



Sheffield Parent Carer Forum

3rd Parent Carer Conference

11th October 2010

Report

Introduction

The Sheffield Parent Carer Forum's third conference was held on the 11th of October 2010 at St. Mary's Church and Conference Centre and focused on the education of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities in Sheffield. It attracted around 80 parents and 20 professionals from all over the city.

Eleven organisations provided information stalls: SIGN (Sheffield Information Giving Network), Sheffield INDEX, ACCT (Aspergers Children & Carers Together), Sheffield Parent Partnership, Sheffield Carers Centre, Epilepsy Action, Parent to Parent, ADHD Project, TaMHS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools), Children's Voices, and the Caring Sharing Project (Mencap).

Opening speeches

Jayne Woodward (Co-chair of the Parent Carer Forum) welcomed everyone to the Forum's third conference.

She informed delegates that, due to the full schedule, she would not be able to give an update on recent activities. Jayne asked delegates to refer to the Forum's website (www.sheffieldparentcarerforum.org.uk) and the September issue of the newsletter for more information. She urged Forum members to provide email addresses in order to receive regular updates. Regrettably, the Forum lacks the resources needed to contact members by post as frequently as by email.

Jayne proceeded to introduce the conference topic: the education of pupils with SEN and disabilities. Education-related issues are frequently cited by parents as the main causes of stress and anxiety for their families. The Local Authority has acknowledged that provision for pupils with additional needs requires urgent attention. Officers have now drafted a new strategy for meeting pupils' additional needs - the Inclusive Learning Strategy (ILS).

The Forum feels that parents need to be key players in the further development of this strategy and associated action plan. For this reason, the Forum decided to make the consultation on the Inclusive Learning Strategy a key feature of the conference.

Jayne acknowledged that there is always a risk that consultations are merely used as a tick-box exercise, and do not lead to any tangible improvements. This risk is compounded by the looming spending cuts and the uncertainty over education and SEN policy at a national level. However, Jayne felt that the ILS consultation represented a unique opportunity to influence education policy in Sheffield. She stressed that it would be hard to dismiss a high level of similar responses. Jayne pointed out that the Forum has parent representatives on the ILS Steering group, which will oversee the further development and implementation of the ILS and the action plan. She urged all parents to take part in the consultation, and reminded them of the tight deadline (15th of October).

She explained that the morning session would feature a presentation by Mary Collins (Principal Educational Psychologist) about the Inclusive Learning Strategy. Following the presentation, delegates would be asked split up into discussion groups. These would be based loosely around the ILS objectives, but would try to broaden their scope in order to capture a wide range of views. Each group would be asked to identify up to 5 key points and note these down on a flipchart.

As an alternative to the group discussions, delegates had the option to attend a workshop on SEN law led by Mhairi Walker, a solicitor from law firm Irwin Mitchell.

Jayne invited parents to use the graffiti walls to write down their views, both on specific issues and in more general terms.

With regard to the afternoon session, Jayne advised that parents could either use this time to look at the findings from the group discussions and fill in their ILS questionnaires, or take part in a “Meet the Manager” event. Jayne expressed her delight that managers from a large number of services accessed by disabled children had come to the conference to talk to parents. She emphasised the importance of partnership working in order to improve services for children and families.

Jayne then asked those parents who had been attending strategic groups as parent representatives to give a brief update on their work:

Deborah Woodhouse (Trustee of the Parent Carer Forum) spoke about her work on the **DCATCH (Disabled Children's Access to Childcare) group**.

Through the DCATCH initiative, Sheffield has received a one-off grant payment of £119K. So far, the group has decided to use some of this money to:

- extend the remit of the early intervention grant (for disabled children under the age of 5) to cover school holidays and not just term time
- set up a network of specialist childminders who are trained, supported and funded to care for children and young people (0-19) with special needs.

Other ideas currently being considered include:

- producing an information booklet about childcare for children with additional needs
- increasing the pool of 1:1 carers for disabled children by recruiting students, teaching assistants etc., training them up and registering them on the voluntary register.

Deborah mentioned that the Forum has been approached by a number of parents with concerns about **home-school transport**. Issues raised included a lack of training for drivers/escorts, the length of time some children spend on the bus, problems with needs assessments, and parents not being informed about transport arrangements for their children in a timely manner. The Forum is working with the transport service to try and resolve these issues.

Joanne Ferguson (Trustee of the Parent Carer Forum) spoke about her involvement with the **Inclusive Learning Strategy**. Joanne is one of three parent reps on the ILS Steering Group. This group, which is made up of officers, head teachers, governors and parents, meets once a month to oversee the development of the ILS. To date, most of the group's time has been taken up by the ILS consultation. Once the responses to the consultation have been analysed, the group will modify the strategy and set up a number of task groups to develop an action plan. Joanne appealed to any parents interested in joining these task groups to fill in expression of interest forms.

Joanne went on to talk about the Forum's **Education subgroup**. This is a friendly, informal group for parents and carers, which meets once a month during school hours at a city centre location (meeting dates are on the Forum website). The group discusses SEN-related issues and tries to identify common themes. Parents who attend the ILS Steering Group and other education-related groups report back to the Education subgroup. They collect parents' views, questions etc. and feed these back to officers at strategic meetings.

