

'How schools are planning for the full return of pupils with SEND in September 2020'

Sarah Butler, SENCo at Billesley Primary School and a member of the EEF's SEND working group, has been gathering voices from pupils, parents and staff in planning the full return to school of pupils with SEND, following the Covid-19 closure of schools to most pupils.

Pupils with SEND at Billesley were asked about their worries before they came back to school. Here are some of the aspects they mentioned:

- All the tables had been changed and their classrooms looked different;
- Use of antibacterial spray;
- Washing hands more often and how this would work;
- Sitting with different people for lunch in the canteen;
- How to move past other bubbles, saying hello but remembering 'to do your distancing'.

Talking about her 7-year old with autism who has not accessed school during the lockdown period, a parent from Billesley explains her hopes for a smooth transition in September.

She explains that ideally there would be as few changes as possible to old routines to help her child settle in after such a long period of absence. However, it is understandable that 'no change' is not possible – so the best thing we can do is to prepare as much as possible for any likely changes. She identifies two things that can help parents:

- School communications about what might look different: for example, visual supports such as photos of the new classroom layout and social stories to help with new rules and routines;
- School to be open and honest about limitations in place.

Her experience as a parent of a child with SEND has shown that any preparation that we can do in advance of changes helps to achieve a successful outcome. Once September starts, she is hoping for school to be flexible and adaptable to her child's

needs, putting in additional supports as required.

Finally, the view of the Assistant SENCo depicts how the time during Covid-19 has affected all families in so many different ways. She explains that it is important as a school to ask families about their experiences so they can plan for provision back in the classroom. Before the children come back to Billesley, they ask families to complete a questionnaire to gain an understanding of the life the child has been leading at home.

Some questions they pose are:

- How has the child been getting on at home?
- Has the child engaged in their learning?
- What motivates them to learn?
- Have they left the house much? Where have they been?
- What are their current interests?
- How does the child feel about leaving the house?
- How does the parent feel about them leaving the house?
- What is their understanding of Covid-19?
- Has the family suffered any bereavement during this time?

Once all of this information has been gathered, they give the parents a comprehensive handbook, aiming to answer all the questions they might have.

Finally, before the children come back into school they give the family a call to answer any outstanding questions they might have about their return to school. At Billesley, they have found that this equips the family and the child well for the 'new normal' back at school.