

## **SECTION 10**

### **Working with Parents and Carers**

#### **Overview**

All parents want the best for their children and hope they will be happy and achieve their potential at school. Success in the education of children depends, at least in some part, on parental involvement and this is particularly so when a child has additional needs.

To this end, parents have a critical role to play and should be seen as vital partners in a child's education. The involvement of parents and carers is perhaps best focussed around contributing to the review of progress and target setting through, for example, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Pastoral Support Programmes (PSPs) and, in the case of children in the care of the Local Authority, Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Guidance on how parents (and pupils) can effectively contribute to these plans is given in the Section "Planning for Individual Pupils".

Parents know their children best and by taking into account their views and experience, schools can increase the effectiveness of any provision put in place for the child. Building genuine partnerships with parents is a whole-school responsibility which can be challenging. In order to be successful, it is important to:

- remember that parents are invariably anxious about their child and are in need of a sensitive, understanding approach
- take into account any additional needs of parents themselves
- support parents to recognise their responsibilities and play an active role in their child's education

#### **Communication and Information Sharing**

Schools must tell parents when they first identify that a child has SEN and it is essential to promote early, open and continuing communication. At the same time, parents must be told about the Parent Partnership Service which can provide additional support (see <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/9ED36516F624972580256BFF003AC136> for more information). In addition, staff from the Intercultural Curriculum Support Service can support parents with English as an additional language. Please contact ICSS at The Benn Education Centre, tel: 01788 562841.

Parents should always be consulted at every step and kept fully informed about the help their child is given, and the results of that help. Explaining and clarifying procedures from the outset can prevent misunderstandings and prevent matters from escalating.

Good practice in communication involves:

- ensuring that parents understand procedures and the purpose of any intervention.
- encouraging parents' participation, listening to their views and acknowledging that their input is valued.
- using a variety of forms of communication, both formal and informal, and, where necessary, establish parents' preferred means of communication, for example, a parent with a hearing loss may prefer to receive a text or email.
- using translators where necessary and not relying on the pupil or older children to translate.
- inviting parents to regular reviews to discuss their child's progress.

- providing copies of plans which have been discussed with parents and which include suggestions for support at home.
- informing parents about the involvement of any external specialist, with an explanation of their role in supporting the child.
- recognising that some parents will require practical help and emotional support.
- contacting parents for positive as well as negative reasons, and discussing the child's strengths as well as areas of need.
- providing regular, agreed opportunities for contact, should a parent wish to discuss any concerns.
- responding promptly to letters, emails and phone messages.
- ensuring any written information is clear and jargon-free.

All parents should be kept well-informed, but needs will vary as to the type of information which is appropriate, and the level of additional support needed. Some families may be harder to reach than others and schools may have to try a number of different strategies to maintain contact.

If parents require a high level of ongoing support in practical terms, this may be difficult for the school to provide, in which case the school will need to be aware of relevant support organisations which can provide specialist information and advice. Please see Parent Partnership webpage for further information:

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/9ED36516F624972580256BFF003AC136>

In addition, schools can seek help from other specialist services, for example, the Inter-cultural Support Service (tel: 01788 562841), the West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children (tel: 01902 714646) or the school's Education Social Worker.

## **Determining Parental Responsibility**

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has issued guidance to schools which states that everyone who is a parent has a right to participate in decisions about their child's education, including being treated equally in terms of having access to information. The exception to this is where there is a court order limiting a person's rights in this respect.

A parent includes:

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person in the sense that the child lives with them and they look after that child.

All such parents, including those who do not live with their child, have the right to:

- Receive information from the school (e.g. copies of the governors' annual report, pupil reports and attendance records)
- Participate in activities (e.g. vote in elections for parent governors)
- Be asked to give consent if they ask to be consulted (e.g. to the child taking part in extra-curricular activities)

- Be told about meetings involving the child (e.g. a governors' meeting on the child's exclusion, pupil reports)

This guidance is currently in the process of being updated.

## Meetings

Many parents may lack confidence and feel nervous at the prospect of meetings to discuss their child's needs and provision. This is particularly so when a range of professionals might be involved.