Eva Juusola (Development Worker of the Parent Carer Forum) spoke about the increasing demand for parent representatives to sit on various **strategic groups**, such as the LDD Strategic Partnership Board, the ILS Steering Group, the Achievement for All Steering Group, the Progress and Achievement (Transition) Group, and possibly a group on Speech and Language Therapy. In addition, the Forum has been asked to facilitate consultations on direct payments, inclusive playgrounds, school transport, and short breaks for under-5s. Whilst the Forum is keen to seize every opportunity to give parents a voice, there is currently only a small group of parents who attend strategic meetings. The more meetings they attend, the less time they have to canvas other parents' views and report back to them. This makes the whole process less representative, and less transparent. Eva appealed to parents to respond to consultations, and to fill in the expression of interest forms distributed at the conference, to let the Forum know which groups they might like to attend.

Inclusive Learning Strategy Presentation

Mary Collins (Principal Educational Psychologist) gave an overview of the Inclusive Learning Strategy (ILS). She explained that this strategy is a consultative paper on a future vision and strategy for responding to pupils with additional educational needs.

The strategy is needed for a number of reasons, such as the lack of an overarching policy for all pupils with additional needs, a significant level of parental dissatisfaction, the need to improve pupil outcomes in a number of areas, and a school funding system which does not promote mainstream inclusion, leading to increased pressure on specialist placements.

Mary explained that the strategy is based on a wide definition of inclusion, which encompasses all mainstream and special schools. The strategy currently covers the 0-19 age range, but is envisaged to eventually extend beyond that into an "inclusive living strategy".

Mary ran through the principles underlying the ILS, which are:

- Successfully meeting pupils' additional needs regardless of location
- Sheffield school wherever possible (reducing reliance on out-of-area placements by developing provision in Sheffield)
- Early identification of needs and access to support
- Developing the local mainstream option
- Multiagency / integrated service delivery
- Strong partnership approach with parents
- Strong collaboration across special and mainstream schools
- Investment, innovation and development
- Gradual change - maintenance of current placements and provisions

Mary highlighted the strengths of additional needs provision in Sheffield, such as well-funded and highly-regarded special schools, low levels of permanent exclusions in all schools, stable initiation levels for statutory assessments, evidence of partnership working, and new funding through the "Achievement for All" pilot.

However, there are also significant weaknesses, such as a policy and strategy vacuum, high and increasing numbers of pupils attending specialist provisions, higher numbers of pupils attending placements outside of Sheffield, parental dissatisfaction, low levels of funding both for high-level and low-level needs in mainstream, a lack of accountability for delegated additional needs funding, high levels of unauthorised absence in mainstream and special schools, high fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools, and lower achievement levels.

Sheffield differs from similar authorities in that it has higher numbers of pupils on School Action Plus, higher numbers of pupils in Integrated Resources (IRs), higher numbers of pupils identified with autistic spectrum disorders, and relatively high resourcing levels in special schools and IRs.

Mary outlined the draft strategic objectives of the ILS:

- Raise the profile and priority of inclusive learning with all partners and stakeholders
- Extend provision within Sheffield's own mainstream and special schools in order to reduce reliance upon placements outside the city
- Partnership with parents and carers
- Increase the number of high-need children and young people able to successfully attend their local mainstream school
- Maximise the level of collaborative working across special schools, IRs and mainstream schools to support greater inclusion
- Assessing needs within an inclusive culture

In February 2011, a report will be presented to Cabinet which will summarise the response to the ILS consultation and propose an amended version of the ILS, as well as a 12-month action plan for each strategic objective.

Mary's presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session. Parents' questions centred around four key areas:

Funding: parents asked whether closures of mainstream schools could generate extra funds for SEN; how the authority hopes to change schools' attitudes when there is currently a financial disincentive for schools to accept pupils with additional needs; and whether the proposed shift in focus from special to mainstream would lead to reduced resources for special schools.

Training: parents commented that some schools are simply not interested in disability awareness training; that schools should provide opportunities for parents of children with SEN to teach other parents about disability; that some governors and head teachers actively discourage SENCOs from attending training; and that sometimes class teachers will say that a child is okay, when a specialist would make a different judgement.

Transition: parents asked what involvement the local authority has with post-16 students in schools; how it manages the transition to secondary school; and whether there is any specific support for pupils with ADHD to help them cope with transitions.

Accountability: parents asked whether there are any arrangements for monitoring the quality of provision at Sheffield College, Longley Park and Robert Ogden; and what parents can do when a child's needs are not being met, e.g. due to lack of staff training. Parents enquired whether SENCOs actually know the law (e.g. SEN Code of Practice, Disability Discrimination Act, Equality Act).

We are hoping to publish answers to these and other questions on the Forum's website (www.sheffieldparentcarerforum.org.uk).

For a full version of the Inclusive Learning Strategy and updates on the consultation, please visit <http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/plans-partnership-consultation/consultation/inclusivelearning>



Group discussions on ILS objectives

Delegates were asked to split up into groups based loosely around the questions in the ILS questionnaire (*text in blue italics*). Each group was asked to identify up to 5 key priorities.

Group 1

"We will work with all schools and partners so that inclusive learning is a high priority. (We think that a strong commitment to inclusion is needed from everyone working in and with schools, not just those who work with children with additional needs). How can we do this?"

