

# Sheffield Parent View of Provision for Children with a Learning Disability

August 2009

## Background

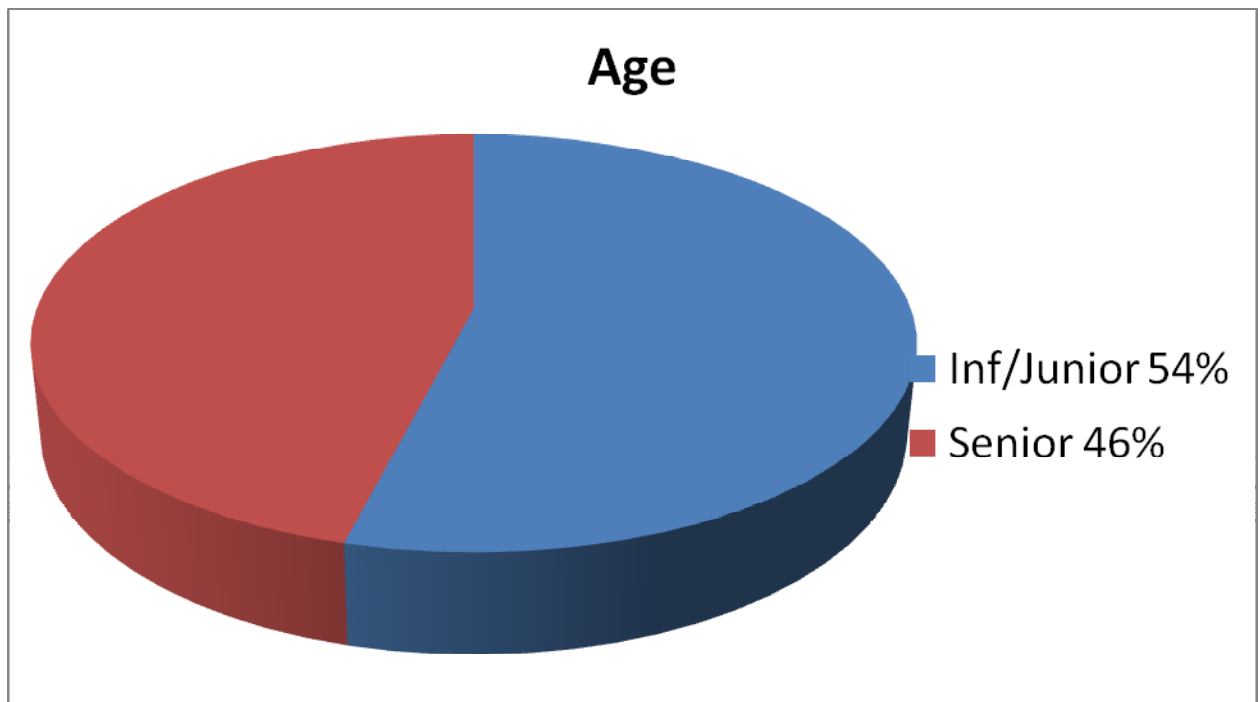
At the first Megacentre meeting of Sheffield parents in February 2009, it became clear that there were many issues causing concerns to families. At the top of the list were worries about support in school and lack of specialist input.

The Interim Parent Carer Forum felt it would be helpful to try to get feedback from as many parents as possible to assess the size of the problem. We decided to do this by questionnaire over the summer holidays in order for us to have some results by the October conference.

1010 questionnaires were sent out to families on the Sheffield INDEX, of which 969 would have had children in full time schooling (i.e. excluding under 4's). 209 questionnaires were returned, which gives a return rate of 22%. This percentage would be higher (24%) if we exclude the 82 families with children at 18+ as they probably did not feel it was relevant to them.

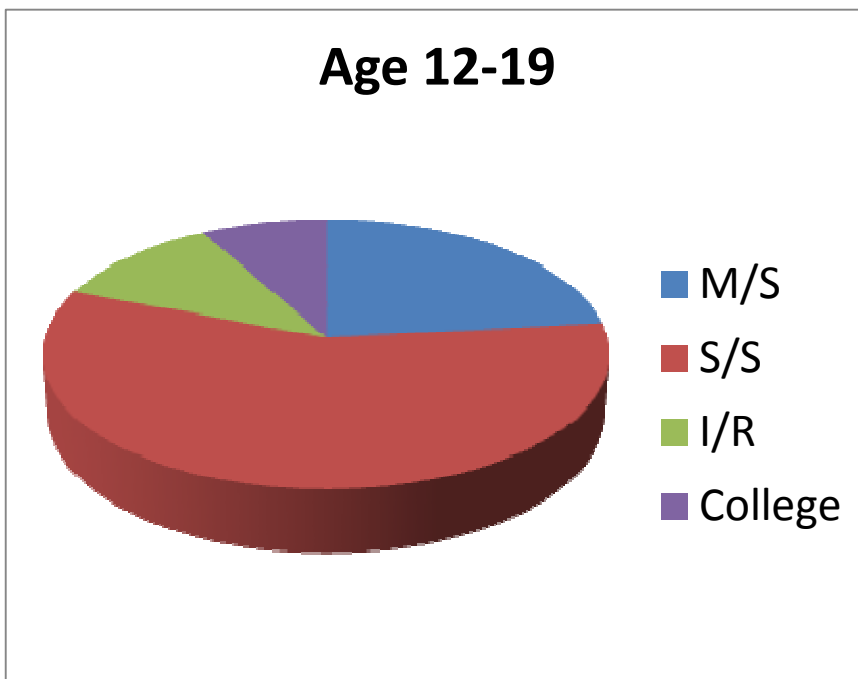
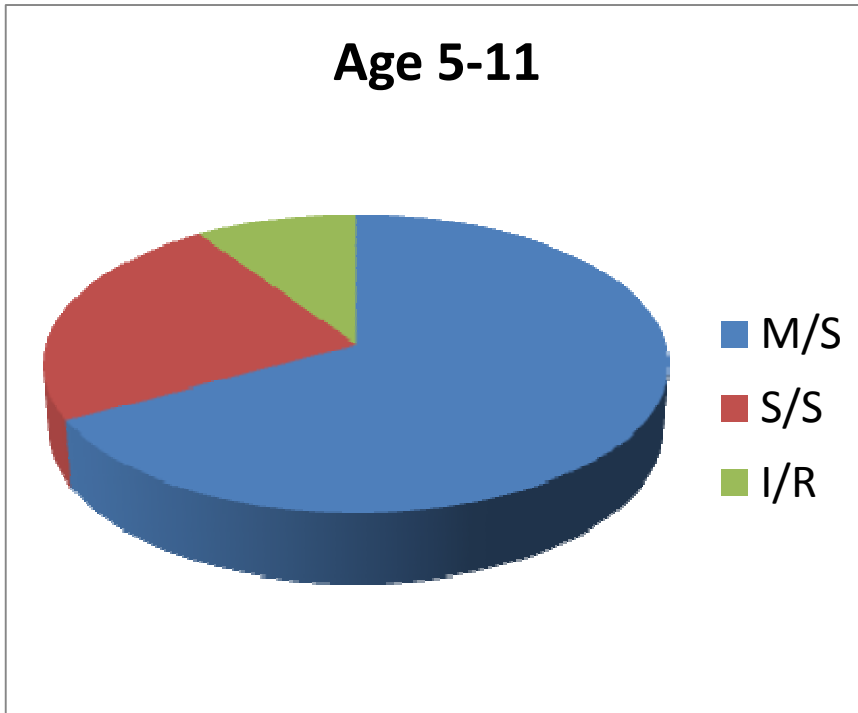
## Results

