

Newsletter

Sheffield Interim Parent Carer Forum | March 2010 | Issue 1



Hello and a warm welcome to the first newsletter of the Sheffield Interim Parent Carer Forum!

We are an independent group of Sheffield parents and carers of children with a wide range of disabilities. The members of our management committee have links to numerous local parent support groups, such as ACCT, Epilepsy Action, Sheffield Down Syndrome Association, Ray of Hope, various groups associated with special and mainstream schools, South Yorkshire Dyspraxia Support Group, and many others.

We are funded by a grant from the Government's "Aiming High for Disabled Children" (AHDC) parent participation programme, and we also receive funding from Sheffield Local Authority

out of their AHDC money. The Sheffield Carers' Centre, Parent Partnership, Sheffield INDEX and Voluntary Action Sheffield all provide valuable practical support.

As our name suggests, we are currently "interim", but this will change shortly! We are in the process of registering our organisation, and will hold our first Annual General Meeting on the 21st of April (see back page).

Until now, we have been so busy responding to consultation requests, sitting on Local Authority groups, organising conferences and generally biting off a bit more than we could chew (!), that we have not been able to devote enough time to the recruitment of new members.

However, that's all going to change as we now have two workers in post to help us out!

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We will publish a regular newsletter to keep you informed of the latest news and events.

To ensure that you receive future issues of this newsletter, please complete the enclosed membership form and return it to our freepost address. You can also register via our website.

Please sign up – we need feedback from all areas of Sheffield and from all our communities!

Around the Region

by Jayne Woodward (parent carer)

The recent availability of funding and involvement of parents and carers in the planning and strategic development of services for disabled children has created a wonderful opportunity for collaboration with other parents.

At a recent Together for Disabled Children conference held in Sheffield, various forums and groups from the Yorkshire region reported on their activities, and there was certainly no shortage of enthusiasm and creative ideas out there:

Hull Trust has developed an inclusive cycle scheme for disabled children accessing a range of adapted cycles. **Bradford** and

Calderdale Parents Forums are engaging widely with the black and ethnic minority communities, employing participation workers and holding various activities such as pamper days, and men and women only events. **North Lincolnshire** Parents Forum completely overhauled an inconsistent and complex direct payments process by working together with the professional agencies involved. **PUFIN (North East Lincs)** members have gone into local hairdressing colleges to give disability training and awareness to trainees. They are also working on PUFIN approved shops and suppliers. **Rotherham** have held a fun day at Twycross Zoo for families and organised a visit to a theatre production,

negotiating a no-bang or surprises panto, with actors holding a meet and greet.

These are just a small selection of some of the many different activities that forums are currently engaged with, and there are plenty of ideas out there we can share and build on.

The Regional South Yorkshire Parents Forum is a recent collaboration that joins together the parent groups from **Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham** and **Sheffield**. Holding regular meetings, we hope to share good practice, develop regional links and offer advice and support. Not having to reinvent the wheel will save a lot of time and effort all round for everyone!

A Special School Parent Perspective

by Anna Grant (parent carer)

As a parent of a child in a special school, I was interested that the Parents' Survey reported a greater level of satisfaction with provision in special schools than in mainstream schools.

The Survey showed only 10% of parents thought mainstream provision was adequate, compared to around 40% for special school provision. However, 65% of respondents rated mainstream provision inadequate, compared to only 20% rating special school provision inadequate - a larger difference. (Approximately 35% of special school parents gave no response.)

The comments from parents of children in mainstream also show a much greater level of dissatisfaction with provision - "complete lack of

understanding", "provision totally inadequate", children being withdrawn because school "cannot cope" - than comments from special school parents.

So what is behind the different levels of satisfaction between mainstream and special education? I believe it is to do with "marginality" - having needs that are on the edge of, or outside, the majority of the population of the school. A successful placement is much more likely where the provision is already there to meet a child's needs, or where required changes are put into place quickly and effectively. The more a child's needs differ from the majority of the school population, the more adaptation will be needed. Special schools exist to meet the needs of children with a more defined range of disability, with a closer match of provision and need,

than mainstream schools, hence the higher level of satisfaction with provision.

To improve overall parental satisfaction, the Local Authority should provide provision in special schools that accurately matches the numbers of children with different types of special needs and disabilities, and ensure that within mainstream schools, and specialist provision, there is the will, the knowledge and the resources to quickly implement any changes required to meet the needs of "marginal" children.

I will set up a thread on the Discussion Board of the Forum website for you to post up any responses to this article. If you wish to put your response into a forthcoming newsletter, please use the contact details on the back page.

Parents' Survey of SEN Provision in Sheffield

In the summer of 2009, Parent Forum member Clare Peck devised a questionnaire about school and specialist provision for disabled children, which was sent to over 1,000 families on the Sheffield INDEX. We received a whopping 209 replies - thank you everyone who took part!

This research has given us more clout when talking to officers and councillors, as we now have data to back us up. We presented the outcomes of the survey to the Council Cabinet (see p. 12) and to a journalist from the Star, which resulted in a 3-page article. A summary of our survey will also be included in the new LDD Strategy for Sheffield (see p. 13).

The following is a brief summary of the survey's main findings. A more detailed analysis can be downloaded from the "Resources" section of our website.