1) Information:

- Information on how to obtain help for schools/SENCO
- Interschool communication and communication with parents
- Individual concerns need to be channelled via local councillors

2) Awareness:

- "In-school" work on disability awareness with all children and all staff
- Actions must speak louder than words
- Honesty about capabilities

3) Training:

- More training for teachers on special educational needs and disabilities
- Staff need time freed up for training and accessing expertise
- Training for "extended school" staff (e.g. after-school clubs)
- "Expert parents" - use their knowledge
- Audit of professional expertise within schools
- Schools should be challenged on their skills and knowledge and be given support by the Council

4) Leadership

- A strong lead from above, for schools
- Also leadership within schools (head teacher, year group leaders)
- School head teachers need to have an "open attitude" to their ability to "cope" with children with special educational needs
- Leadership in identifying and tackling problems within school
- Attitude of staff up and above the call of duty, e.g. teaching assistants

5) Every child matters:

- Recognition of good practice
- Local authority should gather parental ratings of schools
- Citywide awards for inclusive practice to help recognise and celebrate schools/staff who are supporting pupils with special needs
- Valuing children who are not high achievers
- Feedback to Ofsted - Green Paper: value ALL children

Group 2

"We will work together with all Sheffield's local community and special schools so that more children's needs can be met inside the City. How can we do this?"

- 1) Forward planning in identifying needs - child and local authority population
- 2) More information on what is available for parents and officers - primary, secondary, post-16
- 3) Lack of specialist/particular provision or skills to meet needs, e.g. for high-functioning autism (academic ability and poor social skills; these pupils need small groups)
- 4) Post-16/post-18 provision needs to develop independent living
- 5) Choices in how money is spent/allocated

Other comments from this group:

- Identifying biggest category of special needs in out-of-area placements and creating provision within the city
- Social skills determine an appropriate placement, but also academic factors
- Authority needs to be fully aware of what provision is available in free (?) city schools
- Annual review could be used for forward planning
- Residential care for students who need it. This can't be met in Sheffield
- Help from Parent Partnership
- Is a lack of funding behind the lack of specialist provision?
- Lack of specialist help for older students - i.e. post16, Bents Green within Sheffield
- Only out-of-area provision can meet academic and independent living skills in residential setting

Group 3

"We will work in a true partnership with parents and carers so that they have more choice about where their child with AEN is educated. How can we do this?"

- 1) Parents need more/better information about different options and what is available in each school
- 2) Decisions about school placements are made by professionals behind closed doors, to the detriment of parents' choice. THIS NEEDS TO CHANGE! Communication between parents and professionals must improve.
- 3) Some mainstream schools actively discourage interest from parents of disabled children. Emphasis on academic achievement and lack of funding for SEN act as a disincentive.
- 4) More training for parents and staff so that they can work together to support the children.
- 5) To get the appropriate place/support for your child you have to be prepared to battle, e.g. appeal to SEND tribunal. Increased stress on the family unit.

Other comments from this group:

- A third of the parents in this group felt their children were not in the right school
- All of the parents with children in special school in this group felt this was the most appropriate placement for their child
- The system often pits families against families
- Parents need more say in school placement decisions - they know their child best
- Annual review: could be an opportunity for a real dialogue
- Information poor. Professionals had already made up their minds. Parents expected to fit in.

- Professionals took over - advice based on what professionals want, and available resources
- Once a child is in an inappropriate school, you can't get them moved
- There is no real choice

Group 4

"We will work with Sheffield's local community schools so that they are better able to meet the needs of more children with additional educational needs. How can we do this?"

1) Training for teachers:

- Teachers need to learn how to differentiate the curriculum (and they need to be aware of their obligation to do this)
- Specialist services - we need professionals who have the time to work with and get to know our children, and then provide regular on-the-job training/monitoring to teaching staff; a one-off training course is not enough

2) Disability awareness training for staff and children

- Residentials, day trips, sports days, after-school clubs, etc.: make sure schools / extended schools providers know what their obligations are under the DDA; some schools routinely exclude children with SEND from such activities

3) Pastoral support:

- A seamless school day - for some children, the biggest challenge (but also the biggest learning opportunity) is during unstructured times; provide support when the child needs it, not when it's convenient for the school
- There is a particular need to improve pastoral support / lunchtime support in secondary schools
- Good practice: lunchtime clubs and lunchtime support to help children join their classmates in play

4) More funding

- Stop underfunding children with exceptional needs in mainstream
- Support services should be free at the point of delivery - don't make schools pay for speech and language therapy etc.
- Psychological element to school funding: make it clear to schools what proportion of their budgets is intended for SEN, and hold them to account for their SEN expenditure
- Better pay for teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors

5) Home-school partnership:

- We need clearer pathways to support - better information for professionals, schools and parents
- Frequent parent-teacher consultations, and proper discussions about IEP targets
- Schools need to be aware of, and take account of, a child's home situation
- We need a key worker system - someone independent to help parents negotiate the SEN system
- We need TRANSPARENCY and CONSISTENCY within schools and across all schools in Sheffield

Group 5

"We will improve ways of working between special schools, local community schools and integrated resources so that more children achieve better in their learning setting. How can we do this?"

1) Training

- Priority to train all staff
- Training for teachers and teaching assistants: at university, induction for new teachers
- Head teachers' role to ensure staff are well-trained
- Whole day of mandatory training in special needs for ALL staff (teachers, teaching assistants, lunchtime staff, drivers, etc.) - just like health and safety training
- Training provided by special schools: inclusion support services (buy in support) play a key role; link up services to support training, but don't take teachers away from classrooms in special schools
- Outreach: this should be done without lengthy procedures or lots of bureaucracy; staff need to see strategies in action, as training courses alone are not enough; regular reviews; this needs TIME and FUNDING

2) Resources

- Use resources available; don't remove children from existing peer group and children who have accepted them.
- Must use parents/volunteers as otherwise resources/finances won't stretch
- Special schools and IRs have their place - children are placed according to needs. GREAT FEAR that this strategy could mean the end of special schools and IRs
- One-off split placements: increased work load, paperwork

3) Communication

- Ensure good data protection arrangements for liaison between schools
- Working day-to-day communication: schools should flag up problems as soon as they arise, contact parents for views - this is a problem in secondary school
- Create opportunities for parents to exchange information

4) Shared knowledge

Not just special schools - all schools can share knowledge!

