

Education Workshop Notes 10th March 2011

Building Effective Communication between Schools and Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs

Parents identified the headings of Information, Assessment, Provision, Transparency, Progress, Review and Feedback as areas in which they would like better communication with schools and educational settings. This would enable them to access a comprehensive range of support and information at the earliest possible stage, to have a better understanding of how their child's special educational needs are met and to work in partnership with the school. Parents raised the following points in order to assist in developing these areas.

Information

How do parents find information and support when there are concerns or SEND is identified?

Health Visitors and staff in Pre Schools/Nurseries are important first contacts; there should be speedy responses to initial concerns. Home visits are a crucial part of early identification of needs, many slip through the net - as Health Visitors have such large case loads they have to prioritise.

Springboard Opportunity Pre school is a crucial source of information, but many children do not pass through Springboard. If a child doesn't attend nursery they will not be "in the system" until they start school. The Springboard 'Link Programme' is a programme which supports children into their first year at school and provides information - could be extended to all children with SEND starting school ?

Health Visitors, GPs, Children's Centres, Nurseries/Pre school staff and Early Years Sencos, Portage, School staff/Sencos need to give out information. Information needs to be consistent across the authority.

Early Years and Primary School Information packs could be given out to parents when needs are first identified. Parents say they didn't even know what a Senco was, many have not heard of IEPs or Provision Maps, information should be provided to explain this.

It is essential that parents are given information about the Parent Partnership Service and the Family Information Service. Training for Educational settings should include the need to provide parents with information.

Sencos in Early years, Primary and Secondary settings could set up Information meetings, informal coffee mornings for parents, schools could provide an Information area, parents could help schools to set this up, schools can ask for Parent Partnership Service input.

Schools should put SEND information on their school websites with links to Parent Partnership Service and Family Information Service; information could be included in the schools prospectus.

Schools should use opportunities, i.e when they see parents at child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or review meetings, parents' evenings, schools open evenings, to provide SEND information.

Assessment

How do parents find out about in school and professional assessments , what's the criteria, at what stage are they done, who does them?

Parents want information about how their child is getting on and any concerns. Parents want clear, simple information about the national curriculum levels their child is at.

Parents would like more training for school staff to identify and report on concerns.

Parents say it can be really difficult to interpret the progress reports.

If there are concerns they want clarity about the SEN system and what will be done to help and how this will be reviewed.

Parents want to know when assessments are taking place, why, who, and what for?

When parents sign for consent to discuss their child at a Consultation Planning Meeting they need to have the process explained to them.

They want an opportunity to contribute to assessments and be provided with results.

Some authorities have piloted the Achievement for All 'Structured Conversation' model. This is a listening conversation between parents and a key teacher focussing on:

- Parents sharing knowledge about the child to help school target its teaching, interventions and activities more effectively
- Setting achievable targets
- Joint knowledge to support progress and outcomes
- To raise aspirations of school, parents and their child
- Actions jointly for school and parents to support child's learning

This has been successful, and is to be extended across more authorities; this opportunity would improve communication/engagement/partnership between parents of children with SEND and their school. Parents would like North Somerset CYPS to consider using this approach in schools.

Provision

How do parents know how their child's needs are met, what is put in place, how are parents involved in planning?

Parents say they would like more information provided about how their child's needs are met, the SEN structure and criteria, what schools can provide to support, how they do it, and the effectiveness of their interventions.

They would like clear IEPs and IEP review meetings; IEP 'surgeries' are one example of good practice taking place in some schools. Parents do not want to quickly sign an IEP at the end of parents evening; they would like a proper discussion about it and to be involved in planning as per SEN Code of Practice guidance.

Parents would like copies of their child's provision map. Provision maps are valued but they do need to clearly show how the school is providing for the individual child; parents do not want generalised provision maps showing provision for the class or school as a whole.

Transparency

How can schools provide parents with transparent information about meeting their child's needs?

As in provision, clear IEPs and Provision Maps, progress reports.

Parents say more dialogue is needed between school and parents to explain how the SEND system works. If schools don't have the time to do this they should signpost parents to the Parent Partnership Service who can provide parents with this information. This should also be made available on school websites.

Parents would like more transparency regarding their child's SEN progress levels, i.e if their child is on P scales, someone to explain how this works.

Parents of children with Statements are able to see what is provided by the statement. Parents of children at School Action and School Action Plus would also like to have their children's needs clearly set out for them to understand.

Parents want prior discussion before they sign anything to explain what it is for.

Parents would like to have an opportunity to have discussions with professionals when they see their child in school.

Parents would like more information about how their child's needs are funded and to see how this is put into place.

Parents say improved training and the sharing of good practice will help school staff to work in partnership with parents.

Progress

How can parents understand their child's progress?

Parents would like to be included in joint discussions with school about their child's educational progress.

Parents would like to know if their child is supported at School Action or School Action Plus.

They would like regular clear progress updates

Parents would like to know if their child has an IEP

Parents would like to have regular IEP reviews, to know if their child has met targets set and to be included in planning future targets and intervention.

Parents would like to be informed about further consultations with professionals.

If a child is not making progress parents need to know sooner rather than later, to be included in discussions regarding next steps.

Schools need to develop regular dialogue with parents on learning outcomes.

It was noted that Early Years SEN provision works well, (probably due to the link programme) it does not always continue past reception, there should be more continuity throughout the schools years; a structured conversation would support this.

Review

How can parents be included?

Parents say they would like IEP reviews to be with the class teacher, LSA if appropriate and the Senco, and to have meetings independently of parents' evenings, specifically to review the IEP.

Parents say they would value someone being appointed as their 'key person'

Parents would like to feel they are partners and welcomed into the Annual Review of their child's statement.

Parents would like to ensure they receive the annual review paperwork at least two weeks prior to the review meeting, as directed in the Education Act.

Parents say this is often not the case and it leaves them at a disadvantage when the professionals attending the review have already seen the paperwork.

Parents say children at School Action Plus, especially those with Audit Funding would benefit from a similar annual review opportunity, including the more detailed review in year 9, when statemented children start their Transition Plan. There are many children in mainstream schools without statements who need a Transition Plan type of support to assist them through this time.

Parents would like more scrutiny of school systems, i.e checking of IEP's, annual reviews processes.

Feedback

Parents need to feel that they are part of the partnership to support their child's special educational needs. Many feel particularly vulnerable, but the more parents are 'invited in' the more partnerships can be built. Early interventions will improve parental confidence, and confident, well informed parents are less likely to be confrontational, they will be less anxious about how their child's needs are being met and will become more engaged with their child's education, which has been proven to have a profound impact on the child's progress.