



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents



A report from Overview & Scrutiny





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www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.



Preface

Cllr Jon Hunt

Chair, Children and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was an instructive and humbling experience for members of the Scrutiny Review Group to meet so many parents face to face during June and hear their experiences of raising children with special needs.



We heard many stories of determination and frustration - as well as happier stories where children are doing well.

The report on the consultation seeks to reflect the views expressed by those parents.

Our children with special needs all matter as individuals and it is interesting how themes have emerged that match the five themes of Every Child Matters.

An emphasis on safety - what is a safe environment, free from bullying and danger, for these children?

Health - frequently there are significant health needs and an overlap between services provided by the NHS and by schools and the City Council. Can these be joined up better?

Enjoy and achieve - I was struck by stories about children making friends and finding inspiring learning environments.

Make a positive contribution - these are young people who do make a positive contribution and they each need to be recognised as doing so.

Achieve economic wellbeing - great concerns were expressed about the future of many of the young people. We know they can contribute economically. The challenge is to enable them to do so.

I hope all those involved in the review of special education will read this report with care and that it will help to crystallise positive objectives for the work that is being undertaken.

Finally, can I thank all those staff, schools, volunteers and most of all parents who contributed to this consultation.



1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Special Education Needs (SEN) Overview is currently being carried out by a group of members from the Children and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The aim of the exercise is to oversee and scrutinise the development of the city's strategy for special education currently being undertaken by a "Strategic Working Group" led by Cabinet Member, Cllr Les Lawrence.
- 1.1.2 Part of our exercise as set out within the project brief was to carry out a process for engaging with parents/carers of children with special educational needs. This was to complement and run alongside other consultation being conducted by the Children, Young People and Families Directorate.
- 1.1.3 A series of public meetings across Birmingham to speak to parents/carers and ask for their opinions was suggested as a possible way to achieve this. The review group decided that a "Scrutiny Roadshow" was an ideal way to meet parents/carers from across the city.
- 1.1.4 Six events across the city were organised for the month of June and 297 people attended the meetings. The events gave parents a chance to meet the members of the review group and share their experiences of SEN provision within the city. Those parents who were unable to attend one of the meetings still had an opportunity to share their views and experiences with the group by using a specially created online form that was available on the Scrutiny website (www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny)
- 1.1.5 The results from the consultation will be used alongside the other consultations which have been carried out to ensure the final strategy delivers improvements for children and young people with SEN within Birmingham.
- 1.1.6 More details on the consultation process are available in **Appendix 1**, this includes summaries from the plenary sessions of each workshop at each event. These have also been posted on the Scrutiny website.

2 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The term special educational needs encompasses an almost bewildering array of medical conditions and physical disabilities as well as social, behavioural and emotional and other educational difficulties. As a consequence of this, individual needs for, and experience of Special Educational Provision varies considerably.
- 2.1.2 During the consultation we heard from parents with children who had a very diverse range of needs. We heard of both good and bad experiences concerning both, the processes which have had to be negotiated in order to access the services, as well as what provision and other support services are currently available in a variety of settings.



- 2.1.3 As a consequence we found that in some cases the views and opinions of different groups of parents are split on certain topics depending on the specific needs of their own individual children. However in spite of this diversity we also found that there were some key messages that emerged most strongly throughout the series of meetings and these are summarised below.

3 Key Messages from Parents

- 3.1.1 **The most important thing to consider is the needs of the individual. Educational provision must address these needs and not try and fit the child into what happens to be available. This is more important than the physical location of the school or the (mainstream or special) setting of the provision.**
- 3.1.2 There was a strong consensus that it is essential that the current diversity of provision is in part at least maintained, or even extended with perhaps, in future increased specialisation within the overall system. This ensures that there continues to be at least some degree of choice of provision for parents, as well as high quality provision available to cater for various needs. Many parents feared that any new strategy would result in a change from the current system to the integration of all children with special needs into mainstream schools, with or without units – parents wished specifically to voice their opposition to this possibility, as they felt it would be devastating to many children and their families.
- 3.1.3 Parents on the whole, expressed a high level of satisfaction with the special educational needs provision that their children received in both mainstream primary schools and special schools however the experience of mainstream secondary settings was much more variable.
- 3.1.4 The processes for diagnosing special educational needs and statementing are for many parents fraught with difficulties
- 3.1.5 There is a desperate need for more services such as physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and a range of other specialist support services and facilities including respite.
- 3.1.6 In the long term parents want to see improvements in the geographical spread of special educational provision for some parts of the city, and for some specific needs where there is a current shortage of provision in the city.
- 3.1.7 In the shorter term, parents would like some aspects of the transportation service to be improved and would like their children to have access to more extra curricular and summer holiday activities.
- 3.1.8 They would also like to see more training on special education needs made available for all staff within school settings and also for various health professionals.
- 3.1.9 Parents called for more joined up working between the various agencies, organisations and Council departments working with parents and more collaboration between clusters of schools, as well as between special and mainstream schools to assist in service improvements and particularly transition.