5) Respect parents as a resource

Ask parents who have a child at a particular school to help with open evenings

Parents voiced a number of concerns about plans to get special schools to provide more outreach to mainstream schools:

- Special school teachers get to know their pupils really well, and tend to become experts in individual children. Their skills are not easily transferable to a mainstream setting.
- Special school teachers cannot be expected to be experts in all disabilities.
- Special school teachers may be good at teaching children, but they are not necessarily good at training peers.
- When special school teachers visit mainstream schools as part of an outreach programme, someone will have to cover for them in the classroom. This would disrupt the learning of their pupils, who require a high degree of continuity and consistency.
- The time commitment should not be underestimated. Outreach teachers would need to spend quite a lot of time with the children they are supposed to advise on. They would presumably also be expected to act as point of contact for enquiries / crisis management.

- Current special school capacity does not allow teachers to take individual children out of the classroom for visits to mainstream settings. This is a component of outreach that seems to have been overlooked.

Comments on Integrated resources:

- **Positives:**
 Opportunities through shared space, e.g. dining hall, playground
 Talking to parents of children with special needs
 Accessing suitable lessons: a complex process which requires someone who understands mainstream curriculum and child's developmental level
 Allowing parental involvement
- **Negatives:**
 Lack of suitable space - not working in a corridor / "gold fish bowl"
 Don't just babysit children in IRs

Group 6

"We will make sure that when assessments are made these centre on the needs of the child and the resources needed to meet those needs, not where the child should go to school. How can we do this?"

1) Communication between parents, teaching assistants, teachers, professionals, SENCOs

- Professionals should listen to parents rather than just dismissing parents' concerns
- Parents need better information about what school placements, services and support are available
- Not all parents are informed or empowered to challenge schools for the best outcomes for their children, e.g. BME parents who have language barriers
- Respect
- Support
- Hear the unbearable?

2) Early intervention and assessment

- Before starting school / school transitions
- Support for pupils who are more at risk: picking up on any problems from an early stage.
- Early assessment by health services BEFORE starting school, so that provision can be put in place ready for the child on starting school
- Professionals should take a champion role in identifying and assessing children and young people
- Health professionals should be clear about what provision a child needs

3) Information for parents about how assessments and statements work

4) Statements need to be quicker and clearer, and they must be specified and quantified

5) Staff need to be accountable for good/poor practice

Group 7

"Have we missed anything that you think we should have included? You may also suggest other objectives here."

Transitions:

- SEN team/mainstream joining up around transition - who knows the child and how well to make assessments and recommendations? Howden House need to listen to the professionals who are regularly involved with their children.
- Transition - need early identified support for transition to primary, primary to secondary, and secondary to post-16/post-19. Need information well in advance rather than on 'brink' before they get support.
- Flexibility around transitions - timing of choice, and flexibility to change schools if first placement doesn't work out

Childcare:

- We need special schools to provide holiday clubs and after-school provision for their pupils (advantage: continuity of staff); SNIPS provides limited support, and staff keep changing. Schools provision would limit the need for many different care environments.
- Evening provision: we need clubs for young people 18+ in Sheffield
- Lack of wrap-around care at school - our children need support at lunchtimes, and before and after school.

Other comments from this group:

- SENCO quality; frequent changes in personnel; time must be made available to do the job.
- Attitudes of children/parents in mainstream school - stigma if on own. Integration has to be with other disabled children as well as mainstream to be accepted. Society has to be 'exposed' to disability.
- Lack of vocational training for youngsters aged 18+ in Sheffield.
- Parents should not have to "play the system" or battle every different stage.
- "Passport" of information to share with professionals, so don't have to repeat everything (like the red book for babies; is there already one for medical?).
- Information is key and needs to be provided timely and individually – home visits. Parents have to do own research at the moment. We need very specific information, e.g. on childminding; information available is often too general

Group 8

"We want all parents and carers to be confident that their child's needs are being met. What would you want to see in schools that would give you confidence that this is happening?"

- Improve communication and information sharing with parents

How can this be done?

- Invite parents into class to observe and offer advice
- School should be honest about lack of expertise
- Schools should organise information-giving sessions
- Approachable teachers who don't make parents feel a nuisance
- REGULAR progress updates

Notes from "Meet the Manager" session

After the lunch break, parents had the opportunity to speak to managers of services accessed by disabled children:

Direct payments (Amanda Hill, Team Manager Children and Families)

There was a mix of parents of children with various disabilities; some already accessing direct payments, but most wishing to do so and unsure about how to go about this.

Amanda gave a bit of background about direct payments in Sheffield and said the scheme had started for adults with physical disabilities in 2001. By 2004 the scheme had transferred over to children, with parents receiving payments to arrange support for their children. The scheme is not means-tested.

Funds are paid through the social care route based on the particular needs of each individual family after going through an assessment. Once the local authority has agreed to fund the payments the service will usually be reviewed every six months.