Participants

The survey covered a wide range of age groups and disabilities, but included a disproportionate number of children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (40% of all respondents). The children surveyed attended a variety of educational settings: 97 were in mainstream, 83 in special schools, 21 in Integrated Resources (IRs), and 8 in college.

Parental satisfaction

The survey revealed low levels of parental satisfaction with provision for disabled children in Sheffield's mainstream schools, with only 10% stating that they felt the provision for their child was "adequate".

IRs, on the other hand, were rated "adequate" by over 60% of parents, and special schools by around 40% of parents whose children attended these school types. However, more than a third of special school parents did not answer the question about adequacy of provision.

School support

Parents had major concerns over a lack of support in school, particularly in mainstream. Nearly a quarter of



Only 10% of parents of disabled children in mainstream felt the provision was "adequate".

parents of children in mainstream education reported that they had been asked to take their child home at some point.

The survey highlighted a lack of lunchtime and break time support, with only 24% of mainstreamed children receiving any support during this time, compared to 65% in IRs. Several parents suggested that lunchtime support in mainstream schools is often provided by very dedicated teaching assistants who give up their lunchtimes unpaid. Parental requests for lunchtime support were frequently refused, with many schools citing a lack of staff and funding as the reason. This is despite the fact that many of these vulnerable children had experienced bullying which usually occurred during break times and lunchtimes, and at the end

of the school day. The situation was particularly bad in mainstream, where 53% had been bullied.

Funding

29% of participants who had a disabled child in mainstream education said that their child's school had raised the recent change in SEN funding arrangements (see p. 4) as a problem.

Specialist input

Many parents voiced concerns about a lack of disability-specific advisory teachers, particularly for Autism and Down Syndrome; those who were aware of a specialist often commented that their input was only sought as a crisis intervention.

Nearly half of all children displayed challenging behaviours, yet parents and schools did not always receive adequate help with managing these behaviours. This lack of support was particularly evident in mainstream schools, where 62% stated that they had received no help at all.

Parents frequently commented on a lack of speech and language therapy, and many reported very infrequent visits from a therapist. Out of those parents who were able to say how much therapist input their child was receiving, 57% reported two hours or less of contact time with a therapist per term, and a third merely had annual visits from a speech and language therapist!

Staff training

Parental confidence in specialist training for school staff varied between school types, with parents of children in IRs being a lot more confident than parents of children in special schools and mainstream schools. The large number of blanks in response to the question about staff training suggests that poor communication between schools and parents may be affecting parents' perceptions. However, 18% of parents of children in mainstream schools reported that they had actively requested specialist training for school staff and been refused.

SEN Funding in Sheffield Explained



History

In recent years, the system for funding pupils with additional needs in Sheffield's mainstream schools has undergone major changes. These changes saw Sheffield move from "devolvement" of funding to "delegation".

Essentially, this means that most of the funding for additional needs is now included in the general pot of money that a school receives from the Local Authority. This gives schools greater discretion with regard to how they use the money, e.g. they no longer have to spend funding for Special Educational Needs (SEN) on named children - or, indeed, on SEN, since the

money is not ring fenced! However, Sheffield is currently looking at putting in place procedures to ensure that money allocated for additional needs pupils is spent for this purpose and represents good value in terms of wider pupil outcomes.

Many authorities in England have chosen to delegate funding for "low severity, high incidence" needs. It is estimated that up to 21% of the school population has such needs, and this group includes a large number of children without SEN, such as pupils from deprived backgrounds.

However, Sheffield went a step further and decided to also delegate most of the funding for

"high severity, low incidence" needs (also known as "exceptional needs", which only applies to around 3% of the school population nationally; this includes most statemented children). This is NOT a common funding strategy.

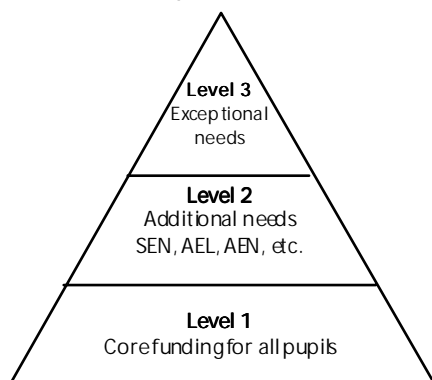
The main aim of this move was to break the link between statements and funding, in order to discourage schools from requesting (costly) statutory assessments just to obtain extra money. We have been informed by the Local Authority that "additional guidance issued to schools has now helped to stabilise requests and to ensure they are more appropriate". However, the number of statements issued in Sheffield continues to be on the increase.

In theory, delegation of SEN funds should enable schools to respond more quickly and more flexibly to pupils' changing needs, thus promoting early intervention. It should also enable support service staff to spend less time on assessments, and more time working directly with the children and thinking through strategies and interventions. This appears to have worked in some schools, but not in others.

It is important to note that, whilst Local Authorities can delegate SEN funds, they cannot delegate their SEN responsibilities - the legal obligation to "arrange" the provision specified in a child's statement always remains with the Local Authority.

Current arrangements

The current formula used to fund additional needs in Sheffield is complex. It is useful to think about a three-tier approach to funding as shown in the pyramid below:



At level 1 is the core amount of funding which is made available to schools by the Local Authority to teach **all** pupils.