In order to encourage parents to participate fully in any meetings, schools should try to:

- reassure parents that their input is valuable.
- provide sufficient notice and be flexible in the timing of any meetings, taking into account that parents may have other commitments (e.g. caring responsibilities, working hours, cultural and religious observance).
- ensure beforehand that parents know exactly who will be attending and what each person's role will be, as it can be extremely intimidating to enter a meeting and be faced with a number of unfamiliar faces.
- make parents aware that they can ask a friend or a representative from a support organisation to accompany them.
- where needed, arrange translators, signers etc well in advance.
- circulate well in advance of the meeting, any written information which will be discussed.
- encourage parents to note down their views beforehand to ensure that any queries are discussed.
- make sure that the room where the meeting is to be held is as comfortable as possible. Avoid using rooms like the staff room, where there may be frequent interruptions from phone calls or people passing through. This, from a parent's point of view, can be seen as greatly devaluing the importance of the meeting.
- provide the opportunity for parents to ask any questions, ensuring that their views are listened to and responded to appropriately, and are given equal weight to those expressed by professionals present.
- check that parents understand procedures and any professional terminology used.
- conclude the meeting by ensuring that parents have a clear understanding of the plan, action points and timescales for review.
- ensure that any minutes or action points noted, are circulated as "Draft", so that everyone has an opportunity to make amendments.

## Further Advice and Guidance for Schools on Working with Parents

The SEN Monitoring and Development Team has produced a good practice guide for SENCOs entitled "Partnership with Parents and Carers", which contains examples of effective practice from a range of different schools across the County. You can download a copy of the guide from

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Pages%20By%20Ownership/7BC5ABC8E0AB7C008025724B004CD763>

## **The Parent Partnership Service**

The Parent Partnership Service works to ensure that parents of children with SEN and Disabilities have access to information, advice and guidance so that they can make appropriate, informed decisions.

The Parent Partnership provides a range of flexible services, including working with schools to help them develop positive relationships with parents.

The service can work with schools by:

- providing one-to-one support for parents of children at School Action, School Action Plus, and those undergoing statutory assessment in order to extend the network of support offered through the school
- offering a wide range of information about local and national voluntary organisations
- liaison with voluntary groups to offer workshops on a range of disabilities to school staff and / or parents
- offering workshops on developing partnerships with parents, based on the experiences of schools and parents
- giving practical support to schools wishing to set up parents groups
- providing SEN resource stands for display in schools
- providing displays about the Service for Parents' Evenings

The Parent Partnership Service can be contacted at:

**ContinYou**  
**Unit C1**  
**Grovelands Estate**  
**Longford Road**  
**Exhall**  
**Coventry**  
**CV7 9NE**  
**Tel: 024 76 588464**  
**Fax: 024 76 588441**  
**Email: [pps@continyou.org.uk](mailto:pps@continyou.org.uk)**

Please see Parent Partnership webpage for further information:

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/9ED36516F624972580256BFF003AC136>

### **Informal Dispute Resolution: Midlands SEN Mediation**

When local informal discussions, involvement of the Parent Partnership Service and the normal complaints procedure have been exhausted and matters remain unresolved, any of the parties involved may then wish to use the statutory SEN disagreement resolution process.

Warwickshire LA is able to access the services of "Midlands SEN Mediation", a specialist, independent service covering the areas of all LAs in the East and West Midlands.

The aim of the mediation service is to help resolve disagreements without parents going to Tribunal. Accessing mediation does not affect a parent's right of appeal, neither is it an additional process for the parents to go through before they lodge a Tribunal appeal. Mediation can run alongside the Tribunal appeals' process.

The LA will inform parents about Midlands SEN Mediation when

- a statutory assessment is refused
- a statement or a note in lieu is issued
- a statement is amended or withdrawn.

Midlands SEN Mediation may also be involved in issues which are out of the control of the SEN and Disability Tribunal. For example, where there are disagreements about

- the provision being made by the school or the LA
- the way an LA or school carries out its responsibilities towards children with SEN and disabilities.

Any party can make a referral - a school, a parent or the LA. Referrals should normally only be made after local avenues have been explored (e.g. discussions with the Parent Partnership Service, local complaints procedures etc), although this is not a requirement before a referral can be made. Further information is available directly from Midlands SEN Mediation on 01952 275038 or from the Assessment, Statementing & Review Service on 01926 742160. Copies of this information are available in large print and on audiotape.

### **Midlands SEN Mediation**

16 Queen Street

Wellington

Telford

Shropshire

TF1 1EH

Tel: 01952 275038

Fax: 01952 224281

Email: [office@midlandssenmediation.com](mailto:office@midlandssenmediation.com)

Website: [www.midlandssenmediation.com](http://www.midlandssenmediation.com)

## **Disagreements between Parents and the LA and/or School**

### **Introduction**

There may be times when parents are unhappy about aspects of their child's provision.

It is important that all parties involved should start talking as soon as difficulties become apparent. Talking about concerns as soon as they arise may help prevent potential problems or misunderstandings from developing into major disagreements.

Good communication, in particular a willingness to share information and to check out that the information has been understood, is the key to good relationships between parents and professionals.

As described above, the Warwickshire Parent Partnership Service is an independent service, commissioned by the LA, to provide parents of children with SEN and disabilities with accurate, detailed information and a range of support options. The Service's role as an independent third party can help in many ways to prevent potential problems, resolve misunderstandings and get all parties involved talking.