Amanda was asked how you go about accessing the service and provided the following information:

- Contact the Children with Disabilities team on 2734368 and ask for an assessment of your child's needs.
- A social worker will then visit the family to see what the need is and come up with a plan as to whether and how to support the family.
- If a family has been assessed as being eligible for a social care service, they must be offered the opportunity to receive direct payments instead of this service.

Parents and carers then asked Amanda a series of questions and the consensus was:

- The social worker should be briefed to look at the need from the point of view of a family with a disabled child NOT assess the situation as a safeguarding issue. A couple of parents said they felt very uneasy that this had happened to others in the past and wanted a clear indication that they were not being judged and their children should not be asked if they were being abused.
- It was felt there should be clear guidelines for who is eligible for support and information of how to proceed should be transparent and clear.
- Families wanted support with employing staff and becoming an employer.
- Guidance about direct payments for childcare (which cover the difference in childcare costs for children with and without special needs) should be made widely available.

Educational Psychology (Mary Collins, Principal Educational Psychologist)

Mary talked about the work of the psychology department. The Educational Psychology Service is based at the Bannerdale Centre and has open access in that carers can call and ask for advice directly. The service works alongside schools and other agencies, and is involved with the Inclusion Development Programme.

The Educational Psychology service has produced a variety of leaflets for carers and children, including on Aspergers, Acquired Brain Injury, and ADHD. Some of these are available via the service's website. The service can signpost parents and teachers to other sources of help and advice. For example, Mary mentioned a resource on dyslexia-friendly classrooms from www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications, and resources on building children's self esteem from the Centre for Mental Health (www.scmh.org.uk).

We had a general discussion about our experiences of the school system, including assessment, current support in mainstream schools, statementing and finding appropriate placements. We talked about the issue of having local choice for specialist provision with some ideas being to have choice of local mainstream schools according to special needs, e.g. choosing a school with more garden space and amenities for children with sensory issues; or having an integrated resource available to each school or family of schools.

Short Breaks (Chris Easton, AHDC Short Breaks Programme Officer)

1. Residential packages

Parents expressed fears that with the looming budget cuts overnight/residential respite will be reduced and families will lose out. Comments from parents that overnight respite is "priceless for families", but is also good for children who find it difficult to attend a school supported scheme. (Some children would be upset going to school and it not being the "school schedule", and would not be able to cope with the change.)

2. SNIPS

Parents always find that their children are pushed towards mainstream inclusion. Parents find specialist play care (for under 8's) is non-existent. Comments from parents that SNIPS lacks flexibility, i.e. parents have little choice in when children attend sessions.

3. Options

Some parents wanted special schools to provide holiday support within the special school facilities. They felt children would not have problems settling in (as some do in SNIPS schemes), as access, facilities and expertise would be "geared up" to children with LDD. Comment from one parent that this school provision would not suit all children (see point 1).

4. Parental monetary contribution

Parents are only offered limited SNIPS support (for some only 1 session per week, with a lot of travelling). Parents felt that this was not enough. Parents were willing to pay for placements - just like parents of non-disabled children pay for universal childcare, rather than being told how much/little provision they can have. Some parents commented that if they could access appropriate childcare for their disabled child, they would be able to return to work.

5. Inclusive recreation and sports provision

Again, families want to be able to purchase services in the same way as parents of non-disabled children. A lot of parents found summer holidays a big problem and would like schemes that offered sporting and socialising opportunities. These schemes (which parents would have to pay for) would free up resources for SNIPS. There is a lack of summer holiday provision and Saturday playschemes.

6. Local provision

Parents commented that there were issues with the amount of time it takes to travel to and from short breaks provision. Most of the residential support is in the South of Sheffield and most SNIPS provision is in the North and East.

Speech and Language Therapy (Lesley Cogher, Manager Sheffield Speech and Language Therapy)

Seven parents attended this session. Lesley gave an overview of her service and gave some examples of capacity, e.g. 1.5 wte (whole time equivalent) Speech and Language Therapists for all mainstream secondary schools and approximately 40.5 wte therapy staff for approximately 4,500 children on the caseload (6.85 wte of which are assistants).

Parents were requesting training for themselves as parents but on a more regular basis. Lots of information given at initial contact but less as time went on and very little on progression of speech and language therapy development for individual conditions/disabilities.

The model of speech and language therapy used in Sheffield is very much one of the therapist advising schools on programmes and an expectation that support workers would carry programmes out. Who is then accountable for ensuring that therapy is delivered?

The possibility of joint parent/teacher training was mentioned.

Use of a Speech and language website (for Sheffield) for parents to access information and get recommendations for books, DVDs, computer programmes, useful websites.

Parents were requesting information recommended by Speech and language therapists instead of trawling the internet.

Also discussed were some aspects of whether speech and language therapists can be involved in disability awareness training for all children in school through SEAL/PHSE.

Lesley informed the group that 2011 is the National Year of Communication/Every Child a Talker (visit www.hello.org.uk for more information). Lesley wondered whether this may be an opportunity to get parents involved in training.

Lesley mentioned www.stokespeaksout.org as a website to look at.

Generally this was a positive session with most emphasis being on communication to parents and training.

Transition (Kit Moran, Service Manager Transition and Progression)

The discussion covered a number of transition points: nursery to Reception, Year 6 to Year 7 Secondary, and Post 16/College.