At level 2 schools receive extra money according to their relative needs for meeting their pupils' additional needs. Sheffield currently allocates funding to meet additional needs using a number of different headings:

SEN (Special Educational Needs)
AEN (Additional Educational Needs - a rather confusing term which actually refers to social deprivation)

EAL (English as an Additional Language)

Personalised Learning (a new funding stream aimed at catch-up support for pupils falling behind, and stretch for the more able, using small-group and 1:1 teaching)

The amount of additional needs funding a school receives is largely determined on the basis of the following indicators: looked-after pupils, probability of living in a household on income support, entitlement to free school meals, entitlement to child tax credit, pupil mobility, number of KS1 and Reception pupils (these attract funding for early intervention), pupil attainment, and pupil progress. The number of pupils on a school's SEN register is NOT taken into account.

This will seem absurd to many parents, but is in line with national practice as many Local Authorities are moving away from pupil audit methods and towards the use of proxy indicators like free school meals. There appears to be a widespread belief that SEN registers are not a reliable indicator of a school's level of need. The main reasons for this are: a) the lack of consistency between schools when it comes to placing pupils into provision categories like School Action and School Action Plus, and b) the bureaucracy and cost involved in moderating the results of a pupil audit. Local Authorities also worry about the risk of creating "perverse incentives" (e.g. schools might inflate the numbers of pupils on School Action to get extra funding).

However, it is worth noting that, whilst some social deprivation indicators are correlated quite strongly to low-severity needs, the correlation to high-severity needs is weak. These indicators are also rather useless when it comes to predicting the level of a child's needs (and thus the cost of provision required to meet those needs). In practice, this means that schools in more affluent areas, which tend to attract very little funding for social deprivation and

low attainment, may struggle to find the funds needed to support pupils with more severe needs. This is especially true if a school takes on more high-need pupils than it had on roll in 2008, when the new funding arrangements were introduced (a safety net currently guarantees that no school will lose more than £3,000 from its additional needs funding compared to 2007/08).

At level 3 of the pyramid the Local Authority provides additional resources which are targeted to those pupils with exceptional levels of need. This funding is allocated to special schools, Integrated Resources and to individual pupils with exceptional needs in mainstream schools. Many of these pupils will have a statement of special educational needs.

In order to receive exceptional needs funding for individual pupils, mainstream schools have to apply to a "Special Educational Needs panel". The amounts schools can receive out of the "exceptional needs pot" for mainstream are quite small, as the amount of money held back by the Local Authority is currently very small (around £410,000 in 2009/10). The allocations range from a few hundred pounds to several thousand. Amounts vary depending on the nature of the exceptional factors that apply to each child. This funding is intended as a "top-up" for pupils with the highest levels of need. It is not intended to provide ALL the support for these pupils, as most of the funding to do this has been delegated to schools (i.e. schools are expected to also use funding at levels 1 and 2 for such pupils!).

It is important to note that at levels 1 and 2 the funding is "delegated", which gives schools the freedom to spend the money as they see fit, whereas at level 3 the funding given to mainstream schools is considered "devolved". This means that schools can only spend it on the pupil(s) for whom it is intended.

Funding Formula Review



When parents of disabled children in Sheffield get together, the conversation will often turn to the hairy issue of Special Educational Needs (SEN) funding. Funding shouldn't really concern us - after all, we just want schools to meet the needs of our children - but because of the shortcomings of the current system, it does, and often acutely so.

Over the past five years, Sheffield has introduced a number of changes to the SEN funding system

(see article on p. 4/5). These have left most parents, and many schools, rather bewildered. Sometimes it seems that nobody really understands how the new system is supposed to work.

What is clear, however, is that it isn't working very well. A survey carried out by the Interim Parent Carer Forum (see p. 3) found that almost a third of parents of disabled children in mainstream education reported that their school had raised concerns about

the new funding arrangements.

Good news, then, that Sheffield City Council has recognised that its current approach to *formula funding pupils with additional needs* (see box) in mainstream schools is in need of a thorough review.

An "AEN/SEN Think Tank" chaired by Gill Ellis (Deputy Director Inclusion and Learning Services), and attended by an external consultant (Tony Dessent), Local Authority officers, head teachers and governors was set up in October 2009 to look at Sheffield's current SEN funding system, compare it with similar authorities (see box), and make recommendations to a Steering Group.

Not so good, however, that they forgot to ask parents along ... but this oversight was eventually rectified when a couple of mums

"Additional needs" is a very wide term which applies to all pupils who require "significant adjustments" and additional, supplementary or specialist support for a variety of reasons, e.g. learning difficulties, physical needs, difficult family circumstances, etc. It is estimated that up to 21% of pupils have additional needs .

"Formula funding" refers to funding which has been delegated to schools via a fixed formula. It does NOT include top-up funding for pupils with exceptional needs or funding for specialist support services.

from the Interim Parent Carer Forum were allowed to join the group (a highly unusual, and very commendable decision!). Unfortunately, these parent members were unable to request feedback from other parents due to the confidential nature of the discussions. For this reason, they made it clear that they were attending the group as individual parents, and not as "representatives" of the wider parent carer community.