Involvement of the Parent Partnership Service can encourage all parties to come together to: keep lines of communication open; assist the parties to assess their relevant positions;

negotiate between them; identify areas of compromise. The Parent Partnership Service is independent and can, therefore, act neutrally without advocating for any one party.

**Schools have a statutory responsibility** to inform all parents of children with SEN about the Parent Partnership Service. If you are aware that a parent would benefit from information or support, please be proactive in helping the parent to make contact with the Service.

### **What if a parent is unhappy with some aspect of their child's school based provision?**

In the first instance, parents should be encouraged to talk to their child's class teacher/subject teachers or the SENCO. Schools have an important role to play in developing a culture which encourages parents to ask questions and share their concerns. Schools should ensure parents of children with SEN and disabilities know who to go to if they have questions or concerns. Some SENCOs find it helpful to offer a specific time each week or each month, when parents can drop in and chat with the SENCO. This can be particularly helpful in preventing situations where parents call unexpectedly and expect the SENCO's undivided attention. The SENCO can even extend the "drop-in" sessions to include the SEN governor from time to time, so that the governors are also aware of parental concerns and worries.

There will be some instances, where despite a school's endeavours, the parents remain unhappy. It is important that parents are aware of what they can do next:

- i) The parents can write formally to the Head Teacher setting out their concerns or complaints.
- ii) If this fails to resolve the issue, the parents can write to the Governing Body.
- iii) If correspondence with the governors fails to resolve the problem, then the parents can write to the Complaints' Officer, Children, Young People and Families' Directorate, Saltisford Office Park, Ansell Way, Warwick, CV34 4UL.
- iv) The LA is able to access an independent disagreement resolution service provided by Midlands SEN Mediation. Details of how parents or schools can make a referral are contained earlier in this section.

### **What if a parent is unhappy about a decision made by the LA?**

At key points throughout the process of referral for statutory assessment, the assessment itself, the drafting of a Statement or Note-in-Lieu of a Statement, parents will be offered the opportunity to talk on the telephone to their Named LA Officer and/or to meet with an Assistant Education Officer from the Assessment, Statementing & Review Service.

All correspondence between the LA and parents outlines parents' rights of appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal, encourages contact with the Parent Partnership Service and the availability of informal dispute resolution through Midlands SEN Mediation.

If parents are unhappy about the work of one of the Services within the Local Authority, then they should be informed of the County Council's Complaints Procedure. Copies of this procedure can be obtained from The Complaints' Officer, Children, Young People and Families' Directorate, Saltisford Office Park, Ansell Way, Warwick, CV34 4UL.

### **The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal**

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) is an independent body which parents can appeal to if they are unhappy with decisions made by LAs in respect of children with SEN and disabilities.

Parents can obtain a copy of the SENDIST's "How to Appeal" from the Assessment, Statementing & Review Service, telephone 01926 742160 or can download a copy from:

[http://www.sendist.gov.uk/parents/documents/dfes\\_sendist\\_how\\_to\\_appeal\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.sendist.gov.uk/parents/documents/dfes_sendist_how_to_appeal_booklet.pdf)

There is also a guide to the Tribunal process for children and young people. You can download the guide from

[http://www.sendist.gov.uk/parents/documents/Info\\_Children.pdf](http://www.sendist.gov.uk/parents/documents/Info_Children.pdf)

For issues related to SEN there is a **two month** deadline for making an appeal and so parents should be encouraged not to delay. For issues related to disability discrimination there is a **six month** deadline (see "Disputes concerning Disability Discrimination" below). Having made an appeal, parents can still talk with the LA and we will endeavour to resolve the issues informally.

### **Parents can appeal to the SENDIST in the following circumstances:**

- i) The LA refuses to carry out a statutory assessment or reassessment. This is regardless of whether the parent or the school made the referral.
- ii) Having carried out a statutory assessment, the LA refuses to issue a Statement and instead issues a "note-in-lieu", which specifies the provision a child should receive at School Action or Action Plus.
- iii) Having issued a statement, the parents are unhappy with:
- iv) the description of the child's needs in part II of the statement
- v) the description of the educational help specified in part III of the statement
- vi) the school the LA has named in part IV of the statement.
- vii) The LA has not named a school in part IV of the statement. This can occur at phase transfer if a parent has expressed a preference for a school outside their priority area and that school is oversubscribed.
- viii) The parents have asked the LA to change the school named in the child's statement to an LA maintained school and the LA has refused.
- ix) The LA decides to cease a statement.
- x) Following a reassessment, it is decided not to change the child's statement.

Parents have two months to appeal from receipt of the letter informing them of the LA's decision of the above.