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- 3.1.10 Last but not least, parents want more information and better advice and support on a full range of topics at all stages of the process. They also want increased communication, with more people listening to their views and respecting their rights. There was a strong feeling that better support would help to achieve the objective of equity of provision (see paragraphs 4.2.8, 4.9.10, 4.14.9).



4 Parents' Views

4.1.1 The following sections sets out in more detail the full range of issues raised by parents at both the consultation meetings and through their written submissions. These have been grouped together into common themes.

4.2 Quality of Provision

General Comments

4.2.1 Parents emphasised that there is a continuum of SEN provision and it is important to find the right setting for each pupil.

“I’m aware that the needs of children on the autistic spectrum and those with ADHD are different to my child who is non-verbal. The difference between children with special needs is vast.”

“Even cerebral palsy does not sum up my daughter. She has no educational problems, she needs mobility support.”

“My son didn’t show a high level of need but was lagging educationally. He did not seem to fit in to either the special needs school or mainstream education. He had to fail before anyone would actually do something.”

4.2.2 Parents told us that there is currently a lack of consistent provision across the board. Provision ranges from excellent to poor. This means that the system does not automatically provide each young person with the opportunity to achieve their full academic and life potential.

4.2.3 We were told that children do not benefit from hopping back and forth between special and mainstream provision.

“Getting the right provision is sometimes a matter of chance rather than planning”.

4.2.4 Parents agreed that the new provision should focus on the child as an individual, their happiness and not just examination results.



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- 4.2.5 Some parents felt that the City Council was pushing them towards putting their children in a mainstream school and other parents were very concerned that the Local Authority may, in the future, try to move their children from their current special schools into mainstream schools.
- 4.2.6 Funding was seen as a major issue. Some points raised under this topic included the fact that more SEN staff are needed within schools but there is no extra money available to employ them. Mention was made of one particular special school that wants to have sixth form provision but there just is not enough funding.
- “It is expensive to do it properly, but you would have thought the Council would increase its budget to cope with the need. They have enough data on it to be able to make the budget realistic.”
- 4.2.7 Some parents felt that children do not always receive the provision required in accordance with their statement, an example was given of a child that should receive one-to-one provision who actually shares this with 3-4 other children.
- 4.2.8 **Many parents from a range of different school settings felt that their experiences of the current provision were very good, but they commented that this was because they were at a “great school” and that they were the “lucky ones”.**
- 4.2.9 All the parents in another workshop group said that the education their child had received, once stated, was excellent and they believed that it met their child’s needs.
- 4.2.10 One parent had a son with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and he had been educated in mainstream school but had now moved onto a special school, so had experienced a range of provision. He felt that he had come on brilliantly since moving to a special school. The staff really understood and met his son’s needs. In addition, he was a governor at a school which has a special unit. He felt that the integration of SEN pupils within the mainstream school was brilliant and helped all the children to have an understanding of the needs of others.
- 4.2.11 Some parents felt that current provision within mainstream schools was very good for children with moderate learning difficulties, but for children with more severe SEN, the provision is just not there. Whereas others felt that there are gaps in the provision where children with mild SEN do not cope in mainstream schools.
- 4.2.12 Parents felt that it is good that there is a continuum e.g. for ASD so children can have the provision that suits their needs best, for example in mainstream or special schools.
- 4.2.13 Parents from some mainstream schools felt they should have access to the same facilities as those children at special schools
- 4.2.14 Another group of parents wanted to see more specialist provision for the increasing number of children with ASD.