### 1. Age distribution

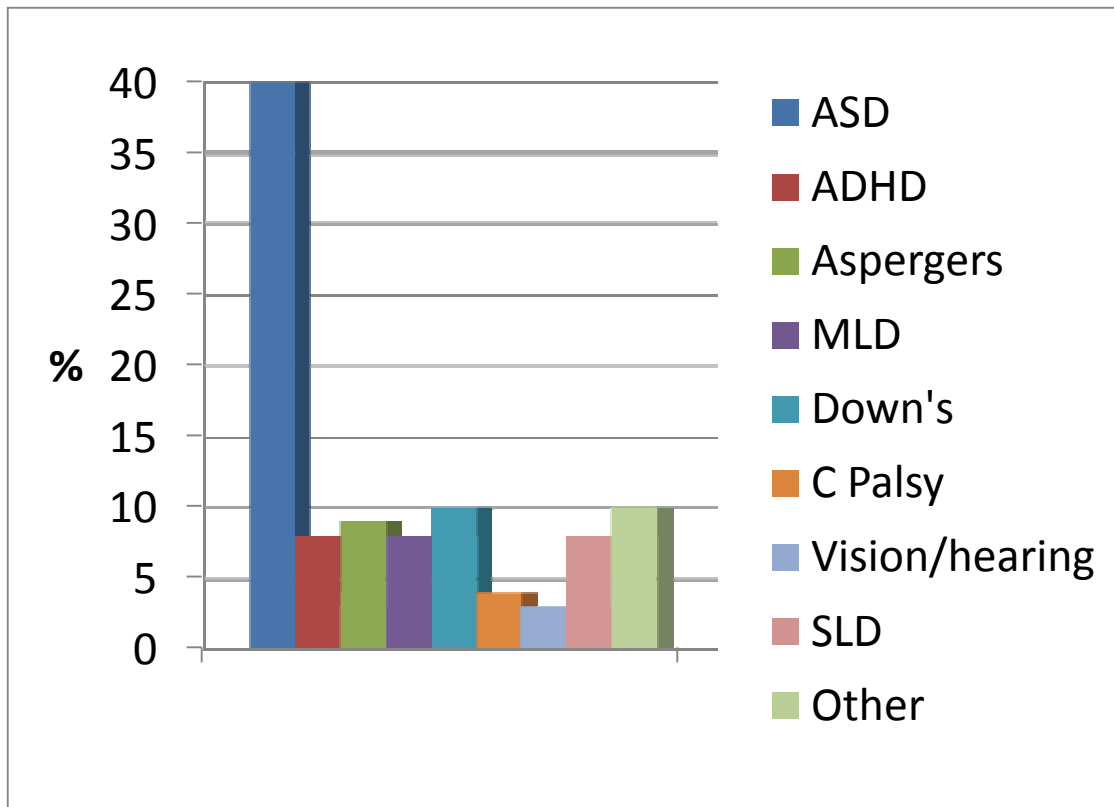


Two questionnaires were from pre-school and are not included.

Spread of ages across mainstream, special schools, integrated resources and colleges.



## 2. Different primary disabilities represented



This does not really represent everything because 30% of our children had dual or triple diagnoses.

"Other" (10%) includes many conditions that are rarer, for example McCune-Albright syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Williams syndrome and many others. One disadvantage for this large group of families is the potential for feeling even more isolated as local support groups may not be available and there may be less information available on specific learning profiles.

