

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

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

11th June 2021

Dear Colleague

Update on Therapies: Speech and Language Therapy; Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy

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

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) leads on jointly commissioning North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) to deliver therapies in Barnet. NELFT is jointly commissioned by the CCG, and the local authority (including BELS). Like other providers, NELFT have had considerable difficulties with capacity over the last 15 months and have struggled with recruitment and retention. These difficulties are not isolated to Barnet, with many other local authorities also experiencing capacity issues affecting their ability to deliver therapy services.

The local authority, BELS, the CCG and NELFT have been working very closely together to prioritise cases and increase the therapy support that is available to children and schools. This has been additionally resourced and is part of a recovery programme from now until the October half term 2021 when it will be reviewed.

As part of the interim arrangements to support the recovery programme, Whittington Health have been jointly commissioned to work alongside NELFT to increase therapy capacity during this interim period.

Whittington Health are working with an independent provider, "Unlocking Language" to deliver therapy to children and young people who have speech and language therapy in their EHC Plan and who have not been in receipt of therapy over the last year. Five additional Speech and Language therapists from "Unlocking Language" have been commissioned to undertake this work.

A process of 'rag rating' schools according to the needs of children and young people with an EHC Plan has been undertaken. If your school is rag rated 'red', Marion Neuman, Clinical Lead in NELFT or a member of her team will contact you by phone to confirm this. A Speech and Language therapist from "Unlocking Language" will then be in touch to arrange to come into school. "Unlocking Language" will start to deliver this support this week. All those schools rag rated 'red' will be visited by a Speech and Language therapist by the end of the summer term. Although there may be a few 'Amber' schools who are visited this term, the majority will be visited from September.

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NELFT will be focusing on new referrals, and the referral route for schools for new referrals remains unchanged.

The additional support that has been commissioned from “Unlocking Language” means that we are able to fulfil our statutory duties to provide the speech and language provision for those children and young people who have this in their EHC Plan. The demand for Physiotherapy is also able to be met.

Where families will find it beneficial, therapists have been asked, where possible to provide therapy input over the school holidays.

We are still experiencing a shortfall in Occupational Therapy and working hard to address this. There is a national shortage of Occupational Therapists and we are working across North Central London to jointly recruit Occupational Therapists who can then be deployed flexibly across the five local areas. We are also working closely with private OT providers to commission them as part of our recovery programme.

Although much of the focus is currently on those who have therapy in their EHC Plan, we hope that in the coming months there will be more early intervention and prevention work undertaken as therapy capacity increases.

For those children and young people with a lower level of speech and communication need, BELS are delivering a Language Enrichment Programme for all schools in Barnet, which is led by a qualified Speech and Language therapist and supported by the Inclusion Advisory Team and BPSI. This is free to all schools and is part of the BELS Recovery, Reset and Renaissance (RRR) package of support for schools. The feedback about the Language Enrichment Programme from last week’s briefings has been very positive, and lots of schools have already signed up to the programme for this term.

Thank you for all that you and your colleagues in schools are doing to support some of our most vulnerable children. We appreciate that the current shortfall of therapy is causing a lot of concern amongst schools, other professionals and families. We are committed to building resilience in the delivery of therapy in Barnet, working closely with you as part of our recovery programme.

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Yours sincerely



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On behalf of:

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

Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

BELS

NELFT

Whittington Health