- 4.2.15 One group of parents thought that there were gaps in provision for children with ASD, that the provision was not suited to their needs and that this caused problems for mainstream schools and for the children.
- 4.2.16 Some parents felt that the infrastructure of the school buildings also needed to be looked at (leaky roofs, unreliable heating systems etc) but others felt although it would be good to have good premises and buildings it was not as important as finding an environment which enables children to achieve and thrive.

4.3 Special Schools

What is Good

- 4.3.1 Many parents were very pleased with their experience of special schools and felt the service was 'second to none'. They commented particularly on the excellent teaching, a good level of care and the independence achieved by the children. Other comments included "fantastic", "cannot fault it", "really happy", "constantly improving".

"There is a different ethos in special schools, staff will go above and beyond their role to meet the needs of the child – "all children were seen as being gifted and talented".

"Special schools treat the whole person with high levels of care".

- 4.3.2 It was felt that both teachers and assistants in special schools have a "vocational calling".
- 4.3.3 Special schools have smaller classes. Parents agreed that the resultant favourable staff to pupil ratio of special schools makes them very appealing.

- One parent said that her daughter has many complex needs and at the moment is in a special school where the teacher is fantastic, but she struggles to communicate even in a class of eight. The parent felt that there was no way she would cope in mainstream school. She wouldn't be in trouble in mainstream, but she would be ignored and would fall behind. She said that the special school curriculum could be tailored around her daughter's needs and that this was not available in mainstream provision

- 4.3.4 It was felt that SEN children do best when they have ongoing one to one support from a limited number of people. They need to feel safe and have their routines. In addition, it is important that parents have regular contact with their children's teachers. They felt that this is more likely to be achieved in special schools.
- 4.3.5 One parent said that the school staff at their child's school are experts on subjects such as autism.



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4.3.6 We were told of the excellent communication and information sharing with parents via avenues such as the Home School Book.

4.3.7 Another parent commended the special school their child attended which gave a high level of input to parents and often made suggestions as to what actions they might try at home.

“The whole family is more supported in special school”.

“Special schools provide a safe environment for children with SEN to mix with peers and make friends, this is because they have similar conditions. There is therefore no bullying because they are no different to other children.”

4.3.8 To many parents specialist provision means that essential services are centralised e.g. school nurses, physiotherapy, speech and language therapists. Parents thought it was very good that they could access other SEN services at school that meet their children’s medical needs as well as educational needs. In addition, some special schools have very good facilities and specialist equipment, such as multi-sensory rooms and pools.

4.3.9 Special schools are very good at dealing with a wide variety and combination of needs, and dealing with problems effectively through “in house” services. Parents were generally happy with the services currently provided in specialist environments.

4.3.10 Special schools in Birmingham have excellent OFSTED reports – if services are rated so highly by inspectors, why does there need to be change?

“If we close SEN schools – what happens if we suddenly have more children who need this type of provision? What would we do – re-open the schools? The planning for provision needs to be long-term. We are effectively going to delete the core asset of the provision if we close special schools”.

4.3.11 Many parents were concerned that there might be a change from provision in special schools to mainstream plus special unit style provision. They felt that would have a huge psychological impact on some children and their families. That could, in itself, create problems.

“If it’s not broken, why fix it?”

4.3.12 Parents felt that life skills education provided by special schools was very valuable to children with SEN.

4.3.13 Special schools are allowed to think outside the curriculum; they can think creatively outside of the box.

“In special needs schools the individual is tailored for; this is not the case in mainstream education.”



“Special schools are very child centred and can offer a very diverse experience. Children should not miss out on life just because they are not academic. We need to celebrate all children’s achievements.”

- My son isn’t good academically but is good at sports. Whilst in mainstream education they just didn’t know this. Since he has been in a special school he has had a trial for the England Under 17’s. There shouldn’t be just a focus in academic skills. For example, I have seen some children at the special school that are very good at cooking. Sometimes it is more important to learn skills to support independence rather than academic skills.

“I attended a tribunal where a parent was fighting to keep his son in a special school because it provided one of the only opportunities for him to get out of his wheelchair. There wasn’t a medical benefit to being there but the father still fought for it.”

