

Meeting with ACT4SEN parents' group

16th February 2018, 10am-12pm, at St Mary's Community Centre

In attendance: Parents (Shelley Eggleston, Sarah Raynes, Clare Jones, Melissa Simmonds, Joanne Ferguson, Deborah Woodhouse, Jeremy Spooner, Mark Wild, Tracey Wild, Mel Frith, Gemma Vaughan), Jayne Ludlam (Executive Director People Portfolio, SCC), Dawn Walton (Director Commissioning, Inclusion and Learning, SCC), Tim Armstrong (Head of SEN, SCC), Robert Carter (Senior Commissioning Manager, Mental Health Portfolio, Sheffield CCG), Scarlett Milward (Children's Commissioning Manager, Sheffield CCG), Katie Monette (SPCF Chair), Eva Juusola (SPCF Participation Coordinator, notes)

Actions from previous meeting:

Re-shape meetings between SPCF representatives and Tim Armstrong	ACHIEVED
Develop use of information from two-year-old development checks and reviews in Y4 and Y9	EARLY STAGES of implementation: Agreements made with Sheffield Children's Hospital Foundation Trust for integrated 2-year reviews. Protocols have been developed to identify developmental issues and intervene early. SCC is currently recruiting a Preparing for Adulthood Programme Manager, who will look at Y9 reviews
Do a refresh of SPCF's "State of Sheffield" survey	NOT STARTED. Hoping to do this with 2018/19 DfE parent participation grant
Involve parents in the commissioning process	NOT STARTED. The outcomes of the strategic review of SEN provision, including parents' views, will inform future commissioning.
Find out about the Rotherham Genuine Partnerships	IN PROGRESS. Katie and Scarlett are planning to attend Genuine Partnerships workshop on 5 th March in York.
Involve parents/children in development of pilots	IN PROGRESS. This was done as part of the sensory pilot, which is currently being reviewed by Sheffield Children's Hospital.
Use social media channels to provide information to parents more proactively	IN PROGRESS. Tim is planning to write monthly updates

Item 1 – Communication

Parent feedback:

- No reply to communication from SEN Team, not even when parent made formal complaint
- Responsiveness is variable and depends on who your locality SEND manager is
- No communication after annual review, EHCP not updated
- No clear pathways for transition to adulthood, parents having to talk to different agencies
- Having to fight/advocate for your child all the time is exhausting

- Took long time to update EHCP, so not up to date when LA consulted with potential schools. Parents not involved in deciding what information is sent to schools
- Parent disappointed that SEND manager felt their attendance was not needed at transfer review meeting
- No proactive communication, so parents don't understand the process, what's expected, what their rights are. Children miss out when parents don't have the information they need
- Many parents get information through schools, which is not always correct. Sometimes schools have their own agenda and deliberately withhold information.

Officer response:

- The SEN Team has not communicated well with individual families, and this is not good enough. The team is working hard to put this right.
- The remit of the SEN Team is being misunderstood. Its function is to administer a statutory process. They are not the experts on all SEN needs and not there to 'solve' all issues. We need to be clearer about the different roles and give out consistent messages.
- The SEN Team expects schools to work with parents in relation to the EHC process (e.g. arrange annual reviews, making requests for assessments), and to provide them with information. We are looking at city-wide training for SENCOs.
- Annual reviews have not received as much attention as they should have done due to the focus on statement-to-EHCP conversions. There will be a renewed focus on annual reviews from March.
- Parental concerns should be routinely acted on; parents should not feel that they need to come to a meeting like this to resolve them.

Item 2 – Request to assess

Parent feedback:

- Many EHC needs assessment requests are refused, for reasons that do not seem accurate
- Refusal letters are sent out very quickly, and there are no panel notes available
- Parents don't know who makes the decisions, based on what information and what criteria
- Several parents reported having received another child's paperwork
- Being refused an assessment can delay support being put into place – this can have a significant impact on a child's life
- Some children mask at school, so their issues are not obvious (e.g. girls with autism)
- What can parents do if the school does not take their concerns seriously and refuses to put a MyPlan in place?
- SENCOs are often part time and can struggle to find the time to deal with assessment requests

Officer response:

- There are around 500 new assessment requests per year. The LA would like this number to reduce, but not by refusing more requests – it should be the result of more children having their needs met effectively at the SEN Support stage.

- The LA must apply two legal tests in the EHC process: 1) **When deciding whether to assess:** if the child has or may have SEN and if it also may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for them by way of an EHC plan. 2) **When deciding whether to issue a plan:** if the child requires special educational provision that needs to be made through an EHC plan, usually provision that would not normally be available in a mainstream setting.
- The information about the EHC needs assessment process on the local offer needs to be updated.
- The Autism Strategy group will look at raising awareness of how autism manifests differently in girls.
- All of Sheffield's mainstream secondary schools will soon be academies. The LA has lost a lot of influence over schools.
- There is a concern being raised that some schools direct parents to other schools who are known to be inclusive, but these schools then end up with more high needs children than their delegated budget can support. The current education policy offers schools no incentives for being inclusive.
- The request to assess process will be combined with the EHC Placement Panel from after February half term and chaired by Tim to ensure greater consistency and robust practice. There is a need for similar robust practice where decisions are being made in localities. Currently two localities are involved in the request to assess process. This is being reviewed.
- The LA is working to support schools by offering training and support services that wrap around schools.