It is important to note that the Think Tank is NOT a decision-making body. Its work is part of a general review of the school funding formula, and is linked to the work of two other Think Tanks (one on Staffing, and one on Institution). Recommendations made by the three Think Tanks will be put out for consultation later this school year. The final decision on whether to adopt any of the recommendations rests with the Council and the Schools Forum (a decision-making group made up of representatives from schools and other agencies).

In a nutshell, the brief of the AEN/SEN Think Tank is to look at the following questions:

- Would it better to combine the different funding streams - Special Educational Needs (SEN), Additional Education Needs/Social Deprivation (AEN), Personalised learning - to provide one overall sum for meeting individual needs in Sheffield's mainstream schools?
- Should the proportion of the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant, i.e. the money a local authority receives from central government to spend on schools) allocated to meeting additional needs be changed?
- How should the Local Authority determine how much additional needs funding a school should get? Which indicators (e.g. attainment/progress, free school meals, numbers of pupils on SA+/Statements) should be used, and how should these be weighted?
- How can the Local Authority ensure that the additional needs funding delegated to schools is spent on the pupils for whom it is intended? (accountability mechanisms)

Additionally, the Think Tank is to consider two decision areas which are technically outside the remit of the formula funding review, but which are nonetheless closely linked:

- Is Sheffield allocating the right amount of funding to pupils with exceptional needs?
- Is Sheffield allocating the right amount of funding to specialist support services?

One of the aims of the review is to make the system simpler and more transparent, and to increase accountability. It is important to note that the review will not of itself create more money for Sheffield's schools, as the funding of schools is largely a matter for central government. As it is, Sheffield's schools are not generously funded compared to similar authorities anyway. However, one of the outcomes of the review may be that a bigger percentage of Sheffield's education spending as a whole needs to be allocated to additional and exceptional needs and support services.

We regret that we are unable to provide more detailed information at this point. However, we have asked officers to consult with the wider parent community on the issue of SEN/AEN funding, and it has been agreed that there will be a parent consultation event during the summer term. We will keep you updated!

How does Sheffield compare to similar authorities?

Compared to similar authorities, Sheffield spends less money per pupil on mainstream education, and more money per pupil on special schools and Integrated Resources (IRs).

The number of pupils attending special schools and IRs in Sheffield is higher than in similar authorities. The percentage of the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant, i.e. the money a local authority receives from central government to spend on schools) allocated to special schools and IRs in Sheffield is also higher.

On the other hand, the percentage of the DSG allocated to meeting additional needs in Sheffield's *mainstream* schools is lower (around 6% of the DSG, compared to an average of 9.14% in similar authorities).

The percentage of the DSG allocated to exceptional needs in mainstream (devolved top-up funding) is *significantly* lower than in similar authorities (just 0.14% compared to an average of 2-3%).



Short Breaks for Disabled Children

by Chris Easton (AHDC Short Breaks Programme Officer)

What is a Short Break?

Short Breaks are what many people might have referred to in the past as respite care. Short Breaks however, whilst providing parents/carers with a break from their caring responsibilities also places a focus upon activities that children or young people want to participate in.

Short Breaks can really be anything that provides a break for the family, from a stay in a residential unit, weekend or holiday activity programmes, befriending services or direct payments in place of an organised service.

Since April 2009 (and until March 2011), Sheffield's Short Break Services have been undergoing a process of transformation with significant investment through the Government's Aiming High for Disabled Children Programme.

What will Aiming High Achieve?

Local areas must achieve the Full Service Offer (FSO) by the end of March 2011 which is the Government's measure of successful local transformation. The FSO is broken down into four objectives, summarised below:

- To base service provision on the identified needs of all eligible disabled children/ young people and their families
- Significantly increase the volume and range of Short Breaks provision
- Significantly improve access to Short Breaks Provision
- Improve the quality of Short Breaks experiences for disabled children and young people



To achieve the FSO a programme of commissioning of services is taking place which will significantly increase the city's capacity to provide Short Breaks for disabled children and young people. In addition a fundamental review of the way in which Short Breaks services operate is being undertaken to identify how things can be done better.

What is happening in Sheffield?

Below are some examples of services or changes that are taking place in Sheffield:

- An enquiry service has been set up with SIGN, part of Sheffield Information Link to ensure that parents know where to go to get information about Short Breaks. SIGN can be contacted on 0114 2669476;
- A range of innovative and new services are being commissioned from a range of new providers, launched in the early part of 2010;

- A Short Breaks Holiday Programme has been launched, providing eligible families with a one off direct payment to provide access to a holiday or similar activity. To receive an application form please contact Catherine Calton, catherine.calton@sheffield.gov.uk, 0114 2398336.
- A new befriending service is currently being commissioned;
- Support has been given to Sheffield's Interim Parent Carer Forum, funding has also been identified to ensure that children and young people play a critical role in shaping their Short Breaks Service;
- A programme of capital projects is underway to improve physical access to facilities across the city for severely disabled children and young people;
- Work with Sheffield International Venues who operate sports and leisure facilities across the city to enhance their potential as a Short Breaks provider;
- A programme of workforce development to ensure that staff working with children and young people accessing Short Breaks have the most relevant skills and expertise.