- Child of 4 with ASD now has support in nursery and the parent is waiting for consultant's decision for assessment, parent concerned that when child moves to Reception in January and to Y1 in September, the support will possibly be withdrawn. Feels the child will not cope with the structure of Y1 classes. The parent outlined some of the issues that she was aware of in a professional capacity working with this child.
- Parent of a child of 3 with learning difficulties seeking help as the child attends a private nursery, to find a school which will meet the child's needs.

Follow up: The Early Years support service has been in contact with the parent to offer advice.

- Parents of children moving from Y6 to Y7 both of whom have ASD are looking at Integrated Resources in mainstream schools. Feel they are not getting any support from SENCO or staff at

the primary school, they feel let down. Want to know why the choice of school has to be done so early as they won't get a decision until the end of March?

Follow-up: Kit Moran to discuss with Mary Collins (Educational Psychologist) re. SENCO input within different schools.

- A parent of a young woman now in Y11 is concerned about the best Post-16 learning options for their daughter. Their daughter wants to go to college but the parent is not sure what support would be available in college, and how would they find out about other options. The parent is concerned that the Annual Review is taking place in November and not sure what to expect.

Follow-up: The parent has been contacted and advice given re annual review, the role of the Connexions worker, the Post-16 learning assessment process and possible post-16 options, the option of the daughter remaining at her current school, going to Sheffield college or to an Independent College.

For children who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, the statement ceases to be maintained once they leave school at 16. For Post-16 units in schools, an assessment of their needs is carried out and individual plans followed.

The Learning and Skills Council's Statement 140 Post 16 (now Section 139A) includes Local Authority Duties of Responsibilities at 16. Preparation of Post-16 college or elsewhere starts at the end of Y8 (age 14) looking at all areas of development e.g. communication skills, preparing them for independent travel, pulling things together for Y11 assessment. At 16 they are in-between services, considered not old enough for adult health and social services.

Sheffield is looking at a range of options, e.g. student accommodation where students can learn life skills, how to care for themselves and handle money. This is to enable young people to remain in the city for their post 16 education whilst recognising some of the learning and development opportunities out of city colleges provide.

Looking at Individual Budgets – Self-Directed Support. This requires a Social Worker to complete an assessment.

School Transport (Martin Green, Service Manager Travel Service, and Chris Lawlor)

Main issues discussed:

Length of time on buses – This time is benchmarked with other core cities. Currently this is a maximum of 1hr 15mins within the city limits, in line with established good practice. Several factors taken into account – complexity, cost efficiency and journey. Journey times cannot be guaranteed but the service tries to minimise them while managing costs.

Queries from parents unsure whether transport was appropriate for their child's needs where children wanted to travel independently – Transport run a Travel Assistance programme. School may also identify children who may benefit. Visit to school to do assessment. Will work with child on journeys to and from school (looked-after children may require support in other settings). Supported journeys will be undertaken with independent travel trainers who will support as appropriate to foster independent travel. Criteria need to be met to establish when a child is capable of this. Will send DVD to Parent Carer Forum about supported journeys which can be shared with other parents. (Please contact the Forum on 0114 2521913 to request a copy).

Buses – wheelchair accessibility: can ask SYPTE (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive) to do a risk assessment. Ramps available on lower crouch buses but not all buses will have them. Depends on route.

Assessment of needs – SEN Section does assessments as to whether pupils are eligible for travel. Risk assessments of children's individual special health and behavioural needs are also carried out by the Travel Service. This considers risks to the child and to others. Travel information form given to and agreed with parents. Not always possible to get assessments from SEN Section in a timely manner – example given of children going to tribunal, which meant school place was not confirmed until after start of school year. Service expressed a wish to be involved in the process earlier with personalised review.

Training of escorts – All escorts undergo induction training. This is in conjunction with school and school nurses as appropriate and individualised. Will include epi-pen and epilepsy training. No medical intervention is allowed due to insurance situation. If a child requires assistance for a medical situation that is taking longer than the care plan indicates, emergency services are called on 999 with the child's needs notified to paramedics.

Funding locked into different age 'silos' (0-19). Transport working with adult partners to smooth the 'handover' between children's and adult services.

SNIPS (Karen Hazlehurst, Team Manager Specialist Community Services)

4 parent/carers in attendance. Karen described the range of services offered by SNIPS (Special Needs Inclusion Playcare Service) and answered questions from parents/carers.

- **Bought-in services for Short Breaks**
These include purchasing sessions at mainstream clubs and commissioning specialist clubs, homecare and befriending services. Some of these services are delivered by Bents Green and Talbot schools, and by Crossroads.
- **Sibling Support Group**
This is the only service that SNIPS deliver themselves.
- **Support to mainstream play services**
Signpost families to local organisations delivering play services that receive pots of money to provide activities (e.g. Kids Can Do programme for 8-13 year olds).
Karen explained that many of these clubs are now only given the funding if they agree to provide places for children with disabilities and provide increased staffing levels when necessary. SNIPS can work with these clubs to help ensure that the club staff can meet children's individual additional needs.
Some of the types of support that SNIPS provide include training workshops for staff working in the play settings. SNIPS liaise with parents and clubs to help them produce Working with Me documents (previously called Care Plans) as applicable for individual children.
- **Support for childcare for working parents**
SNIPS provide inclusion grants to clubs that are ring-fenced to support places for children with disabilities. Working parents have to pay the club's normal session charge, but the inclusion grant pays for the additional cost of a place for the child with a disability. The club will receive funding to pay for a 1:1 worker if this is needed.