4.3.14 The overwhelming consensus within one workshop group was “that SEN was best delivered in specialist schools.”

Problems Encountered

There was recognition that there is still some room for improvement in some aspect of special school provision. These issues are listed below.

“There are not enough places and it can be difficult to get in.”

4.3.15 Some parents felt that sometimes by attending “special schools” it does create a stigma for children.

“Some of the provision is excellent whilst some does not provide any academic challenges to the students.”

“If they (children) are “clever” then some special schools are less interested in the children who are seen as being “high functioning” and therefore not seen as needing special attention.”

4.3.16 One parent believed the LEA has destroyed special schools by placing children there with behaviour issues rather than learning issues.

4.3.17 Another parent felt that her child had learnt more by having a tutor, than being in a special school

4.3.18 Some parents were not aware that their child could have started at a special school at 2 ½ - if they had known they would have liked their child to go to school sooner.



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4.3.19 On the downside, often if children are in special schools their home and school life do not cross. The only interaction is with other children at their special school.

4.4 Mainstream Schools

What is Good

4.4.1 At one end of the spectrum, parents said they received an excellent service from mainstream schools – one parent told us that their child went to visit a special school but was distressed as his disability was not as severe as the other children at the school.

“The mainstream school is good; it has a number of other children there with special needs. The school holds regular reviews and our child receives speech and physio support in the mainstream school.”

“Being in a mainstream school enables my child to mix with able-bodied children.”

“The school is fantastic ... I am really pleased that he is in a mainstream school.”

- One parent talked about their experience at a primary unit in a mainstream school which has a speech and language unit on site. This school raises funds to improved facilities which now include a sensory room, chill out room etc. The mainstream pupils all mix with the special needs children. There is no evidence of bullying and parents feel that the school is run in such a way that it would be stamped out immediately. This unit puts on workshops/assemblies for parents and there is good parent interaction. The parent said her son struggles with children who look different; therefore, this special unit in a mainstream school was more appropriate.

4.4.2 Another parent felt that their child’s mainstream infant school was very supportive in getting a child statemented when it became obvious he would not cope with mainstream junior school.

“My son’s teacher is very good and has bent over backwards to help him. Though we have had to provide books on our son’s condition.”

4.4.3 Other parents felt that mainstream schools were good at getting children to mix and ensuring that children with special needs were seen as “normal”.

4.4.4 Another parent also had a very positive experience of mainstream provision, and felt that this was because the teachers had been excellent and well trained enough to cope with children with special educational needs.



4.4.5 Some parents felt that within mainstream schools, the ethos and attitude of the schools to meeting SEN is critical. Head Teacher leadership is necessary to encourage staff to go the extra mile in ensuring that they meet the needs of the child.

4.4.6 There was a general agreement that there are some very good mainstream schools with special units.

“Our child’s needs were identified very early on in Year 1. The mainstream school he attends provided extra help for him very quickly through the Schools Action Plus scheme.”

“My child doesn’t have a statement. He is at a mainstream school and he needs physiotherapy. The school have been very helpful taking on board my child’s needs and programming it into his day. They have taken on board all of his needs.”

4.4.7 It was generally felt that primary provision was able to be more inclusive than secondary provision given the fact primary schools are smaller and children tend to be with one teacher but there are huge differences in the primary and secondary school environments.

4.4.8 Other parents said that primary schools offered a safe and nurturing environment but they might still fail to identify needs.

4.4.9 Parents said that mainstream schools could be appropriate in some situations, but only for a very narrow margin of children with certain types of SEN, e.g. some specific types of ASD.

- One parent spoke about the high quality of the support she had received from the SENCO at her mainstream primary school and felt that her child’s needs had been very well assessed and his needs had been met but she had concerns about what would happen at secondary school. Whereas another parent feared the mainstream SENCO had little involvement with the rest of the school and in particular the teachers. “People on the ground, in mainstream schools, who deal with the children day to day, are doing a brilliant job. However, they just don’t have the time or resources of special schools.”

Problems Encountered

4.4.10 Some parents did not have such positive experiences.

“Mainstream schools are not always appropriate – there seems to be a shift towards a feeling that mainstream schools are the answer for every child – they are not.”