### **Parents cannot appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal about:**

- i) How the LA is arranging to provide the help set out in a child's statement.
- ii) The way a school is meeting a child's needs.

In these circumstances parents would first have to follow the school and/or the County Council's complaints' procedure and ultimately could go to the Local Government Ombudsman.

### **Disputes concerning Disability Discrimination**

Where a parent believes the LA or school governing body has unlawfully discriminated against their child on the grounds of their disability, the parent can appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal. You can find out more about the duties schools have under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) from the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) "Code of Practice for

Schools”, which came into effect in September 2002. The Code can be downloaded from the DRC’s website:

[http://www.drc-gb.org/library/publications/education/code\\_of\\_practice\\_for\\_schools.aspx](http://www.drc-gb.org/library/publications/education/code_of_practice_for_schools.aspx)

The Advisory Centre for Education website also provides a useful and clear summary of DDA issues in relation to schools. Although the website is aimed at parents, schools will find the information helpful as well:

<http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/booklets/Disability.html>

Parents will find details of how to appeal and what they can appeal against in SENDIST’s guide “How to claim”. This can be downloaded from:

[http://www.sendist.gov.uk/parents/documents/how\\_to\\_claim.pdf](http://www.sendist.gov.uk/parents/documents/how_to_claim.pdf)

Parents can also use a free independent conciliation service established by the Disability Rights Commission. Information and advice about the conciliation service is available from the Disability Rights Commission's Helpline on 08457 622633. Where parents use the conciliation service the deadline for appealing is extended to **eight months** from the date of the alleged discrimination. The Helpline can also provide information to employers and service providers, including schools, about their obligations under the Act.

## Useful Addresses

### **Warwickshire Parent Partnership Service**

CEDC, Unit C1, Grovelands Court  
Grovelands Estate  
Longford Road  
Exhall  
Coventry  
CV7 9NE  
Tel: 024 76 588440  
Fax: 024 76 588441  
Email: [pps@cedc.org.uk](mailto:pps@cedc.org.uk)

The Parent Partnership Service can help put parents in touch with local and national voluntary organisations, as well as providing schools with information about local and national organisations.

### **Midlands SEN Mediation**

16 Queen Street  
Wellington  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF1 1EH  
Tel: 01952 275038  
Fax: 01952 224281  
Email: [office@midlandssenmediation.com](mailto:office@midlandssenmediation.com)  
Website: [www.midlandssenmediation.com](http://www.midlandssenmediation.com)

### **Children, Young People and Families' Directorate Complaints**

Complaints' Officer  
Saltisford Office Park  
Ansell Way  
Warwick, CV34 4UL

### **SEN and Disability Tribunal**

See below

### **Disability Rights Commission**

DRC Helpline  
FREEPOST MID 02164  
Stratford upon Avon  
CV37 9BR  
Tel: 08457 622 633  
Fax: 08457 778 878  
Textphone: 08457 622 644  
Email: [ddahelp@stra.sitel.co.uk](mailto:ddahelp@stra.sitel.co.uk)

### **Local Government Ombudsman**

Commission for Local Administration in  
England  
21 Queen Anne's Gate  
London  
SW1H 9BU  
Tel: 020 7915 3210

## **ACE (The Advisory Centre for Education)**

ACE offers free telephone advice to parents on all education issues, including exclusion from school, bullying, special educational needs, disability and school admission appeals.

- General advice line: 0808 800 5793 (Mon-Fri 10am-5pm)
- Exclusion information line: 020 7704 9822 (to order a free advice pack)
- Exclusion advice line: 0808 800 0327 (to speak to an adviser) (Mon-Fri 10am-5pm)

## **Special Educational Needs and Disability Contact Details**

SENDIST is open from 9:00 to 17:00 Monday to Friday. Parents should use the helpline if they need general advice about rights and how to make an SEN appeal or a disability discrimination claim.

SEN Help line: 0870 241 2555

Disability Discrimination helpline: 0870 606 5750

Email: [General queries](#)

Email: [Hearing queries](#)

SENDIST has two offices to which correspondence can be sent. All new SEN appeals and all new disability discrimination claims should be sent to the Darlington office.

If parents submit an appeal/claim they will be given a direct line number in the team that will deal with your appeal.

Tel: 020 7029 9707 or 9708 or 9711 or 9721 or 9730 or 9734

### **London Office**

SENDIST  
Procession House  
55 Ludgate Hill  
London  
EC4M 7JW  
Fax: General:020 7029 9726  
Fax: Hearings:020 7029 9728

### **Darlington Office**

SENDIST  
2nd Floor Old Hall  
Mowden Hall  
Staindrop Road  
DL3 9BG  
Fax: 01325 391045