Further Information

We would like to keep you informed about Short Breaks. If you would like to receive updates on this service please contact Catherine Calton, 0114 2398336, catherine.calton@sheffield.gov.uk.

Opinion

The short breaks transformation programme is now finally getting off the ground in Sheffield – but should it have taken a whole year for the money to start trickling down to the families who so urgently need it?

We get the impression that the Local Authority assigned a very low priority to the project during the planning phase (April 08 – April 09) – a time which could have been used to conduct wide-ranging consultations with families, and to use the data gathered to make a number of strategic decisions, such as the types of services needed, staff training requirements, access routes, and eligibility criteria.

It was only in the second year of the project that a programme officer (Chris Easton) was appointed to run it. A positive aspect here was the involvement of parents in the recruitment process.

Due to commercial sensitivities, it has been difficult for the Forum to scrutinise short breaks expenditure.

However, we hope to gain more clarity when we receive a budget statement for 2009/10 at the end of March. We have been assured that there will not be an underspend in the current financial year (which would have to be returned to central government).

We also feel we need to get a clearer picture of PCT (Primary Care Trust) spending on short breaks. Sheffield PCT is expected to make a significant contribution towards the short breaks programme, and has received an increase in its baseline allocation to do so. This money, however, is not ring-fenced, so there is a risk that it could just disappear into the general pot.

Another concern is that a lack of clear eligibility criteria is making it difficult for parents to understand or challenge the decisions of the short breaks allocation panels. We have raised this issue with officers, and will continue to work with them to bring more transparency to the process.

Support Group News



The Ray of Hope Scans

Sheffield children's additional needs support group **Ray of Hope** hosted a full programme of activities over the Christmas period, funded by Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) - Short Breaks money.

There was a Christmas extravaganza disco party, buffet, games and a visit from Santa who took time out of his busy schedule to pay a visit to Firth Park Alley on Christmas Eve. The previous week the children and their carers/parents enjoyed a wonderful picturesque train ride on the Santa Express, which was surrounded by snow. The week after Christmas we visited the panto at the City Hall - oh no we didn't, oh yes we did - to see Cinderella, followed by a ride on the Big Wheel viewing the lights of Sheffield.

Through AHDC we intend to host a programme of activities throughout the year. If your child has a special/additional need and you feel you would benefit from attending a support group, please see website www.rayofhope-supportgroup.co.uk or contact Jayne on 0114 2490797. We also need soft toys for fundraising (we are able to collect).

Achievement for All

Sheffield takes part in pilot project

Achievement for All is a new pilot project which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and Sheffield is one of ten local authorities in England taking part.

The project will run between September 2009 and September 2011 at 51 primary and secondary schools in Sheffield, as well as Talbot special school (please see our website for a complete list of schools).

The project will collect data from pupils with special educational needs (i.e. children on School Action, School Action Plus or Statements) in years 1, 5, 7 and 10. In the second year of the project, pupils with SEND in other years will also take part, but they will not be tracked.

The project has three main aims:

- 1. To improve educational attainment and progress**
This will be done through better assessment, tracking, and interventions.
- 2. To get parents more involved in their child's education**
This will be done by training teachers to hold termly "structured conversations" with parents.
- 3. To improve wider outcomes**
Schools will be required to focus on two of the following areas:
 - Attendance
 - Behaviour
 - Bullying
 - Developing positive relationships
 - Increasing participation in extended services provision (e.g. extra-curricular activities,



after-school clubs, childcare, specialist services).

Sheffield will receive a total of £2.7m of additional funding to deliver this project. This money will go towards:

- employing a local authority project leader (Gillian Anderson)
- spreading good practice by enabling less experienced teachers to shadow the most effective and inclusive teachers in "placement schools", i.e. schools regarded as being at the forefront of inclusion
- building capacity in schools to free up staff time; however, this is mostly for evaluation, planning and conversations with parents, rather than direct contact with the children
- improving support for all parents of children and young people with SEND
- the cost of training and development sessions

- developing and distributing materials to help staff deliver the aims of the project.

Most of the funding will be given directly to schools, but some will be held back centrally. Schools will have to account for their spending to the Local Authority, and will be required to collect data on a number of indicators, such as: termly attainment for English and mathematics, parental engagement and confidence, wider outcomes (e.g. attendance, participation in extra-curricular activities), and changes in staff attitude and school ethos.

Is your child's school taking part in this project?

What has your experience been like so far?

Let us know by posting on our online forum!

To register, just go to:

www.sheffieldinterimforum.org.uk

Open the "Discussion group" tab and click on "Register". We look forward to reading your messages!

Opinion

by Eva Juusola
(Development Worker)

Achievement for All is only just starting to be rolled out in Sheffield, and of course we all hope that it will be a resounding success. I am a bit reluctant to comment on this project at such an early stage, and I hope that my comments will not be interpreted as unfair criticism.

However, the idea of a pilot is that you try out something new which may or may not work, so that others can learn from your successes and mistakes. Since this project is very much about increasing parental participation, it seems to make sense to voice parents' concerns early on, in order to engage in a constructive dialogue with officers and schools.

