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Our Ref: TOF-1300

Date: 19 June 2020

Dear Ms Boulton

Thank you for your letter of the 18 May received by the Department on the 10 June. The Minister has asked that all Covid-19 responses are dealt with by officials until further notice; therefore, I am replying on the Minister's behalf.

The Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan is specific to England. In Northern Ireland, the Special Educational Need (SEN) Framework includes the Education (NI) Order 1996; the Education (SEN) Regulations (NI) 2005; and the 1998 Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN. A Statement of SEN details the assessment of the pupil's SEN and the type of support required to meet their individual needs.

The issue of support for vulnerable children and young people and minimising the impact of the pandemic has been central to the Department's response to Covid 19, with all schools closed to pupils from 23 March except for children of key workers and vulnerable children for supervised learning. The measures taken by the Department, which are monitored and reviewed include the modification of the statutory duties on statutory authorities, see Coronavirus Act 2020 Temporary Modification of Education Duties (No.7); Notice (Northern Ireland) 2020 (3 June – 4 July).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/notice-coronavirus-act-2020-temporary-modification-education-duties-no7-notice-northern-ireland-2020>

There has been considerable ongoing efforts undertaken by the Department of Education, the Education Authority (EA), Public Health Agency (PHA), Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and Special Schools to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and to provide support, where it is safe and appropriate to do so, when a parent wishes their child to attend their Special Schools.

The Education Authority <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/pupil-support-services> and Middletown Centre for Autism <https://www.middletownautism.com> continue to provide ongoing online support for children and young people with Autism and their families. New information in relation to Anxiety & Autism is available at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/resource-file-children-special-educational-needs>.

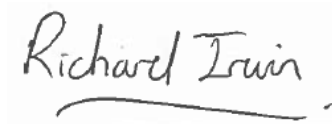
An Education Restart Programme, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-sets-out-plans-reopening-schools>, is being developed by the Department alongside stakeholders.

The Programme has identified five key priorities:-

- **Physical Protection** –protecting the physical health our workforce and learners as they return to schools and settings – minimising the risk of Covid-19 transmission.
- **Well-being** –promoting the mental health and emotional well-being of our workforce and learners as they adjust to a “new normal”.
- **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Services** –ensuring that services to vulnerable learners, including SEN services, are re-instated in a safe and effective manner when schools return to operation.
- **Standards and Learning** – maintaining (or re-dress) educational standards, provide continuity of learning and ensure appropriate assessment.
- **A new normal** – practical arrangements to deliver a new normal which is consistent with guidelines on social distancing.

The timing and phasing of re-opening of schools will be based on health guidance and will require the confidence of our stakeholders. The Minister has committed to full engagement with all relevant stakeholders and as we manage the return to school, we will certainly seek input from stakeholders across the sector. The Department will consult and engage with all relevant parties, including school leaders and trade unions on behalf of staff as this work progresses.

Should you wish to provide input or views in relation to the Programme you can send directly to [Restart@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Restart@education-ni.gov.uk).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Irwin". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

**Richard Irwin**

**Director of Inclusion and Wellbeing**