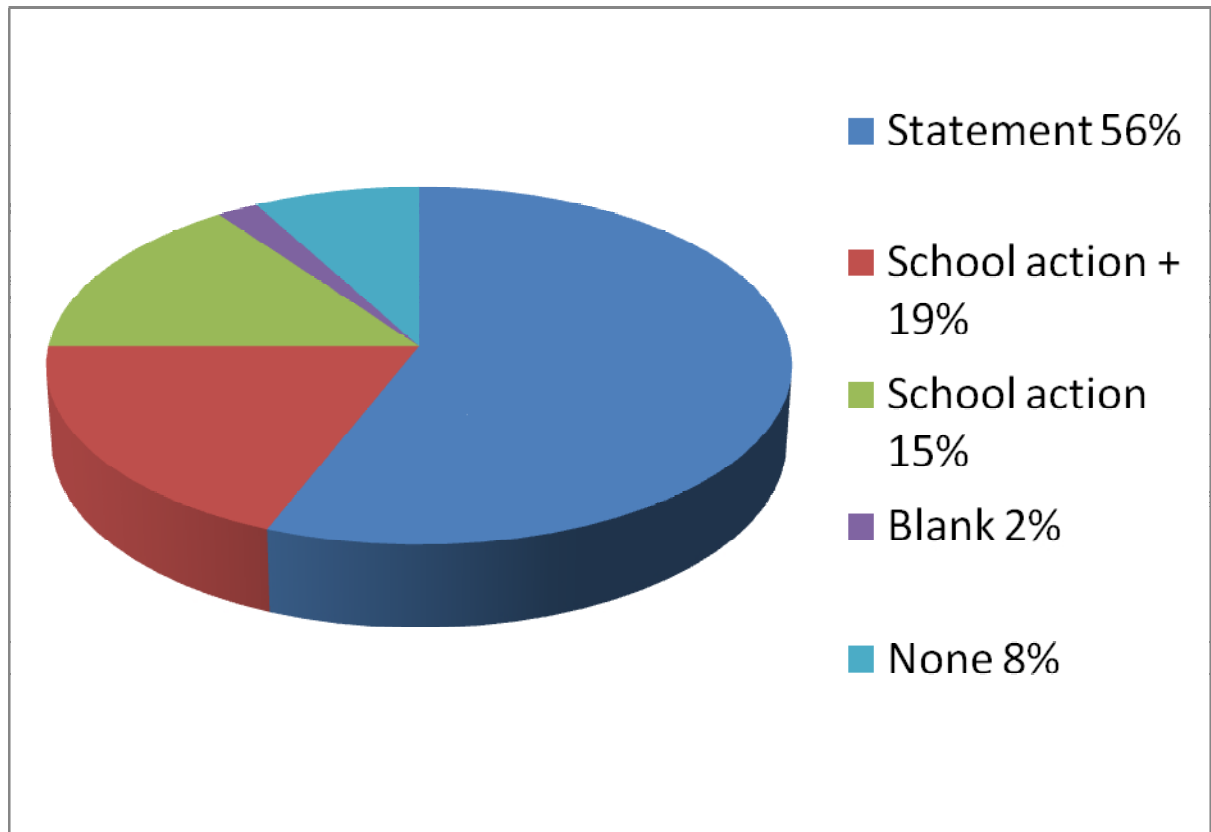
16% have moderate or severe learning disability with no specific label. There are advantages and disadvantages to having a label in the education system. It may lead to an earlier recognition of the need for extra support in school, it may be that with that label comes more information and understanding for parents, the child and teachers.

On the other hand, labels can cause people to make assumptions about a child before getting to know them and may prevent appropriate help being sought because a new problem is put down to the known disability.

### 3. Level of SEN support

Children in Integrated Resources and special schools were nearly all supported by statements. Those in mainstream were supported as shown.

#### Mainstream support



### 4. Hours of support on statements

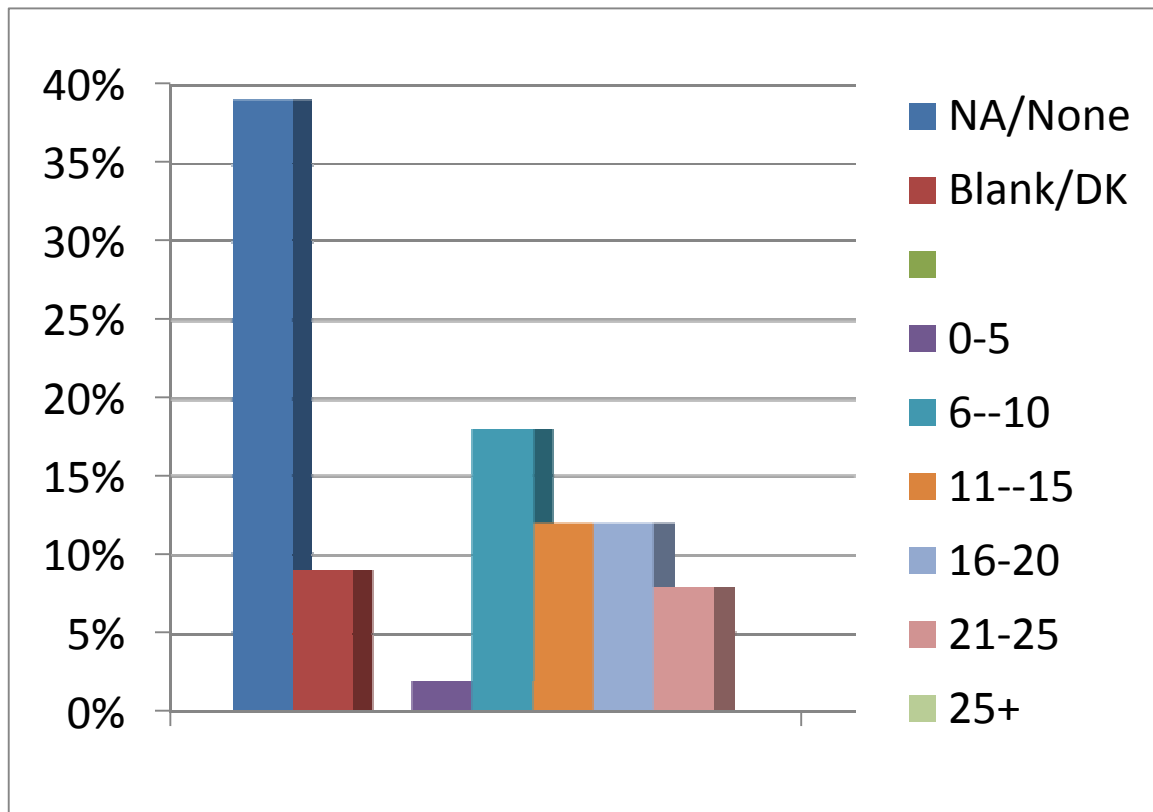
The hours stated on statements are graphed below. 62% received 15 hours or less, 38% received 15 hours or more. Our sample contained no children with full-time support (i.e. 32.5 hours per week). In fact, the maximum was 25 hours per week, and it would be interesting to establish if there is a policy to send children who require more than 25 hours to special schools.

Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not enquire if parents had had to appeal to gain the higher hours. However, there were many comments stating that higher hours had only been achieved through appeal, but the information cannot be quantified.

Parents found it difficult to answer the question about the number of hours their child was actually receiving. "I haven't a clue" was a common response. Overall, the hours thought to be received correlated with the statement, with a few children having less and a few more. A recurrent comment was children shared

their teaching assistant with other children who did not have stated needs. This need not be a bad thing as group work can be really helpful, but transparency about where the help is being used is essential.

### Hours on statement



Changes in the allocation of SEN budgets to schools, which were introduced in 2008, have changed the way schools receive funding for our children. Schools now receive a larger direct budget worked out on the size of the school and the level of deprivation. Out of this budget, the school has to meet all the needs of statemented and non-statemented children. So, regardless of the number of children with special needs on roll, a school's budget remains roughly the same. Some schools in more deprived areas have seen an increase in their budget, while other schools have seen a drop.

All the parents I have spoken to are at a loss to understand how mainstream schools can be expected to welcome the inclusion of children with special needs if they do not see extra funding follow that child. There is a widespread perception among school staff and professionals that schools only receive extra funding if a child's statement specifies more than 15 hours of learning support per week. Hence, there is little incentive for schools to request an increase in support hours, unless this lifts a child's total hours over the 15-hour mark. This seems to miss the whole point of writing a statement in the first place, which is to describe

the needs of a child, and to specify and quantify the additional provision required to meet those needs.

Therefore, we asked how many parents had experienced the schools raising the new funding arrangements as a problem.

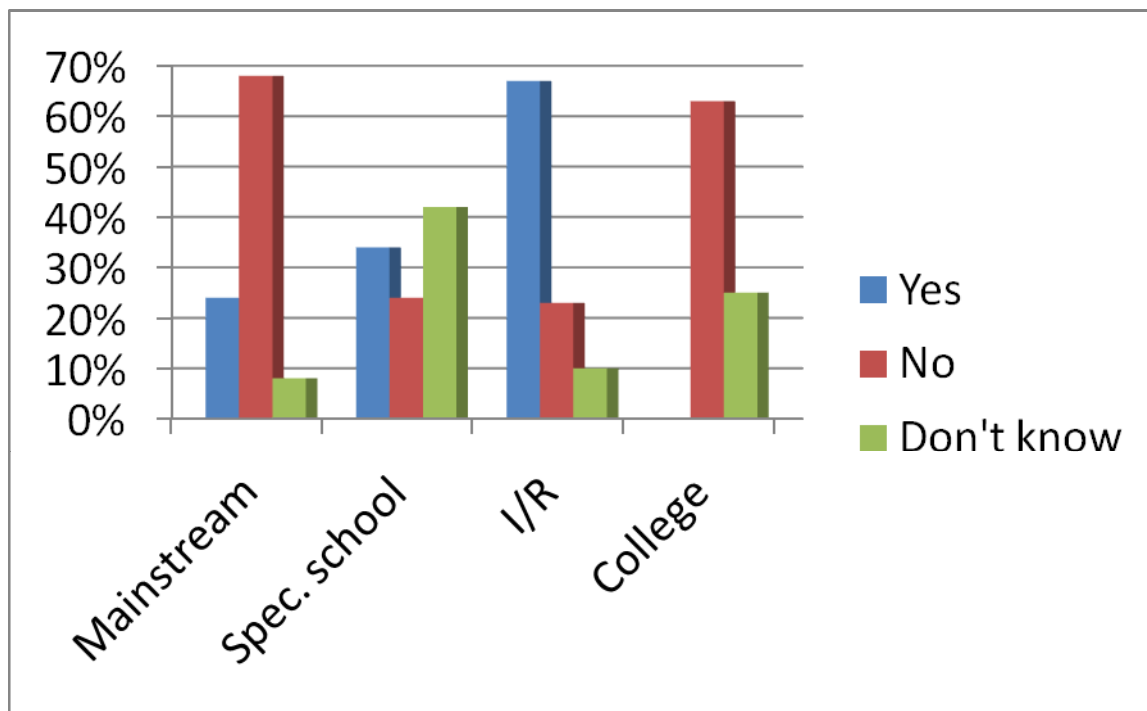
**5. Has the change in SEN funding been raised by your school as a problem?**

Overall 19% said yes, rising to 29% in mainstream.

Several parents have been told that disabled children are taking money away from other children. These types of comments are not going to foster trust and good partnerships between parents and the school.

**6. Lunchtime / break time support**

The most support was recorded for Integrated Resources; however, 42% of those in special schools said they did not know.



Comments for the 24% receiving support in mainstream suggested that the support was often by teaching assistants giving up their lunchtimes unpaid.

Of those who stated that they had no support at lunchtimes, 38% had asked and been refused.

**Reasons given to parents for lack of lunchtime / break time support:**

No staff (+ several similar comments)

No funding (+ several similar comments)

No time (+ several similar comments)

Lack of support was reason for us requesting special school

She was out of school gate, it was left to a child to tell teacher she had gone

Would lose time in classroom support

Applied for this as part of statement but refused by SEN section, told Sheffield did not give statemented support for children at lunchtime

I requested that the circle of friends be created to support my daughter on a residential, continue in school; this was refused

Dinner lady not aware of his learning difficulties

No reply

All support refused, no reason given

TA lunchtime etc

I have enquired but told this time is understaffed anyway without adding anyone else!