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4.4.11 Some parents felt that many children start at mainstream schools because they are pushed towards it only to find out later that their children had problems. Very little choice was given to very young children.

4.4.12 One parent said it sometimes takes a child to be excluded before they are assessed as having a problem.

4.4.13 Many mainstream secondary schools are huge. SEN Parents were concerned about the large class sizes and felt that this, in some circumstances made it a difficult environment for special needs children.

“It would be nice if mainstream schools had smaller class sizes and the ability to breakdown goals. I am struggling to find what is right for my child. The mainstream schools are struggling with behaviour because of lack of knowledge and the one to one workers are trying to teach.”

“Mainstream schools do not prepare children for living – they have to teach the curriculum, whereas some children need more emphasis on life skills.”

Mainstream schools tend to teach subjects whereas special schools teach the child.

4.4.14 Some parents felt that mainstream schools tended to concentrate on league tables and achievement rather than the individual needs of a child.

“The stress of exams set in mainstream secondary can cause SEN pupils anxiety.”

“Homework is another issue; my child never had any homework at the special school so he is struggling to understand why the mainstream school expect him to do work out of school.”

4.4.15 We were told that PE, drama and the playground are the areas that cause problems as many SEN children need one to one support in these areas and this is just not available.

4.4.16 Mainstream schools are not always knowledgeable about medication – one parent changed her child’s medication regime to meet the needs of the school.

4.4.17 There can be a problem with staffing – if the teacher is changed or takes time off this can cause problems for the child with special needs who does not like change.

4.4.18 There was a feeling amongst some parents that SEN assistants in mainstream schools are not always as knowledgeable as those in special schools and they do not always have sufficient resources to support children.



“It is not acceptable when a school sends a child home because the SEN Teaching Assistant is sick.”

4.4.19 There was a fear that children in mainstream schools are not always receiving the hours of support that are allocated to them.

“The schools said that they are only able to provide support for when my child is in English and Maths lessons. I said that I’m sorry, but my child is deaf in all lessons.”

4.4.20 Parents felt that staff need to be better trained about the needs of the special children – even dinner supervisors who can misinterpret a child’s behaviour as naughty or disruptive rather than seeing the behaviour as resulting from their special needs.

- One parent who was also a teaching assistant at a mainstream school said that she had seen a five year old boy causing big disruptive problems in a class who ended up being excluded. She felt it was a problem not only for the child but also for the other children in the class, and commented that if this was the disruption caused by one child, how could mainstream teachers possibly cope with any more?

4.4.21 There is a real shortage of therapists – if a therapist has to travel between mainstream schools to give individual support then precious therapy time is lost because of travelling.

4.4.22 One parent had difficulties with mainstream schools accepting Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) to support an autistic child with positive reinforcement, even when it was included on the Statement:

“The school said that they cannot have an ABA programme in the school and that my son was too autistic to be educated in the mainstream. But in one year in his current school we have seen a big improvement. His previous school was inflexible and didn’t think of the child’s needs. SENAS allowed the school to do this and sent a five page letter explaining why. But the problems they listed would have applied to all children at the school.”

4.4.23 Difficulties were experienced with some schools in that they were not as positive about children that they saw might potentially affect their performance.

4.4.24 Parents felt that children with SEN in mainstream provision fell to the bottom and were often bullied by other children. Putting children with SEN into mainstream school can also result in them being expelled and encouraged to misbehave by other children.



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4.4.25 Some parents expressed a view that mainstream schools in particular often do not know how to deal with the behaviour that they face in particular from autistic children. Their approach is therefore to simply contain the behaviour and this can do more harm than good and lead to the child feeling that they are “a misfit” (child’s words).

One parent felt that the disadvantage of mainstream schools can be that they keep children with special needs away from others with similar needs. An example was given of a child with hearing difficulties educated in a mainstream school who did not want to identify with and associate with others with hearing problems, because they perceived them in a negative way.

- One parent had four children with SEN. Two are in a special language unit, one is in a special school and one is in a mainstream unit. He said that the mainstream environment had been good on education and support for his son, but that his son had been bullied in the mainstream setting. He also said that the school has to fund his son’s extra hours of support, he has been through CRISP not a statement, and that while his son has been assessed as needing 12-15 hours of support, he can only get 7 hours.

