, recruitment and retention of staff over the last 12 months. These difficulties are not isolated to Barnet, and many other local authorities are also experiencing problems in delivering therapy services.

The local authority, BELS, the CCG and NELFT have been working very closely to prioritise and increase the therapy support available to children and families, and schools. We are working with individual private therapists and other private providers to secure more therapists, who will work alongside NELFT in undertaking assessments and delivering therapies to children with therapy provision in their EHC Plan.

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In addition to this Whittington Health has been commissioned to lead recovery work over the remainder of the Summer term and Autumn term and are working towards supporting your child's therapy needs. This is part of ongoing work with Whittington Health to build greater resilience into our therapy provision in Barnet.

Although we would want therapists to work closely with staff in schools, we recognise the need for children who require therapy to receive the necessary input and support and have asked therapists to offer therapy during the school holidays. A blended approach will be adopted during the school holidays, according to the needs of the child, with a mixture of virtual and face-to-face therapy, and taking account of parental preference.

This additional resourcing for therapy will continue until the end of the Autumn term 2021, when we hope that our commissioned provider will have sufficient capacity to meet need in Barnet.

In addition to the work being undertaken to obtain and deliver more therapy support, Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS) is also putting together a recovery package of support for schools. This includes offering all mainstream primary and secondary schools in Barnet access to a qualified private Speech and Language Therapist who will train school staff and facilitate small group support for pupils with a lower level of need who will benefit from a language enrichment programme. This is due to start straight after half term in June and will also be offered to schools in the Autumn term.

We know that therapy provision is a concern for many families of children with SEND, particularly those who have therapy provision in their EHC Plan. There will be two 'open sessions' on therapies for parent carers. Senior officers from the local authority, BELS, Whittington Health, NELFT and the CCG will be attending these sessions to respond to questions and concerns.

The sessions will be virtual, using MS Teams. The sessions will be run in the first two weeks of the second half of the summer term (week beginning 7th June). Depending on the interest shown, more sessions will be arranged, as needed.

Details about these sessions will be on Barnet's Local Offer and on the Barnet Parent Carer website. They will also be circulated to all schools in Barnet to pass on details to parents.

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We will be sending out another letter for parent carers in the week beginning 14th June providing an update on progress being made in providing therapy services in Barnet.

Schools will also be receiving an update in a separate communication.

Yours sincerely



Dr Helen Phelan
Director SEND & Inclusion,
London Borough of Barnet & BELS



Jess Baines Holmes
Director of Integration
Director of Integrated Commissioning
London Borough of Barnet & North Central
London CCG

On behalf of:

Chris Munday, Executive Director Children and Family Services, Barnet Council

Dr Helen Phelan, Director SEND & Inclusion, Barnet Council and BELS

NCL, Clinical Commissioning Group

Whittington Health