Going to the SEN room is better than nothing but ideally my child needs help in learning the skills of how to play

School has created a refuge for vulnerable children staffed by SEN staff

**7. Have you ever had to take your child home due to lack of support?**

Overall 18% said YES

rising to 24% in mainstream

**Reasons why children needed to be taken home:**

When there wasn't enough staffing for a trip to the zoo

I have said that I will, however they tell me if I do they will take me to court

Yes, my child has been upset not understanding lessons

At break times (+ several similar comments)

For trips and residential  
When they were short staffed  
I have gone in to assist  
Wanted to!  
I would love to!  
Yes, which is why we went for special school

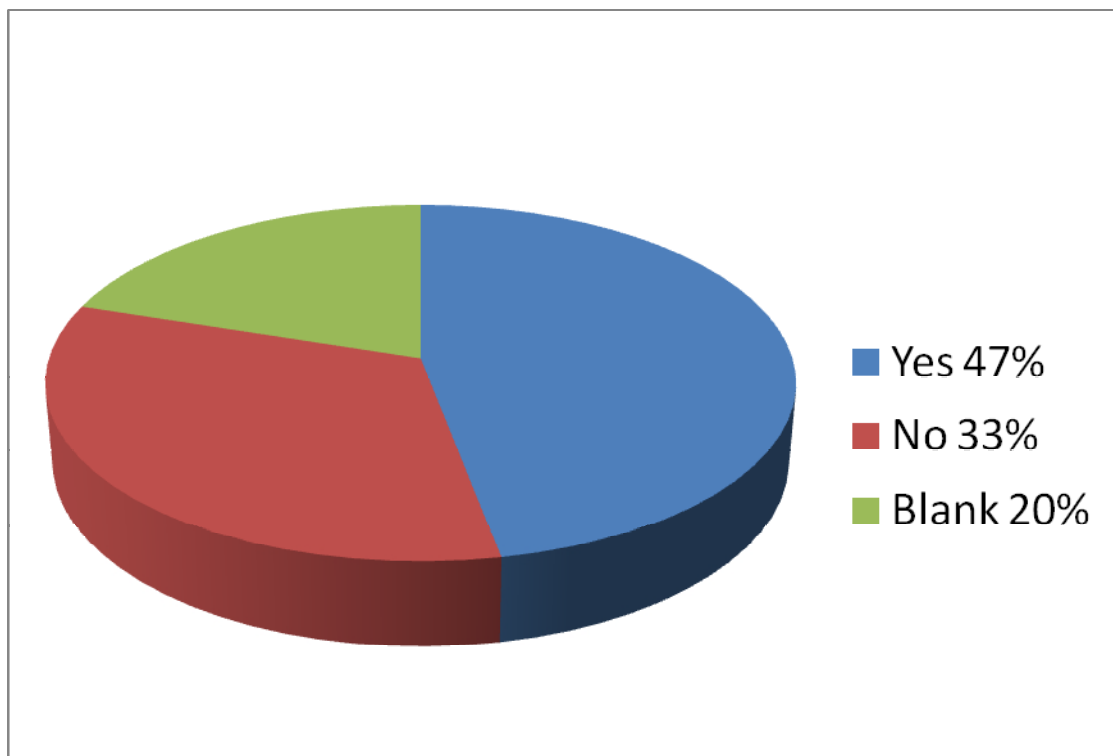
**8. Has your child ever been bullied?**

39% said YES

rising to 53% in mainstream

Overwhelmingly, this was in break times and at the end of school, resulting in some parents taking children home for lunch or picking them up half an hour early at end of the school day.

**9. Does your child display challenging behaviours?**



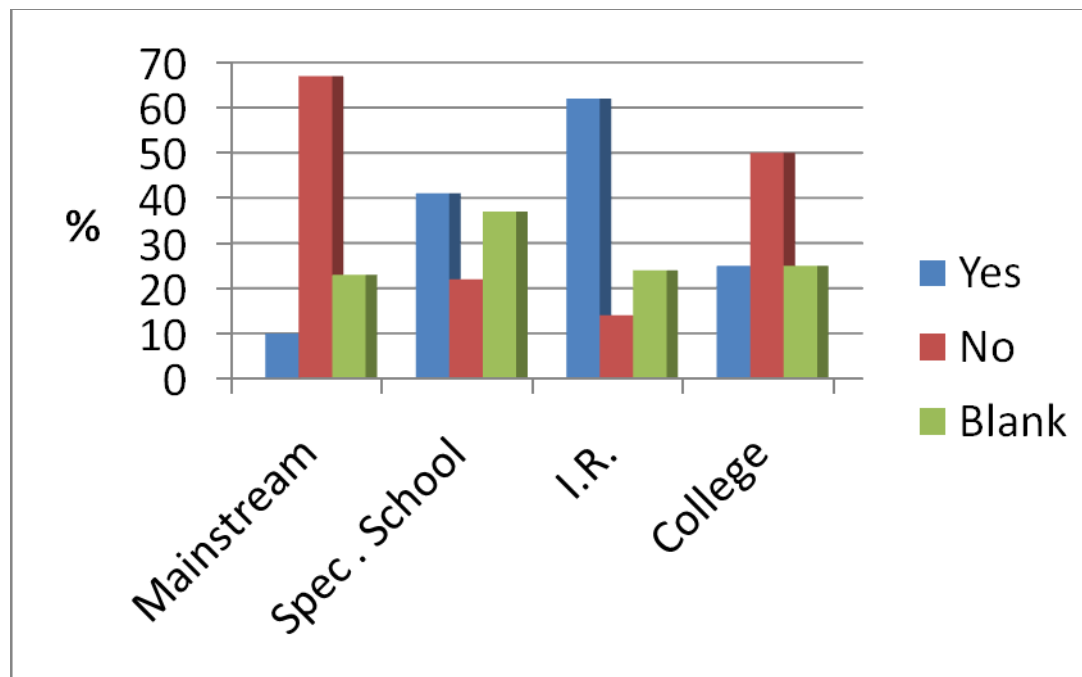
Of those who answered YES:

27% in special schools and Integrated Resources said they had received NO help with these behaviours, rising to 62% in mainstream.



