

**Changes to the school suspension and expulsion process due to Coronavirus  
(COVID-19):  
Feedback from the Special Educational Consortium**

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) is a membership organisation that comes together to protect and promote the rights of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN). Our membership includes the voluntary and community sector, education providers and professional associations. SEC believes that every child and young person is entitled to an education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.

SEC identifies areas of consensus across our membership and works with the Department for Education, Parliament, and other decision-makers when there are proposals for changes in policy, legislation, regulations and guidance that may affect disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our membership includes nationally recognised experts on issues including assessment and curriculum, schools and high needs funding, the SEN legal framework, exclusions and alternative provision.

**SEC Response to suggested changes**

SEC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the proposed changes to the school suspension and expulsion process during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

The virtual world that has been in place since the first lockdown in 2020 has impacted the lives of children with SEN in many ways. A number of SEC members provide support to children and families going through the formal school exclusion process:

- We are aware that, broadly speaking, 'virtual justice', including online meetings, which have been introduced for a number of processes (including for the school exclusion processes) have enabled more children to participate in meetings and discussions, and have given them a voice which has sometimes been unheard.

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- One member fed back on the use of virtual IRP processes during the Independent Review Panel, feeling that this was delivered successfully. Part of this process was a pre-meeting which allowed all participants to get used to the process and to get comfortable with the technology. Regular breaks being offered is another aspect of good practice which must be considered within the process. Those responsible for overseeing any virtual processes must ensure they include these aspects of good practice alongside the use of technology and the delivery of any virtual meetings.
- Other concerns have been raised regarding timescales and the danger of the indefinite extension of meetings, as giving leeway to authorities and governors might end up leaving pupils and parents waiting indefinitely and risking remaining out of education longer than necessary.
- Another member organization represented a young person at a virtual governors' hearing, and as an advocate felt that the virtual process had some flaws. Connectivity issues made it sometimes feel chaotic and less civil, and the family were denied a recording without good reason - this seemed unjust and potentially a matter that can be addressed. However, the same parents were also happy that they did not have to travel for the meeting, and could participate together in the familiar setting of their home.
- SEC would like to ask that the DfE commit to monitor both the practice of virtual meetings during school exclusions (including feedback from children, young people and their parents of what has worked and what remains problematic), and the data around the exclusion process (including decisions made by IRPs) to see if/how these virtual processes are working.

We would be happy to provide further information or to clarify anything in our response.

**Chris Rees**

Coordinator, Special Educational Consortium