The positive comments first: I really like the idea of peer mentoring, i.e. spreading good practice by getting weaker or less experienced teachers to observe the most inclusive ones. Training teachers to have regular, in-depth conversations with parents of children with SEN is a long-overdue step in the right direction.

However, I fear that this project focuses too much on academic achievement, especially if you think of the more severely disabled children who may lack the developmental foundations for academic learning. As one mum put it, "They're trying to run before they can walk". For many of our children, an adequate education isn't, or isn't just, about getting better grades - it's "life skills" like resilience, self esteem, the ability to think flexibly, social skills, and independence, that will make the biggest difference to the quality of life they will enjoy as adults.

All that Achievement for All seems to offer to help children achieve what it calls "wider outcomes" (and independence isn't even mentioned here!), is SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning). Such a generic mainstream approach to social skills

training is unlikely to be effective for children with a social communication disorder. What is needed is a far more refined approach, which focuses on identifying, and closing, an individual child's developmental gaps. To develop such a tailor-made approach, we would need disability-specific expert advisors to assess children regularly, to train all of the child's caregivers to deliver appropriate interventions, and to regularly review progress and set new targets.

There are without doubt many fantastic mainstream teachers out there, and seeing them in action will hopefully inspire others to strive towards a more inclusive classroom. But even the most inclusive mainstream teachers are, by the very nature of their jobs, generalists. Wouldn't it make sense to dispatch mainstream teachers to shadow their counterparts in special schools and IRs, or for specialist teachers to

provide outreach support to mainstream schools?

As for parental engagement, it would have been great to engage parents right at the beginning of the project, when schools had to identify their areas of weakness with regard to SEN provision, and decide how these should be addressed. Many parents of children with SEN would have had a lot to contribute to this discussion, but I am not sure if anybody thought to ask them.

The Interim Parent Carer Forum would be more than happy to facilitate consultation with parents, particularly at a more strategic (Local Authority) level.

We have raised the points mentioned here with officers working on the project, and hope to publish their response in our next newsletter.



Going to Cabinet



by Deborah Woodhouse
(parent carer)

Many of you will have seen the article in the Sheffield Star highlighting a survey by our group about special educational needs in Sheffield, which showed that only 10% of parents feel there is adequate provision for children with special needs in mainstream schools.

To see the Star articles, go to www.thestar.co.uk, enter "Interim Parents Forum" in the "Search" box, and follow the first two links that come up.

As a group, we thought we had an idea of how parents felt from our own experiences about the difficulties our children were facing but wished to ask as many other families as possible for their views. We decided to conduct a questionnaire so we had more clout facing the local authority with our concerns. Clare Peck, one of our members, put the questionnaire together and we received more than 200 replies (see page 3 for more details). Once we looked at the

responses we decided to raise the issues at the Cabinet Meeting in November to talk to the politicians face to face. We wanted them to know the difficulties our children face on a day to day basis and give them a chance to look at the issues and improve the social and educational experience of our children.

Three of us braved the Cabinet meeting! We had to put together a three-minute question stating our case, so worked extremely hard trying to condense everything we wanted to say into three short minutes – rather a difficult task I am sure many of you will appreciate! We stood before a large boardroom-style table with Sheffield's most senior local authority politicians and officers, and asked our question. We highlighted a lack of support, SEN children being bullied and general dissatisfaction with provision within the mainstream system. We also said we wished to be involved in the decision-making processes and asked for a senior politician to be a champion for disabled children here in Sheffield.

Since the cabinet meeting we have received a response from Councillor Sangar thanking us for asking the question and also extending his thanks to 'all the parents who took the time to contribute to the research, (and to assure us) "that the officers who are working on our strategy for Inclusive Learning will be using the report to inform the development." He also said how pleased he was to hear that we "are now involved in the task groups working on the Strategy for Inclusive Learning". (Which is not quite correct - parents have been involved in the task groups working on the LDD Strategy, the Inclusive Learning Strategy has had no parental input so far!) They are also looking at nominating a Sheffield "Champion" for Children with learning difficulties and disabilities and we'll let you know how this goes in future newsletters.

The full text of our question and Councillor Sangar's response are available on our website under the "Resources" tab.

I think it was worth going to Cabinet and asking questions of the politicians face to face and would certainly do this again. Yes, we were intimidated but we supported each other and had the feedback from many parent carers to press our case. Let's hope long-lasting change results from our campaign for better services for our children!

Strategic Thinking

Developing a new LDD Strategy for Sheffield

When a new LDD (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities) Strategy for Sheffield was put out for consultation at the beginning of 2009, it was given a massive "thumbs down" by parents, support groups and even some professionals. To our surprise (and delight!), the Local Authority then took the brave decision to re-write the strategy.

