

Planning for Children with SEND: What Parents Tell Us

Parents Questionnaire and focus groups

Leeds Educational Psychology Team Summer 2021

Code of Practice says

When the Code of Practice was introduced in 2014 one of the key changes was 'a clearer focus on the participation of children and young people and parents in decision-making at individual and strategic levels'

The Code recognises parents as key partners

*6.7 In fulfilling these duties schools should have regard to the principles set out in Chapter 1. In particular, they should ensure that **children, parents, and young people** are actively involved in decision-making throughout the approaches set out in this chapter.*

Further extracts are in the appendix at the end of this document

Context

This piece of work was carried out to explore with parents of children with SEND their hopes and wishes about how planning for the education of their children worked.

The work involved core questions thought an online questioner with parents through Voice and Influence Team, followed by a focus group to explore some of the themes that emerged.

Questionnaire had 27 respondents

Focus groups had 5 parents to explore areas identified as key themes from questionnaire

The seven questions based on the Code of Practice were asked and responses explored for key themes

- How does / could your school help you stay informed about the changes to the support your child receives at school?
- What has your child's school done / could do to make you feel confident they understand your child's needs?
- How does / could your child's school help you feel confident they can meet your child's needs?
- What does / could your child's school do to help you feel confident that they have high hopes / goals for your child?
- What helps / could help you work together with school to ensure they are meeting your child's needs?
- How does / could your child's school involve you in planning to meet your child's needs?

From the responses key themes were highlighted

- How it feels
- Roles and relationships
- Communication
- Coordination and planning

Suggestion from the focus group and survey are set out below

How does it feel?

'Feeling listened to as a parent and our own understanding of our child's needs building a collective understanding'

'How school articulate the outcome focus on the child rather than staffs needs'

How schools and setting respond and engage parents really reflect their underlying values. Schools can play a positive part in parents feeling heard and enabled. Parent really recognise the importance of the values that schools express in their practice and how it makes them feel.

Parents expressed these things help

- Personalised approaches and taking a holistic approach, looking at the child as an individual
- Highlighting the positives and solution seeking focused on children's needs in a holistic way
- Feeling included as part of the solution through engaging in a shared conversation which uses pupil and parent voice to inform planning around the child
- Being proactive and consistent in moving things forward
- Recognising how adaption may be needed and how this will be supported and implemented in school

People (roles and relationships)

'Thinking about how my child's needs are understood by wider school eg parent and other staff and how this is best communicated not just held by SEND and parent'

Parents expressed how the roles of staff were key in them feeling confident that their children's needs would be met in school and considered a this from a range of perspectives.

They highlighted these themes

- All staff understanding my child's needs and there's clear communication between parents, SEND teams and school staff
- Appropriate sharing of reports and actions by school such as professional's reports, funding applications, school assessments
- Staff who are approachable and not judgemental and understanding the struggles of parents
- Feeling that someone is advocating within your child in the system.
- Whole staff awareness, training and knowing how to embed this in practice
- Clear points of contact
- Ways to establish relationships.

Communication

'Being adaptable and amending provision through reviews sharing feedback from assessment and professional and us a parents how they are using to take next steps'

Parents really recognised that communication both in terms of being heard and hearing what is happening, the dynamic and collaboration across these too. For some parents knowing about the day to day experiences was important; for other being clear about the plan and review. Parents valued having a conversation about how best to communicate and how it could work for both schools and parent.

Key points included

- Clear communication
- Having a named person who has an overview of all the plans for child and having a clear way to contact them for any additional clarification/ concerns/ updates of info
- Parent able to contact and communicate with school so they are listened to and valued;
- Views are used to inform practice and approached e.g. change and adapt provision and approach based on parent feedback
- Different situations need different communication modes e.g.:
- Daily update via dojo or tapestry end of day catch up for ongoing info where needed or child not able to share experiences of day
- Regularly planned updates/ through statutory process/ meeting and reviews involving external professionals

Coordination and planning

'We have regular half termly meetings. Occasionally I will think that I could/should have been involved in a decision, or that it would have helped if I had been briefed in advance of a change in school e.g. different teaching arrangements so that I can prepare her for the change but overall, I think we are appropriately involved in planning'

A key factor for parents was that there was a plan, that different information was joined up and knowing when it would be reviewed.

Particular concern for parents were points of transition between year groups, particularly between settings, and for changes in staff.

- Clear pathways, goals and planning for the future by setting and reviewing targets at follow-up meetings
- Regular meetings that allow parent to be involved and influence planning and decision making
- Assessments and reports are shared with schools and parents and clarity on how these will be used to take next steps
- Planning is child-focused and includes parent and child's voice
- How plans consider times of transition across years/ between settings e.g. challenges of supporting young people at college

Appendix 1

Code of Practice

6.19 The first response to such progress should be high quality teaching targeted at their areas of weakness. Where progress continues to be less than expected the class or subject teacher, working with the SENCO, should assess whether the child has SEN. While informally gathering evidence (***including the views of the pupil and their parents***) schools should not delay in putting in place extra teaching or other rigorous interventions designed to secure better progress, where required. The pupil's response to such support can help identify their particular needs

6.20. For some children, SEN can be identified at an early age. However, for other children and young people difficulties become evident only as they develop. All those who work with children and young people should be alert to emerging difficulties and respond early. In particular, ***parents know their children best and it is important that all professionals listen and understand when parents express concerns about their child's development***. They should also listen to and address any concerns raised by children and young people themselves.

6.39. These ***early discussions with parents*** should be structured in such a way that they develop a good understanding of the pupil's areas of strength and difficulty, the parents' concerns, the agreed outcomes sought for the child and the next steps. A short note of these early discussions should be added to the pupil's record on the school information system and given to the parents. Schools should also tell children, parents and young people about the local authority's Information, Advice and Support Service.

6.45 In identifying a child as needing SEN support the class or subject teacher, working with the SENCO, should carry out a clear analysis of the pupil's needs. This should draw on the teacher's assessment and experience of the pupil, their previous progress and attainment, as well as information from the school's core approach to pupil progress, attainment, and behaviour. It should also draw on other subject teachers' assessments where relevant, the individual's development in comparison to their peers and national data, ***the views and experience of parents, the pupil's own views and***, if relevant, advice from external support services. Schools should take seriously any concerns raised by a parent. These should be recorded and compared to the setting's own assessment and information on how the pupil is developing.

6.46 This assessment should be ***reviewed regularly***. This will help ensure that support and intervention are matched to need, barriers to learning are identified and overcome, and that a clear picture of the interventions put in place and their effect is developed. For some types of SEN, the way in which a pupil responds to an intervention can be the most reliable method of developing a more accurate picture of need.

..Parents should be fully aware of the planned support and interventions and, where appropriate, plans should seek parental involvement to reinforce or contribute to progress at home. The information set out in 6.39 should be readily available to and discussed with the pupil's parents.