



Welcome to our Christmas edition of the SEND newsletter.

Inside this bumper issue, we've put together a round-up of fun and exciting activities and events that you could join in with. From pantomimes that support children and young people with SEND to Father Christmas visits and events that are quiet and more relaxed for children with sensory needs, there is a lot going on this month. Alongside this, we've included information about coping with winter illnesses and advice from Trading Standards about Christmas scams.

This year, we've been able to meet many parents in person, and this really helps us to keep focused on what matters to you, as well as share with you what we've been doing to improve services in Kent. It was a personal pleasure to meet lots of parents at the Kent PACT launch in September. If you didn't get to it, we've included the video link below.

Finally, thank you to you all for continuing to receive this newsletter and lookout in the new year for information about our SEND improvement programme.

Merry Christmas!

Mark Walker

Director of SEND and Disabled Children's and Young People's Service

In this newsletter:

- [Local SEND accessible Christmas events](#) - including meet Father Christmas and quiet, sensory, and relaxed events
- [Shop safely online](#) - Trading Standards advice for shopping for toys online
- [SEND Partnership and Engagement Team](#) - an update on the latest changes to the SEND information hub and our engagement with parents
- [Disability Student Allowance](#) - learn how the allowance can support young people attending university
- [KENT PACT launch event](#) - a round-up of the event, including videos and documents to support talks on the day
- [IASK information sessions](#) - sign up to free information sessions and workshops
- [NHS updates](#) - including support around COVID-19, norovirus, and flu vaccine
- [Be Bright Be Seen campaign](#) - a campaign to keep your child safe at night in the dark
- [Kent residents e-newsletter](#) - sign-up to receive the latest news from KCC
- [Primary school applications](#) - don't forget to apply
- [School closure alerts](#) - sign up to receive text alerts when your school is closed
- [Changing Places addition to Shorne Woods Country Park](#) - a new facility to support those who may need a Changing Place
- [Foster for Kent](#) - why not become a foster parent today
- [CXK partners with KMBG update](#) - find out how young people can self-refer to access free unlimited career advice
- [BEMIX news](#) - two new courses to support young people with employment and internships

Recent newsletters

[October 2021](#)

[September 2021](#)

[June 2021](#)

[Our other newsletters](#)

Get involved

If you would like to get involved in our newsletter, tell your story, ask us a question, or have a topic you want us to discuss please email yourvoice2@kent.gov.uk.

[Subscribe to future newsletters](#)



It's behind you!!

Throughout December and January there are lots of Christmas-themed events in Kent providing accessibility support for children and young people with SEND:

- attend your local pantomime with accessible-friendly theatres
- meet Father Christmas in a quieter environment
- visit a wonderland walks for a light sensory experience

- riding the Polar Express

[Find out what's happening in your local area.](#)



Kent Trading Standards is urging the county's shoppers to shop safely online ahead of the festive break.

Anybody can be scammed, but the elderly and vulnerable are more at risk. So, look out for neighbours, friends and relatives and if you think you, or they, are a victim of a scam, you can [report your concerns online](#).

You can also get lots of advice about buying the real-deal and avoiding nasty surprises, and sign up for Scam Alerts, [via our scams webpage](#)



Hello, we are the SEND Partnership and Engagement Team:

- Sharon McLaughlin – SEND Partnership and Engagement Manager.
- Natalie Blower and George Austin - SEND Local Offer Coordinators.
- Chloe-Elizabeth Mutton – SEND Youth Participation Officer.

Natalie and George - what we do

"Hi, we're Natalie and George.

"As part of our role, we want to make sure that you know about the [SEND information hub](#) (Kent's local offer). Our website provides you with information, advice, and support for children and young people aged 0 to 25. We manage and update the information hub, [community directory](#) and engage with parents.

