



CONNECT INFORM EMPOWER

Meeting with Tim Armstrong and Scarlett Milward

20 December 2017

School placements at phase transfers

Background: For children transitioning from nursery to infants, infants to juniors, and primary to secondary school, the local authority must issue final EHC plans naming the next educational placement by 15th of February. As in previous years, there have been more applications for specialist placements than there are places available (e.g. 48 applications for Bents Green). There are an additional 40 families requesting a move from a mainstream to a specialist placement.

The issue: In the past, not all children were placed by the 15 February deadline. Communication with parents whose first choice could not be accommodated has often been poor. Children who had been placed in a special school were erroneously sent letters welcoming them to a mainstream school, causing upset for families.

Work to be done: *In the short term:* The SEN Team is currently holding block consultations with specialist provisions. Placement panels will meet in January. If a family's first choice is not agreed, the SEN Team would like to contact the family by telephone to discuss alternatives. However, whether this is feasible will depend on the number of families affected.

In the long term: Planning needs to start earlier, e.g. a discussion about secondary school should already take place in Y4, and preparing for adulthood should start in Y9. The letter inviting parents to apply for a secondary school place needs to make it clear that requests for children with EHC plans will be passed to the SEN Team.

Update (January 2018): All 106 families of statemented Y6 pupils have now been sent a draft EHCP, and all should be issued with a final plan by 15th February. Specialist placements will be discussed at a meeting with primary and secondary special school head teachers on 26th January. This will look afresh at children's needs – there should be no foregone conclusions based on the previous placement. If first or second choice of placement is not agreed, parents need to be told why, and they need to be given a contact person they can talk to.

Progress review: March 2018.

Inclusion Strategy

Background: Tim has written a draft Inclusion Strategy. This has 4 key themes: 1) identification and assessment of need, 2) support, provision and commissioning, 3) improving outcomes through high quality, partnership, leadership and practice, and 4) engagement of children, young people and their families and the workforce and good communication. There will be a strategic review of SEN provision, which will feed into key theme 2. Tim is also commissioning a review of provision for learners with social communication difficulties.

The issue: It is not clear how parents and other stakeholders will be consulted on the other key themes. There is a risk that previous work (e.g. Sarah Draper's position paper on educational provision for learners with ASD) is not taken into account, and that parents are asked the same questions yet again.

Work to be done: SPCF will share any relevant previous reports with the local authority. These may precede current staff. SPCF will also summarise parental feedback on SEN provision from the past two years, and feed this into the strategic review.

Update (January 2018): Reports have been shared and a summary of parent feedback collected by SPCF has been submitted. This will also be worked into the action plan for the Inclusion Strategy. The Inclusion Programme Board and the Autism Strategy group have requested copies of this document, and the Inclusion Programme Board wants to consider parental feedback on a termly basis.

Progress review: February 2018

Attendance letters

Background: When children's attendance drops below a certain level, schools automatically send out letters about poor attendance. Because the system is automated, these letters are also sent out when this is clearly inappropriate, e.g. if a child is not in school due to anxiety or a serious illness.

Work to be done: Tim will discuss this issue with SENCOs and find out whether it is possible to manually override the system. If not, then a workaround needs to be found, e.g. by sending out a letter to families asking them to ignore the automated attendance letters.

Update (January 2018): This has been raised with Marie McGreavy, LA lead for attendance.

Support in school

Background: A school must use its best endeavours to secure that the special educational provision called for by the pupil's or student's special educational needs is made.

The issue: Parents have flagged up numerous examples where this is not happening, e.g. child's TA not available as helping out with Christmas play, disruptive child excluded from certain lessons and made to sit in corridor, child left in soiled underwear when the class TA is busy with other children. When parents raise issues like these with the teacher or SENCO, they are often told that the school doesn't have the funding to provide all the support their child needs. This even happens when the provision required is set out in an EHC plan. One parent was told that the school could not get top-up funding as the locality had spent all their money on training [Tim confirmed that this is incorrect, as localities have a crisis fund]. Parents are often reluctant to make a complaint to the governing body as they fear that their child/ren will be penalised for it.

Work to be done: The local authority will provide training for school governors and head teachers on their equality duties. The Inclusion Task Force is developing a school data set with a number of indicators which can be used to identify schools that need additional challenge and support around inclusion. Parents felt that there should be a way for parents to flag up schools that are in breach of their equality duties, but there is currently no system for doing this, and nobody who has responsibility for this at a local authority level. For now, parents should be encouraged to raise their concerns with the school.

Update: Learn Sheffield provides training for governors on SEND. The Inclusion Taskforce is currently looking at SEN data to identify schools causing concerns. The Regional Schools Commissioner also

has a role to play in holding academies to account. Agreed that SPCF will inform John Bigley (Manager Admissions & Access) about schools that are not welcoming to children with SEND.

EHCP queries

Background: At a recent SPCF workshop on EHC plans, parents asked a number of questions.

The questions:

Do advice givers for EHC needs assessments need specific qualifications?	No, but any private reports would be expected to detail the experience and qualifications of the advice giver.
How would a young person's mental capacity be assessed, and how would it be logged that they did not have mental capacity to make decisions in relation to their EHCP?	Mental capacity can only be assessed in relation to a specific decision, at a specific time. This would normally be done by Social Care, and detailed in section D.
Can alternative qualifications, such as ASDAN, be specified in an EHCP?	An EHC plan would normally detail the provision required to achieve a qualification, not the qualification itself. Specific qualifications would only be listed if there was a clear need for this.
Where would dietary needs and provision be included?	In the Health sections of the plan.

Child in Need reviews

Background: Parents of children who receive overnight respite have received a letter informing them that it is council policy to visit their child every 4-6 weeks. This different from the previous of regime of 6-monthly reviews.

The issue: The letters coincided with the launch of the short breaks consultation, which led parents to assume that their respite was going to be reduced. The council does not differentiate between children who are classed as "children in need" due to disability, or due to safeguarding concerns. Parents have reported that the social workers carrying out the visits had not read their child's files. Parents feel that the frequency of visits should be agreed with families.

Work to be done: Tim will remind social workers that they need to read the files before visiting families, and that these conversations should be used to fill in any gaps. It would also be beneficial to discuss with families if a 4-6 week review frequency is appropriate for them.

Update (January 2018): This issue has been flagged up with the Children with Disabilities Team.