Item 3a – Quality of EHC plans

Parent feedback:

- EHCPs are often cut and paste jobs from reports
- Possible safeguarding implications when information in EHCP is wrong
- For some parents, having right school named on the plan is the most important thing
- Having the right reports is crucial, but report writers often don't know what to include. Reports can be too positive, or not specific enough. If needs are not well described, this will impact on provision sections
- Some parents have been told: "If it's not written in the plan, the school won't do it"
- Important to have the right people at the EHCP meeting
- What can the LA do if school is not making the provision described?
- If provision is not specified, a request for help from adult social care won't be approved by funding panels
- Neither parents nor professionals fully understand what should and shouldn't be included in an EHCP
- When a family moved from Sheffield to Derbyshire, the provision in their EHCP was made a lot more specific and a substantial amount of funding was attached to the plan
- Parents feel they have to re-write EHCPs if they don't give an accurate description of their child

Officer response:

- When writing EHC plans, SEN Managers depend on the advice given by professionals. Where advice is clear and specific this should be able to be lifted into the EHC Plan.
- Work is ongoing with health professionals to develop common templates and training on detailing specific strengths, needs and provision
- The LA is developing standardised templates for advice givers
- The LA will clarify what should and should not be included in an EHCP
- Schools have a responsibility to meet a child's identified needs, whether these are written into an EHC Plan or not. Needs change regularly, but the plan should not be changed every time a need changes; however, the education provider should still respond to this need.
- The Preparing for Adulthood agenda needs to be addressed. The LA will improve pathways and get better at integrated working
- If Derbyshire is better at writing EHC plans, then we should look at their model

Item 3b – Funding linked to EHC plans

Parent feedback:

- Schools tell parents they haven't got the resources to meet child's SEN
- It feels like nobody is holding schools to account. Should school governors and academy trustees be doing more?
- The IR model has changed, and less IR funding is reaching IR pupils. Schools with IRs are reluctant to publicise them.

Officer response:

- The LA has not given schools enough guidance and structure regarding the use of locality top-up funding.
- All mainstream schools receive notional SEN funding in their school budget to support learners with SEN. They can then access locality funding in addition to this.
- The LA wants to develop an SEN funding audit so that schools can be supported and challenged in their use of funding. The LA has asked the Department for Education for good practice examples.
- The funding for IRs has not been reduced.

Item 4 – Mediation and tribunals

Parent feedback:

- Parents feel ignored and out their depth; they don't understand what the mediation process should look like
- Mediation outcomes were not minuted, so there was no evidence
- Mediation now feels like "part of the process" for parents
- Waste of resources – decisions reached in mediation could have been taken by just taking a closer look at the available information
- Sheffield don't win many SEN tribunals -> waste of money, parental stress

- The SEN tribunal has in the past dismissed appeals due to the LA not having submitted their paperwork. Why let these cases proceed?
- School placements: how you deal with the most difficult cases is the real measure of success
- Tribunal appeals can mean loss of transition time for children

Officer response:

- Initially Collis Mediation were not writing notes as they advised it was not part of the mediation process. They are now writing action points and circulating to all parties.
- The SEN Manager with responsibility for tribunals is leaving, and Ben Allchin will be taking over this responsibility. The SEN Team wants to sit down with families more, BEFORE mediation, to explain decisions and find a way forward.
- The LA was able to issue 98.5% of EHC plans for Y6/Y7 transfers by the 15th February deadline this year. They were able to allocate 84% of parent's first preference and 88.5% of first, second or third preference. The team has been phoning parents who did not get their first choice. It will be harder to meet the 31 March deadline for those transitioning to post-16 education.

Item 5 – Health reports

Parent feedback:

- How can CAMHS input into EHCP reviews?
- Health reports are not much use if the Health professionals don't know what to put in them
- Parents had to chase health and social care professionals to attend meetings. There is often no representation from Health at EHCP meetings
- Parents have found that vital health information was missing from EHC plans, e.g. about child's epilepsy, hearing impairment
- Health aspects are often neglected for children with ASD

Officer response:

- Before each annual review, the school should contact the health SEND single point of access service to establish health professional involvement and invite relevant professionals to attend or send a report. However, the pathway for schools to make this request has not been clearly defined. Scarlett to take this away to consider how health can develop input into EHCP reviews and link into schools more effectively.
- Health has appointed a new Designated Clinical Officer who will act as the central point of contact for all the health professionals involved and provide quality assurance.
- The CCG is working to develop a joint single point of access to provide a holistic overview of children who require significant input from multiple services that requires a joint approach to meet a child's needs and to provide greater input into EHCP.

Actions:

- Jayne committed to extending her “open door” policy to parents of children / young people with SEND. She offered to hold one session per month, starting in April.
- Jayne to revisit the vision for Sheffield’s Inclusion Strategy at her next meeting with parents and consider whether the LA is still focusing on the right priorities
- LA officers to look at themes emerging from the strategic review of SEN provision
- LA officers to develop clearer social care transition pathways
- Scarlett to consider how health can develop input into EHCP reviews and link into schools more effectively.

Date for next meeting: to be arranged for end of May / beginning of June