Karen said that SNIPS no longer deliver services directly or provide 1:1 workers, but will instead support the organisations that they are working with through mentoring support. They work with clubs to help them be inclusive; some are very committed, but others are not as receptive.

Questions

Parent 1- Her child was threatened with exclusion after only a couple of weeks at a playscheme organised by SNIPS. Also SNIPS didn't call back as promised about sorting out an alternative playscheme.

Karen said that she would follow up the non call back and explained that if a club wants to exclude a child the SNIPS mentor goes to the club to see what has happened with a view to working together to overcome the difficulty.

Karen said that they have recently sent out questionnaires to assess how children have enjoyed their sessions and the feedback will help to inform future commissioning. She added that they will be following up feedback over this club as positive feedback is reducing.

Follow-up: After the conference Karen followed up on the non call back. Karen reported that the service is for childcare and that the family had decided to withdraw their child from the club. The SNIPS mentor had maintained regular contact with the family over alternative service options, which were not needed at the time. An alternative service is in place for October half-term. The family did not receive feedback over discussion with the club that they withdrew from.

Parent 1 said that this wasn't her first choice club - her first choice couldn't offer 1:1 support. Karen responded that if SNIPS was funding the placement 1:1 shouldn't have been a problem and that this may have been due to the club not having sufficient staff to bring in an extra person. Karen suggested that Crossroads may be able to support the child at the playscheme until 1:1 support was sorted out by the club.

Parent 1 said the playscheme did not have the positive handling training that her child needed. Karen responded that clubs can currently have Team Teach training funded, this is the training that staff in special schools have. SNIPS encourage clubs to commit to attending this but not all settings do.

Parent 2 said that the SNIPS mentor kept in regular contact with her and had visited her within 7 days as promised to update her child's information. The service that she has is for childcare. Karen advised parent 2 that they were probably eligible for a short break/holiday service. Karen explained that currently parents can access short break/respice holiday sessions directly if they don't receive other services, with 1 playscheme session per week for each week of the holidays fully funded by SNIPS.

Parent 1 asked about Crossroads. Karen said that they have contracts with Crossroads for homecare that includes babysitting and befriending, which can be used instead of playschemes. Karen said that usually families receive 3 hours per week; a professional completes an assessment which goes to the short breaks allocation panel. Parent asked if a family could have some Crossroads and some playscheme sessions. Karen said she didn't see why not.

Parent 3 said they were waiting for a member of staff from SNIPS to call her back. She had received an email saying that they had not been able to contact her on the telephone number that they had. Karen said if SNIPS were unable to contact parents/carers they should send a non-contact letter to the parent's/carer's address. Karen took the parent's email address to follow this up.

Follow-up: Karen established that the email to the parent had highlighted that her contact number was not working and asked her to phone/email SNIPS with a number to contact her on.

Parent 4 asked about transition between primary/secondary phases. Karen said they have recently introduced transition meetings, scheduled 6 months before the child finishes the age phase with early years. Karen referred to the article in the SNIPS newsletter. She acknowledged that this area needs improving and said that new transition arrangements for this age range will lead to improvements for families in the future.

Graffiti walls

Parents/carers were encouraged to write comments, suggestions, praise and criticism on graffiti walls.

What's not working?

- Childcare provision out of school (half-term/after school) when attending Special Schools
- Respite care – it takes too long to get the help needed
- Unclear medication administration policy for schools
- Direct Payments: when trying to combine looking after a child with complex needs with work. The last thing I want to do is to run my own business to get the childcare I need.
- Mainstream teachers need more information (at training level?) to be able to differentiate material (curricular etc.) for children with additional needs
- Sheffield College SEN provision
- SENCO only works 1.5 days per week in a mainstream school with 90 SEN children. Needs greater investment in SENCO support
- SENCO works 3 days but the teachers have no training in SEN
- Any respite at Special Schools (residency, after school etc.) stops at 16 – needs to be extended
- Attitudes to SEN/disability (heads, teachers, parents and mainstream children): 'disable-ism' should be regarded in the same light as racism
- Transport: pick up 7.30am; drop off at 16.45 – too long!

What's working for you?

- It's early days, but we have an individual budget for my 16 year old under a pilot scheme run by the Council for her to make the transition to living away from home. Her flat is near home and, although there have been a few hiccups, people seem keen to make it work.
- My son's school has an excellent SENCO. She communicated clearly and shows insight, assisting TAs and teachers to help my son. A valuable and vital addition which is required in every school.
- My child is now in a special school having all her needs met.
- Excellent 1:1 support in special schools

What could the Parent Carer Forum do for YOU?

- Help with DLA claim forms/appeals. Don't "ConDem" us to poverty
- Put together a "code" of best practice for schools re: Communication: Information: Assessments: Referrals – based on good experiences in either local or national schools

What kind of information would you like to see in a handbook about SEN?

- Flowcharts where appropriate, e.g. statutory assessment process
- Timescales – how these are (can be) stretched out! Shouldn't be but do!
- Information which clearly reflects the range of need – SEN is very diverse so signposting is needed
- Information on Special Schools/mainstream units/home teaching
- Things you can't find in existing SEN handbooks, e.g. tips, what works well in some schools, where to get private help, e.g. speech therapy students

Short Breaks/Respite for Young Children (0-5): what provision would you like?

- Skilled "babysitters" to allow occasional evening out for parents
- When you're feeling overloaded or just tired and need a nap or a bath, have someone to ring for an immediate break, even if it's only an hour.
- Desperate for a babysitting service. My husband and I never go out together

Closing speech

Jayne Woodward (Co-chair of the Parent Carer Forum) thanked everyone for coming to the conference, and stressed the importance of working together.