## 10. Appropriateness of provision

Do you feel the provision at school is adequate?



### Comments from parents of children in special schools:

We need more lunch and break support (+ several similar comments)

She gets bored at lunch

Need supervision to help integrate, not separate off to SEN room

The appeal was so stressful, support now is OK

I would like better communication with school

More 1 to 1

There is a lack of experienced staff

It would be nice to see a copy of the statement

Mainstream need more understanding of Learning disability

When in mainstream he was home more than school!

Special school responded when we felt we needed another assistant

### **Comments from parents of children in mainstream schools:**

More teaching staff / more training in LDD, "complete lack understanding "  
(+ several similar comments)

More speech and language therapy (+ several similar comments)

We have to keep our child at home for 2 afternoons and 3 lunchtimes a week  
because they cannot cope

I haven't got a clue what she does, when I ask for more teaching, they say, go to  
another school who can teach her more, I think the special needs teacher should  
know more

They see education as the first, second and only concern. The lack of provision  
at breaks will lead to serious problems in long term

Should encourage buddy systems

I would like a statement

Provision is totally inadequate, I am in process of an appeal

Cover TA (teaching assistant) illness

Better communication (+ several similar comments)

Needs 1 to 1 (+ several similar comments)

Not enough support in History, Geography, Spanish; homework a big problem,  
can't keep up and does not know what is expected of him

More support (+ several similar comments)

Has to come home 2.30 so he does not get beat up

Unfair that my school has to provide more than statement says

I strongly believe our children are being let down by education department

More numeracy

More parent support

Money to follow child; schools accountable for how used

### Comments from parents of children in Integrated Resources

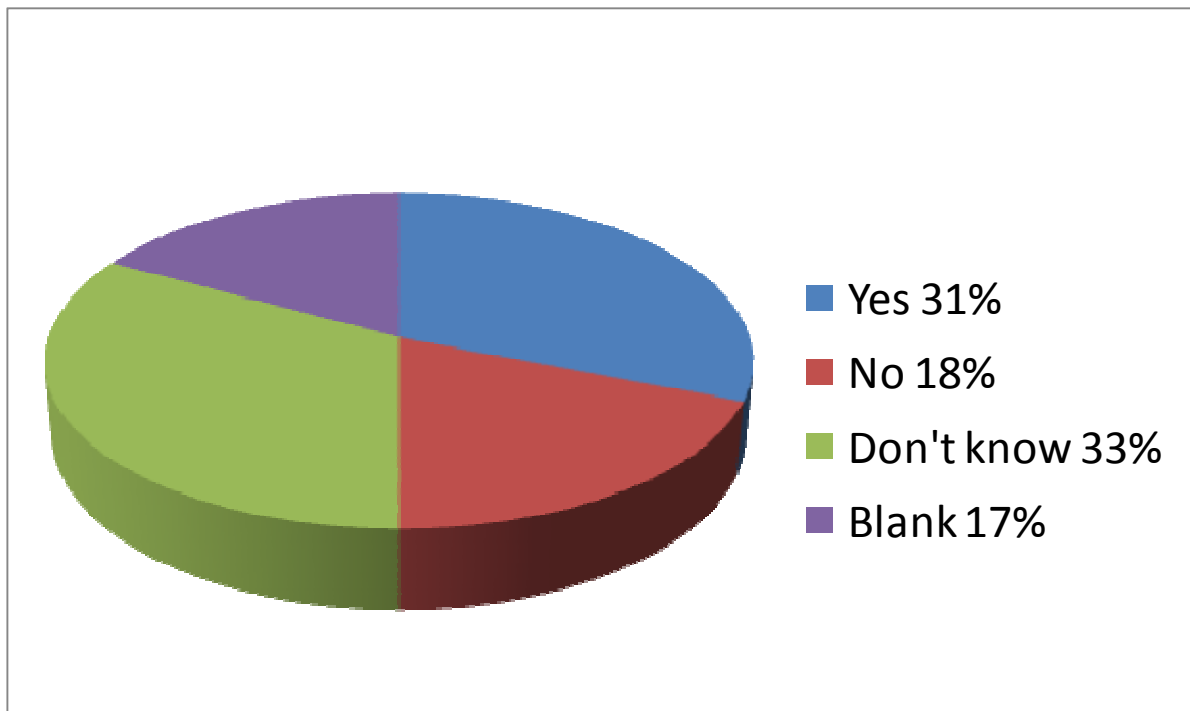
Worried about secondary school (+ several similar comments)