"Our job is to make sure that the SEND information hub is always up-to-date. We work with departments within KCC and our partners. But, we also want to hear parents' views, as it is you that uses the website, and we want to make sure that you have a good experience. So we try to attend many local events to meet families to hear your views about the website, as well as show you how the website can support you.

"We recently attended the Kent PACT Launch event and it was fantastic to see so many parents and carers, as well as lots of local charities, and to share the support available on our website.

"Your experiences and views really help us to improve our website and we left the event feeling really happy that so many parents were willing to work with us to improve our website!



"We've also held 4 small online focus groups for families. We learnt about the family needs and requests for our website, as well as how we can improve the information we provide, which has led to some improvements in the way how we present information on our website.

It also led to a change in name of our website. A focus group member told us that it

wasn't clear what SEND stood for. As a result, we were able to make a small change to our website name to “Special educational needs and disabilities” as opposed to the acronym SEND. We have also changed some of the headings on our pages in line with this to make these clearer.



"We also visited Cecil Road Primary School in Gravesend at the end of November, where we had the chance to talk to around 40 parents. It was great to engage with some new faces and to help highlight the advice and support available to them on the SEND information hub website.

"We were also able to have our new merchandise, pop-up stand and table cover to promote our website!

"If you would like to get involved in focus groups to help improve the website then email yourvoice2@kent.gov.uk. Or look out for our social media posts in the new year which will give you details of our next groups and events".

Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Chloe-Elizabeth - what I do

"Hi, I'm Chloe-Elizabeth the SEND Youth Participation Officer.

"I work with young people across Kent to find out what is important to them, and how we can change the way we work. For example, young people have told us that they want us to care more for the environment and stop wasting paper. Because of this we are using social media more and trying to go digital where we can. Of course, we also produce information and advice in paper for people who don't have access

to the internet.

"I'm also creating information videos with young people. The videos will provide a visual and interactive summary of the SEND information hub".

Sharon - what I do

"Hi, I manage the SEND Partnership and Engagement Team. I work behind the scenes with services, partners and organisations to make sure we work in partnership with families.

"Don't forget you can easily get involved in future projects, [visit the SEND information hub to find out more!](#)"

Sharon, Natalie, George and Chloe-Elizabeth
SEND Partnership and Engagement Team

[Visit the SEND information hub](#)



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[Tweet our newsletter on Twitter](#)



[Forward this newsletter to a friend](#)



Disability Student Allowance (DSA)

Did you know that 1 in 5 students have a disability or support need? Needs can range from mental health conditions and, long term illnesses, to specific learning difficulties, and physical and sensory disabilities.

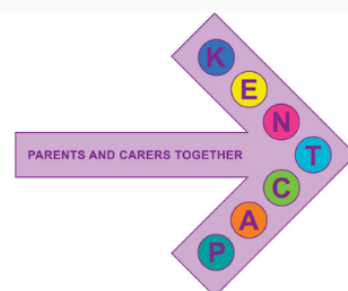
Eligible students can use the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) to cover some of the extra study-related costs incurred due to their impairment, mental health condition, or learning difference.

However, 60% of eligible students are not aware that DSA exists when starting university. This results in delays in accessing the support they are entitled to, with many students missing out on it altogether.

Watch a [free webinar to learn more about the Disabled Students' Allowance \(DSA\)](#), who is eligible and how you can ensure your students get the support they need to thrive in higher education.

Or find out more about DSA by [visiting the Diversity & Ability website](#).

Kent Parents and Carers Together (Kent PACT)



[Kent PACT](#) is a parent carer forum in Kent for parents and carers of children and young people up to the age of 25 with disabilities and additional needs.

We are a member of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) and are recognised by the Department of Education, KCC and Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, Children's Commissioning Group as the strategic voice of parent carers living in Kent.

Kent PACT can help you to share your views. We want your views to be known at a strategic level while working collaboratively with KCC, health partners and other organisations to improve services and outcomes for your child.