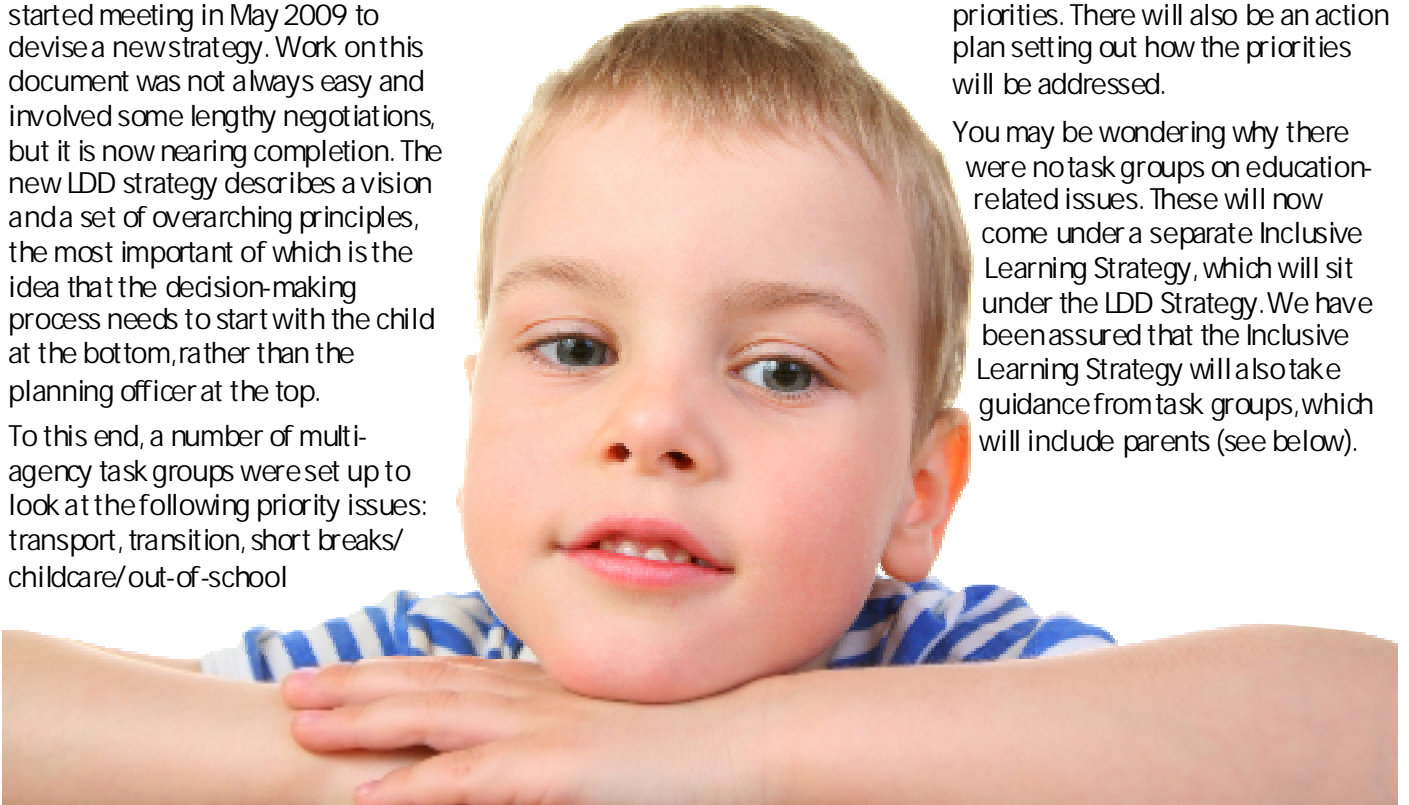
A sub group comprising officers from the Local Authority and the PCT (Primary Care Trust) as well as several parent representatives started meeting in May 2009 to devise a new strategy. Work on this document was not always easy and involved some lengthy negotiations, but it is now nearing completion. The new LDD strategy describes a vision and a set of overarching principles, the most important of which is the idea that the decision-making process needs to start with the child at the bottom, rather than the planning officer at the top.

To this end, a number of multi-agency task groups were set up to look at the following priority issues: transport, transition, short breaks/ childcare/out-of-school

activities, and complex health needs. At the beginning of this year, each group held two four-hour meetings, which were attended by parent carers, professionals and practitioners, and officers from the Local Authority and PCT. We would like to say a big thank you to everyone who braved the ice and snow to attend, but particularly the parents who gave up their time so generously - you know who you are!

Feedback from the task group meetings was very positive, and many professionals remarked that the input from parents was crucial. The meetings also seem to have had the positive side effect of kick-starting collaborations between people working on similar strands. Priorities identified by the task groups will now be included in the new LDD strategy, which will be put out for consultation in the spring. Hopefully, parents will feel that the new document better reflects their priorities. There will also be an action plan setting out how the priorities will be addressed.

You may be wondering why there were no task groups on education-related issues. These will now come under a separate Inclusive Learning Strategy, which will sit under the LDD Strategy. We have been assured that the Inclusive Learning Strategy will also take guidance from task groups, which will include parents (see below).



Education, education, education...

If you are interested in education-related issues and would like to have an input in the **Inclusive Learning Strategy**, please get in touch!

We are planning to hold a few meetings just for parents to get our heads together before the "official" task group meetings start - dates will be announced via our website and email list.

If you find it difficult to attend meetings, you can also write to us, visit our office, talk to us on the phone, or contribute to the discussion forum on our website. Contact details are at the back of this newsletter. We look forward to hearing your views!

Meet the team

Our management committee...



From left:

Jayne Raynor,
Sue Robinson,
Deborah
Woodhouse,
Jayne Woodward,
Julie Fry,
Rachel Crowther,
Sue Roe,
Clare Peck,
David Roe.