She warned that there were difficult times ahead, and expressed her fear that the Comprehensive Spending Review might lead to spending cuts which could impact disproportionately on the disabled, the vulnerable and the poorly paid. She said that there are already signs of this happening in Sheffield; for example, the specialist Connexions team which looks after disabled youngsters will be disbanded due to funding cuts. The future of SIGN (specialist information service for parents of disabled children) is under threat.

The Parent Carer Forum is not exempt. Jayne explained that all of the Forum's current funding (from Sheffield City Council and central government) will run out at the end of March 2011. She reassured parents, however, that the Forum is working hard to raise the funds needed to keep the organisation going.

Jayne appealed to parents to keep supporting the Forum in whichever way they felt able to. She emphasised that parents do not need any special skills, knowledge or ability to make a contribution; being the parent of a child with special needs is qualification enough. Jayne assured parents that anyone volunteering to attend meetings would be fully briefed and supported, and would never be the only parent at a meeting.

Jayne concluded her speech with three quotes:

"It is not for the disabled to adapt to the dominant and dominating world of the so-called non-disabled. It is for us to adapt our understanding of a common humanity; to learn of the richness of how human life is diverse; to recognise the presence of disability in our human midst as an enrichment of our diversity."

- Nelson Mandela

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead

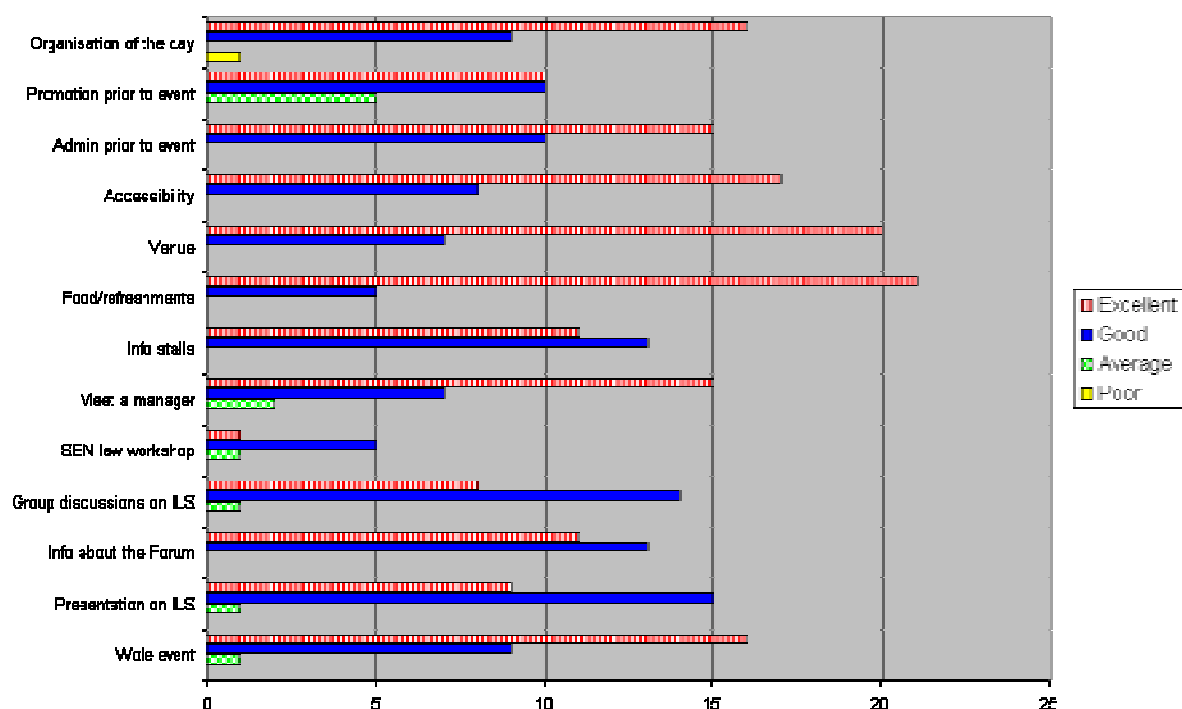
"Do, or do not. There is no 'try'."

-Yoda

Conference feedback

13 expression of interest forms (from parents volunteering to join strategic groups) and 27 evaluation forms were received.

Below is a breakdown of the conference feedback:



A selection of comments received:

"Many thanks for this, we really value and appreciate the time and effort you've put into organising this in order to help us parents. However, too much to do today, not enough time!"

"Sound/acoustics not very good - hard to follow discussions. Great opportunity to meet and exchange views, information with parents having similar experiences. Nice to meet up with Forum and the whole setup in Sheffield. Thank you for organising this event!"

"I would have liked more time to speak to the people involved in different aspects of learning, i.e. transitions, transport, SNIPS. I could only see 2 managers. Can we have another day where we could just have time to meet these people?"

"Congratulations to the Forum on another successful event. Well organised, well attended. Glad to have been part of the day"

"As a manager it was absolutely brilliant to meet and speak to the parents we support, and to hear their concerns and help them to understand the context in which we work."

"Always enjoy attending as I have a chance to speak with other parents and see how others manage, sharing good practice and recommendations. Thanks!"

"Does information to out to schools - so SENCOs/TAs/teachers can access it (today has been/would have been very beneficial to professionals in Education). Thank you!!"