We have representatives across Kent who can offer support and advice:

- Matt Weaver covering: Sevenoaks, Dartford, and Gravesham - matt@kentpact.org.uk

- Amanda Oliver covering: Tonbridge, Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells
- amanda@kentpact.org.uk
- Tracy Playforth covering: Ashford, Shepway, and Dover
- tracy@kentpact.org.uk
- Louise Kirkman covering: Thanet, Swale, and Canterbury
- louise@kentpact.org.uk

Follow Kent PACT on Facebook

Kent PACT launch event

Our launch event took place in September in Ashford, and it was so great to see you all!

Throughout the day, we had a number of guest speakers who spoke about their specialisms and answered questions from those who attended. Each slot was packed with parents, with standing room only!

If you missed any of our speakers, don't worry. We recorded the talks, and they are available on our YouTube Channel.

You can hear from:

- [Alison White - Chair of Trustees, Kent PACT](#) (4 minutes)
- [Mark Walker - Director of SEND for Kent County Council](#) (38 minutes)
- [Jane O'Rourke - Associate Director Kent Children & Maternity Commissioning Team at NHS Kent & Medway CCG](#) (34 minutes)
- [Phil Lightowler - Head of Public Transport, Kent County Council](#) (45 minutes).

We want to thank everyone who attended the event from parents to professionals.

Vicky Evans - Operations Manager
Kent PACT team



Watch Alison White our Chair of Trustees talk to attendees at our Kent PACT launch event.



Following on from the feedback and questions raised in [Mark Walker's video](#), below you will find further details as to the documents and support discussed on the day:

- [support in schools including Provision Evaluation Officers](#) (PEOs)
- [Mainstream Core Standards](#) - sets out guidance on the expectations of schools and their legal duties to support your child
- [SEND co-production charter](#) - created by children and young people to make sure that their voice is heard
- [SEND strategy](#) - jointly developed by Kent County Council and the NHS in conjunction with children and young people, parents and carers, Kent PACT (Kent parents and carers together) and other key stakeholders.

Information Advice and Support Kent (IASK)

Information
Advice and
Support
Kent



For confidential impartial information advice and support about educational matters relating to a child or young person's special educational needs or disabilities.

For more information you can:

Call us: **03000 41 3000**

Email: iask@kent.gov.uk.

[Visit our website.](#)

Bookable information sessions

Why not book one of our information sessions? Our sessions allow you to have an individual conversation with a Family Involvement Worker about any queries or concerns you have about your son or daughter's special educational needs or disability.

[Find out more and book your information session](#)

Book a free virtual workshop

Our workshops are for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, their parents/carers, and practitioners. Why not book onto one of our workshops today!

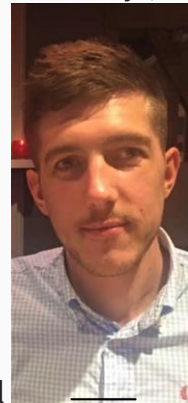
[Find out more and book your virtual workshops.](#)



Working with our NHS partners



"Hello. My name is Matthew Ward, I am happy to tell you that I am the 'Deputy Designated Clinical Officer for Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)' in



Kent & Medway. It is my role to help the Designated Clinical Officer provide a link between the local authority and health services for children with SEND

"My main training is in mental health nursing and I have lots of experience in reducing risk and early help and prevention I have worked in the crisis resolution home treatment team in West Kent, as well as secure units helping people with a wide range of complex needs such as eating disorders, personality disorders, severe depression, and psychotic illnesses.

"Some of you may recognise me from my earlier role as 'Health Lead for SEND' within the Clinical Commissioning Group. I am excited to be working closely with partners from health, education, and the local authority for our children and young people and their families. I want this role to be a positive link for health and help to improve and develop services so that their processes are easier to use and understand.

"I look forward to continuing to build positive partnerships and help to improve the health services for children and young people with SEND."