Support trips

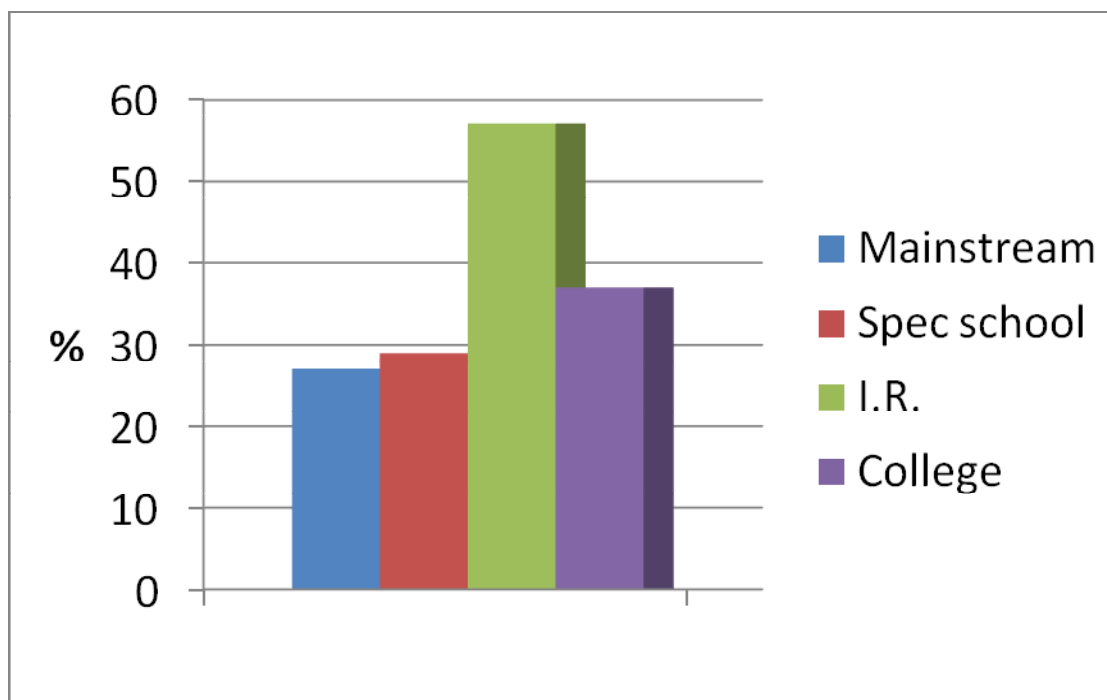
Lunch support

### 11. Is your child's teacher or teaching assistant receiving any training from education services to help your child in school?

Overall, replies show that at least half of parents are not sure about this one:



When looking at different providers, the parents with children at Integrated Resources seemed more confident in the training:



Many parents had requested specialist training for staff and been refused. Schools seem reluctant to accept ideas from parents. The nature of having a child with a disability often means you have researched the subject pretty well and have a good deal to offer.

Overall 12% of parents, rising to 18% in mainstream, had requested specialist training for school staff and been refused. Many parents commented that they had not thought to ask for this.

I was brushed off

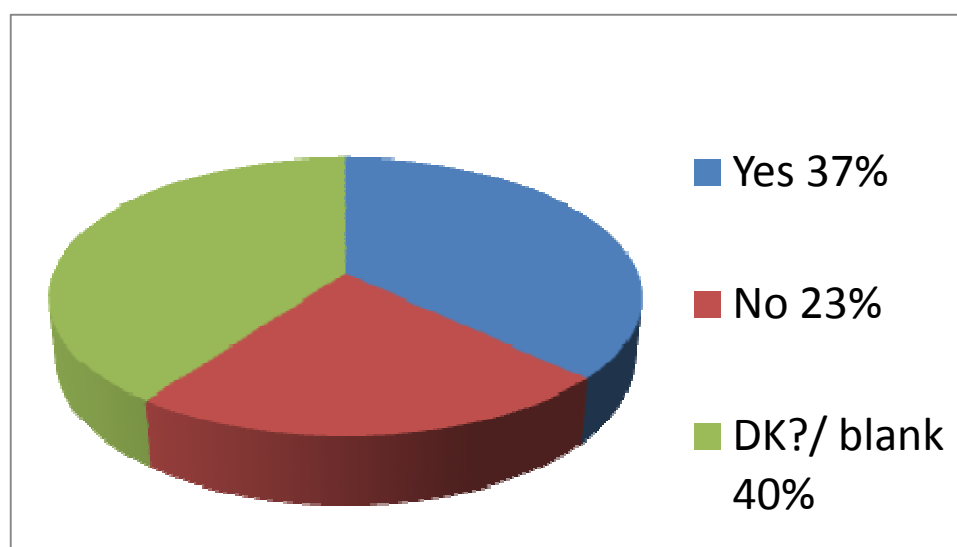
They refused

I asked for Makaton

I offered to pay

We arranged some training but the staff did not turn up

## 12. Is there a specialist who knows about your child's educational profile?



37% felt there was a specialist who knew about their child, but many comments stated that the specialist was only sought at a time of crisis.

Many positive comments about the Autism Team, but with a huge amount of concern that this service seems to have shrunk and no longer gets involved in a proactive way, with child contact. Many parents of younger autistic children did not know about the Autism Team.

A specialist for Down syndrome in Sheffield was a repeated request.

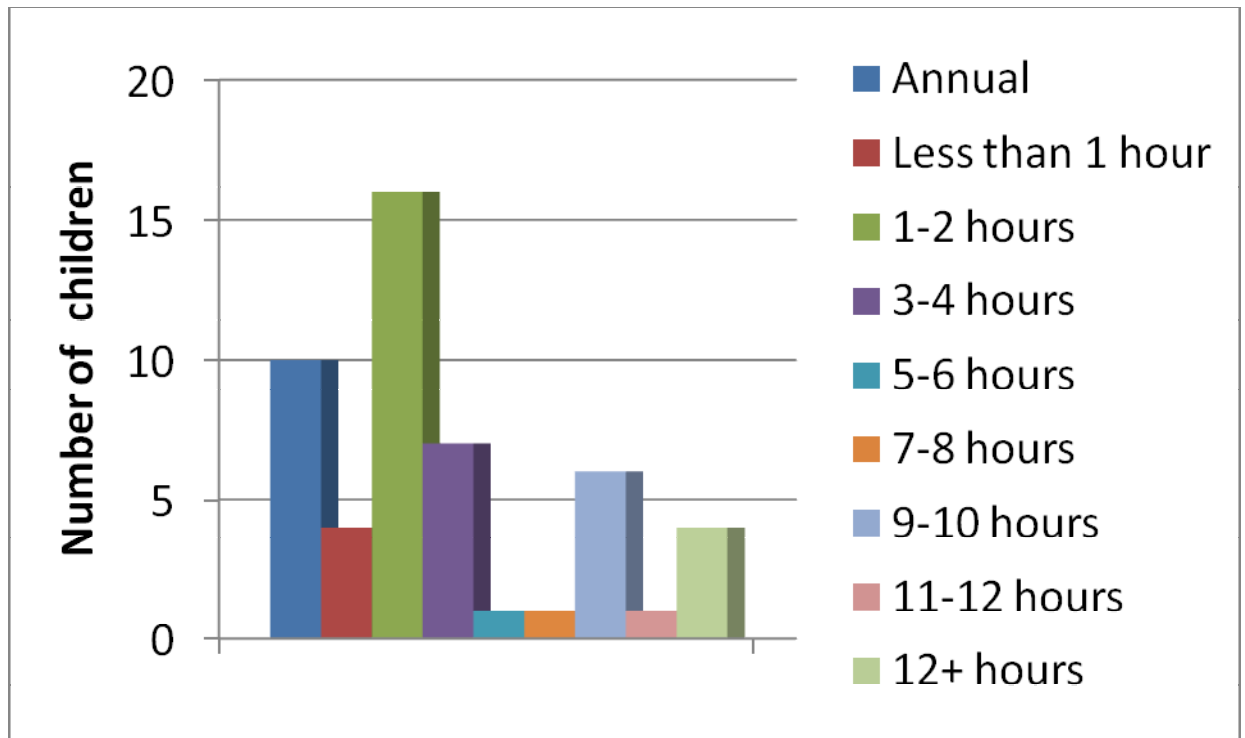
In a city the size of Sheffield it would be more efficient to train up teams of people who can stay up to date and visit children in their setting.