... and our workers:



"Hi, my name is Eva Juusola and I initially got involved with the Interim Parent Carer Forum because I have a little boy with ASD. However, my problem is that I simply can't do things by halves! I soon found myself turning down freelance jobs (I'm a translator by training) and taking on more and more work for the Forum.

When the position of Development Worker came up, I jumped at the chance. I'm over the moon that I've got the job, and determined to give it 150%!

I am very excited about all the new participation opportunities for parents in Sheffield. The tide really is in our favour – let's make the most of it!"

"Hi, my name's Claire Wood, and I am delighted to have been appointed as the Forum's Business Support Worker.

My recent working background has been in the field of Administration management, working in both the not-for-profit and charity sectors, as well as a stint with the Local Authority Short Breaks Team. I have gained an insight into the work that still needs to be done in respect of getting a much better deal for children with disabilities in Sheffield, and I am passionate in my support for helping to achieve positive outcomes for all."

Competition quiz

Here's a bit of fun for you: without recourse to the internet (go on, you can do it!!) have a bash at our competition quiz.

All entries must be received by **30th of April 2010**. The first correct entry drawn out of the hat will win a £10 WH Smith gift voucher!

1. A doomsday device known as the Q-bomb plays a decisive role in which film?
2. The following are some of the most expensive paintings in the world. Who was the artist responsible for each painting?
 - a. No 5, 1948
 - b. Portrait of Dr. Gachet
 - c. Green Car Crash
3. Which insane 'artist' once said "Any one who sees and paints a sky green and fields blue ought to be sterilized"?
4. Which Oscar winning film is based on the trials and tribulations of Harold Abraham and Eric Liddell?
5. What is the well known translation for 'River of January'?
6. Which modern means of transport now usually replaces the richly adorned but antiquated and impractical 'Sedia Gestatoria'?
7. There are 13 official countries in the world which have a capital city beginning and ending with the same letter. Can you name six? One point for each correct answer
8. Nasty, Stig, Dirk and Barry were collectively known as what?
9. The flag pole in front of Anfield Stadium was the top mast of which colossal 19th century ship?
10. The voices of Anthony Quinn, Richard Burton and Curt Jürgens were all used, albeit in different versions, to narrate what?

Help us design a logo!

Do you have a budding artist in your family? Or perhaps you have a flair for design yourself? Then we need your help!

We will be holding our first Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the 21st of April, at which point we will drop the "Interim" from our name and officially become the "Sheffield Parent Carer Forum". Please help us design a distinctive logo to go with the name!

The logo should reflect the nature of the Forum, and must be suitable to be copied in

either colour or black and white.

Simplicity is key, as the logo should be clear when used at a small size (e.g. 3 cm wide). Submitted designs, however, should be fairly large.

We will enlist the help of a designer to assist us in choosing a winner, and we reserve the right to modify the chosen design. Please do not include any copyrighted material.

Closing date is **30th April 2010** (a nice little project for the Easter holidays!). The winner will receive a £20 Amazon gift certificate.

Please send entries for either of the two competitions to:

Email:

enquiries@sheffieldinterimforum.org.uk

Freepost address:

Sheffield Interim Parent Carer Forum
c/o Sheffield Carers Centre
Freepost NEA9555
Sheffield S1 2ZZ



NB: By submitting an entry for the logo competition, you agree that your submission of a design constitutes an assignation to Sheffield Parent Carer Forum, of all rights in that design. All submitted designs shall become and remain the property of Sheffield Parent Carer Forum.

Get in touch



By Post:
Sheffield Interim Parent Carer Forum
c/o Sheffield Carers Centre
7 Bells Court, Bells Square
Sheffield S1 2FY UK



By phone:
0114 252 1913



By e-mail:
enquiries@sheffieldinterimforum.org.uk



Drop-in:
Currently by appointment only;
please contact us to arrange a time



Website and online discussion forum:
www.sheffieldinterimforum.org.uk

Please come along to our first AGM (Annual General Meeting)!

When: 21st April 2010, 7pm

Where: St Mary's Conference Centre, Bramall Lane, Sheffield S2 4QZ

Who: Open to all members of the Sheffield Interim Parent Carer Forum (opportunity to register at the meeting)

What: Presentation of the management committee report and accounts, election of trustees, and appointment of auditors. Well, that's the boring bit! We'll also tell you what we've been up to over the past few months, look at the entries to our design-a-logo competition, and eventually adjourn to a nearby pub for the social part of the evening. It would help if you could let us know in advance that you are coming. We hope to see you there!

Our aims

We want:

- disabled children and their families to have a better quality of life
- disabled children to be fully included in, and accepted by, their local communities
- disabled children to receive all the services, help and support they need to reach their full potential

We will work in partnership with parents, schools, the local authority, the health authority and the voluntary sector to achieve these objectives.

Specifically, we will:

- give parents of disabled children in Sheffield a strong voice in influencing local developments that affect their children
- keep parent carers informed of developments that affect their children
- provide a platform for parent carers to exchange information and support each other
- signpost parent carers to sources of advice and help



Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the official views of the Sheffield Interim Parent Carer Forum. We welcome articles from parents, officers, professionals and practitioners. Please contact us to discuss possible contributions.