Matthew



Every winter cold and flu bugs - including COVID-19 - circulate that can make us feel unwell.

By taking small steps to stay safe, we also help to look after our key workers so that crucial services can continue to run throughout the winter.

There are 3 main ways you can stay well and protect yourself and your loved ones this winter:

Good hygiene:

- regularly wash and sanitise your hands
- wear masks or face coverings indoors where you're asked to, and generally in crowded places
- if you're meeting in groups, it's safer outside. Open doors and windows indoors.

Testing

- take regular lateral flow tests, especially before you visit medical settings or attend public events. [Find out how to order lateral flow tests.](#)
- you may need to take a PCR test if you have symptoms of Covid-19 or have been advised to by your local authority, GP or other medical practitioners. [Find out when and how to book PCR tests.](#)

Vaccines

With the arrival of the omicron variant it is more important than ever that everyone takes up the opportunity of a vaccination. We have been busy in Kent and Medway and so far we've vaccinated more than 42,000 12 to 15-year-olds children to protect themselves, their families, and their friends. If your child (or indeed other family members) has not been vaccinated please book now.

Details about current arrangements for vaccinations for 12 to 17-year-olds can be [found on the Kent and Medway CCG website](#).

You can also read one of the following family guides for information:

- [Gov.uk for children and young people an easy understandable guide](#)
- [Gov.uk - COVID-19 vaccination easy reads](#)
- [Gov.uk booster vaccination – easy read](#)
- [Mencap - COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Autism.org - coronavirus vaccines](#)

Norovirus

[Norovirus](#), also called the "winter vomiting bug", is a stomach bug that causes vomiting and diarrhoea. It can be very unpleasant, but usually goes away in about 2 days. If your child does develop norovirus, they must stay off school until they have not been sick or had diarrhoea for at least 2 days. This is when they're most infectious.

If you or your child is feeling unwell, you can get help and advice from:

- a pharmacy – pharmacists can give treatment advice for a range of minor illnesses and can tell you if you need to see a doctor
- your GP – you may be able to speak to a GP online or over the phone, or go in for an appointment if they think you need to
- NHS 111 – go to 111.nhs.uk or call **111** if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do

The sooner you get advice, the sooner you are likely to get better.

Children's flu vaccine

Every year children are offered the safe and effective nasal spray flu vaccine to protect against the flu. It can be a very unpleasant illness for children. It can also lead to serious problems, such as [bronchitis](#) and [pneumonia](#).

Children can catch and spread flu easily. Vaccinating them also protects others who are vulnerable to flu, such as babies and older people.



As the nights are getting darker earlier it's important for everyone to be bright and to be seen. In partnership with KMFm, our Road Safety Team are giving out a record-breaking 25,000 'Be Bright Be Seen' reflective keyrings.

The keyrings can be added to your child's bag, lunchbox, or coat to help them be more visible to cyclists and drivers.

If you are a Kent school teacher, school chaperone, school transport assistant, sports coach or community leader you can order the reflective keyrings [via the KMFm website](#).

If you are a parent and looking for safety tips to teach your child whilst crossing the road during these winter months, [head on over to our Road Safety website](#) to read some great advice.



Did you know that you can keep up to date with the latest from [Kent County Council](#) by signing up to our residents' newsletter?

Why not join our mailing list today and you'll receive:

- updates and news
- information and guidance about our activities and services
- advice and suggestions on where to get help and support.

[Subscribe to our residents' newsletter](#)

PRIMARY SCHOOL APPLICATIONS



Primary school applications opened on 5 November 2021 and close 17 January 2022.

Before you choose a school you may find it helpful to think about whether your child can be supported at the school.

Most children with SEND have the right to attend a mainstream school. Children who do not have an EHC plan should apply for a mainstream school place. We recommend that if an EHC needs assessment has started but is yet to be completed, then you should still apply for a school place as you may miss out on a place at one of your preferred schools.