## 13. Speech and language therapy

Given the disabilities represented in our sample, it can be assumed that well over half of the children surveyed had speech and language needs. However, only 31% of respondents stated that their children were receiving some speech and language therapy. Unfortunately, the questionnaire failed to establish how many children needed speech and language therapy, but were not receiving any. However, nearly every comment expressed frustration over lack of this resource.

Out of those children whose parents were able to quantify the therapist input their child was receiving, 57% had two hours or less per term, with a third of this group receiving *annual* visits from a speech and language therapist. The issues here are not just to do with hours of contact with the speech and language therapist, but how to translate the advice given (e.g. games to play, resources to use) into action that happens daily in the classroom and thus turning the "advice" into "therapy".

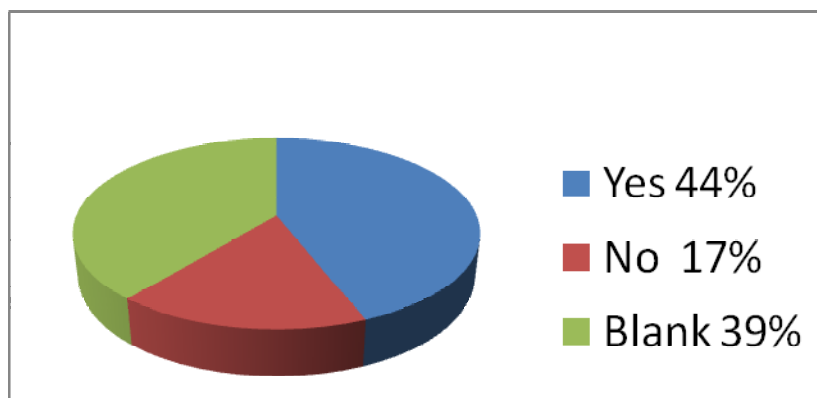
### Hours of speech and language therapy received per term



### 14. Does your statement specify the number of hours of therapy?

Out of all the respondents whose children had a statement and speech and language needs, only **9%** stated that speech and language therapy was quantified in their child's statement, often as a result of an appeal to SENDIST. Out of these 9%, more than half stated that, despite their statement, their child was not receiving any speech and language therapy at all.

### 15. Would you like to change anything?



### **Comments from parents of children in special schools**

We had to go to Manchester to get specialist provision

Need specialists, e.g. autism, Down syndrome

Need more speech and language therapy (+ several similar comments)

Nearer home

Better provision for more able pupils

Update statements more regularly

Meet with psychology service

More VI (visual impairment) input

Help in holidays (+ several similar comments)

Would like to know if a specialist exists

Make sure staff trained

Better communication in secondary school

### **Comments from parents of children in mainstream schools**

Change the school; they brush her under the carpet

Recognise my child has special needs

Listen to my child

To actually get what is on his statement

Monitoring mainstream schools to ensure they can provide a special needs education; "my school has taken the money and run"

Psychology input; 3-4 month wait for Ryegate "drop-in" is a joke

I want to change everything!/yes lots!/whole bloody system; more specialised services, Integrated Resources at secondary school, play schemes in holidays

Stop changing support worker; spend some money at break times

Stop "there's no more money" attitude she needs help now.

Motivate staff to learn about LD/more training/view of many mainstream teachers is that children with SEN are not their responsibility (despite fact that SEN code practice states it is their job)

Yes schools, but as soon as they see he is autistic they won't take him.

Can't go on outing unless parent available

More understanding staff, instead of being treated as an overprotective mother of a disruptive child

Specialist advice / specialist to come to IEP meetings

Communication; who works with my child? (+ several similar comments)

Speech and language therapy (+ several similar comments)

### **Comments from parents of children in Integrated Resources**

More Integrated Resources

Funding per child

Would like to meet a specialist in Down syndrome!



## **Summary**

### **School support**

1. Schools are definitely giving the message that the new funding system is causing a problem.
2. Lack of break and lunchtime support is perceived as a huge problem by parents.
3. A significant number of children have to be taken out of school because of inadequate support.
4. A huge number of children have experienced bullying, particularly in mainstream schools.
5. Nearly half of the children surveyed displayed challenging behaviours, with a significant number of parents stating they had received no help with these.
6. Overall 44% parents felt provision was not adequate, although for parents of children in mainstream schools the percentage was much higher (67%).

### **Specialist provision**

7. There is a well-described frustration from parents failing to see appropriate training being offered or taken up.
8. The lack of specialist input available is seen as a big problem.
9. Lack of speech and language therapy is well described.

If this questionnaire is just used as a tool for complaint then it has failed.

I hope it has highlighted areas of need, and with this information, we can talk constructively with our local schools, and the Local Authority and PCT, to improve services for our children.

Clare Peck, member of the Sheffield Parent Interim Forum, October 2009