[Apply for a primary school place](#)

Don't forget to [read our previous primary school newsletter](#) also had some great tips and guidance from local parents and teachers on moving into primary school.



Did you know that you can register to receive free email alerts when your child's nursery or school is closed due to bad weather or other emergencies?

[Sign up to receive alerts today](#)



[Shorne Woods Country Park](#) has been selected as the ideal place for a new Changing Places toilet to be installed.



CLlr Mike Hill also explained about previous work at the park to make it accessible

saying: “A lot of effort has gone into accessibility at Shorne Woods, with the installation of over two miles of easy access routes that are ideal for wheelchair users and pushchairs. Visitors can also hire Trumper vehicles to explore the park. The Changing Places toilet is another step towards full inclusivity, and we look forward to welcoming even more people to the park now.”

Find out more about the [accessibility at Shorne Woods Country Park](#) or [find your nearest Changing Place toilet](#).

**FOSTER
FOR
KENT**

Over 40 years' experience helping children in Kent find a supportive home.



Our [Kent Fostering](#) team are appealing for new foster carers to provide a safe and loving home for babies and children under 5 years old (including sibling groups). Due to a current shortage of foster carers able to look after children aged 0 to 5 years old (who are often as part of wider sibling groups), this specific need is now being felt more than ever.

Fostering is caring for a child in your own home when they are unable to live with their birth family. If you choose to become a foster carer, you can improve a child's life by offering them support, guidance and care, in a safe and nurturing environment.

You can stay in contact with the birth families of the children placed with them, with a view to help children return to their birth family where possible.

All our foster carers are supported by a team of professionals from social services, education, and health care.

We can offer you fantastic training, generous payments, and great benefits.

If you are looking to become a foster parent or are wanting to find out more about our Kent Fostering team, please call us today on **03000 42 00 02** or [visit our Kent Fostering website to find out more](#).

CXK partners with KMPF for SEND Progression



Building on their successful partnership and series of well received [webinars](#), which focused on young people with SEND and their career choices, CXK and KMPF are launching a new virtual information, advice and guidance service which, is “free” to access for young people with SEND who are interested in higher education. Aimed at supporting some of the most vulnerable in our community, this service provides a welcome source of support.

Any young person from Kent and Medway with SEND, who is interested can now self-refer or be referred by their school, college, or parent/carer to access FREE, unlimited (subject to capacity), independent advice, delivered virtually by one of our trained and experienced career guidance professionals. This offer is in addition to the support already provided via our contracted schools service and the national careers service team.

[Find out more about what support is available.](#)

BEMIX - employment support



At [BEMIX](#) we are here to support you!

We have two new courses to help prepare you for future employment.

Preparation for employment

Preparation for employment is a full-time programme for young person with

learning difficulties and/or autism (with an EHCP). The programme helps to prepare you for the world of work through enterprise activities, work experience, employer visits, functional skills and more. We aim to provide EPIC opportunities, which stands for: Each Person's Individual Career opportunities. This means, we work with you to identify what you want to learn. For example, developing your confidence, work related skills and identifying what career paths you want to focus on. This is a pre-internship year and suitable for you if you need more support to prepare for the world of work before going into a Supported Internship year.

Supported internships

A supported internship is about you as a young person with a learning difficulty and/or autism (with an EHCP) achieving high quality, paid work that lasts and begins to build a career. It's a full-time, one-year course. You can join this programme instead of, or after, 6th form or college. Join whenever the time is right for you to move from education into a job and career.

To join one of our programmes, you need to:

- live in Swale, Medway, Gravesham, or Canterbury
- have an education, health, and care (EHC) plan
- be aged 16 to 24
- want to move towards being employed at the end of the programme.

If you match all the above and want to work, this could be the opportunity you've been waiting for!

Visit our website to find out more:

- [Preparation for employment page](#)
- [Supported internship page](#)

Or email referrals@bemix.org