- Mr X said his child attended mainstream nursery school for 8 months and it was the worse time of his (the father’s) life. He said that the treatment his child received at the school was terrible. He felt that the teachers weren’t able to address his son’s needs and that his son was seen more as a ‘hindrance’ and ‘getting in the way’. On another occasion, Mr X was told not to bring his child to school for the Christmas play because he was too disruptive.
- Mr X, an Asian gentleman, has lived in the UK all of his life. He said he has never suffered racism but felt that, at that particular time in his life, what he experienced must have been close to it.

- A number of parents agreed that when children are younger, differences are not that noticeable and therefore they had been generally happy to send their children to mainstream primary school, but then as they got older they found it necessary to move them to specialist provision and that sometimes this had been problematic.

4.4.26 One parent observed that SEN may go unnoticed and although which may not cause too many problems in a mainstream primary school could manifest in a mainstream secondary school. As subject areas were often split into sets at secondary schools, parents were concerned that the bottom set may become a “dumping ground” for all those with “problems” (LD, PD, ADHD, BESD etc.) and felt that mainstream teachers would be ill-equipped to deal with a child’s individual needs.

4.4.27 One parent had a child in a mainstream school with specialist support. She was advised by the speech and language therapist to move him to specialist provision, but the move was blocked by the mainstream school, because the school would lose a teaching assistant if the child left.

4.4.28 SEN children were labelled as ‘naughty’ and put in an underachievers group in mainstream school with ‘can’t be bothered’ pupils.



“I was often not believed when I tried to tell people there were problems with behaviour and other people began to think it was my fault as a parent. Issues seem to be picked up much faster when it is a physical issue rather than behavioural. People would often tell me He’s a boy, they do that.”

“When my son was excluded he was sent to a behaviour support unit for four days a week but eventually the head teacher said they couldn’t cope with this and reduced it to two mornings a week. All the children in the unit were in conflict with each other which then exacerbated the behaviour problems.”

4.4.29 It was felt that children with SEN were very susceptible and vulnerable to bullying in mainstream schools.

Issues in All Schools

The following section explores issues affecting SEN children in all schools.

4.5 Summer Holiday Activities

4.5.1 Parents who accessed summer provision said that it was extremely good and offered a huge range of activities such as visits, donkey rides and access to sensory rooms.

4.5.2 Parents from all types of schools cited the need for more activities for the children during the long summer holidays as many children with Special Educational Needs need routine and forget what they have learned if there is a long break. They can also lose some of the social skills that they have acquired at school during this period.

4.5.3 “Many children do not understand holidays and they need something else for them to do.”

4.5.4 It was explained that many schools do offer summer school provision but that places are limited. We were also told that there were few activities that they could attend because of their needs.

4.5.5 Mainstream school summer activities did not cater for statemented children because of the need for specialist helpers.

- The parents of a child with severe physical disabilities had arranged their own playgroup to give their child a social life during the summer break. This was for 20 children from 10am until 2.30 pm for a two week period and cost them and the other participating parents £8000.

4.5.6 Where a child attended a school across the city, summer activities presented the problem of how to transport the child to the school in order to participate.



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- 4.5.7 One parent suggested that parents on low income should not have to pay for this provision but another parent said that assistance with these activities was means tested and so was difficult to access.

4.6 Facilities and Provision of Health and Other Support

- 4.6.1 Parents were very complimentary about the Health Specialisms that could be accessed on site at the special schools, for example (but not exclusively), Speech and Language Therapy, Physical Therapy and optical treatment. Parents were also very happy with the way that all health related issues were dealt with in special schools, for example, medication would be administered at the school rather than the parent having to go in themselves to administer their child's medication as in a mainstream school.
- 4.6.2 In contrast some mainstream parents felt that their children were missing out on essential services like immediate access to physiotherapists, nurses and speech therapists as well as access to hydro pools.
- 4.6.3 Everyone agreed that they received a good level of service from Speech Therapists but; *"we just haven't got enough of them"*. It was felt that improvements need to be made to the provision of these services, particularly in mainstream schools because for example a lack of speech and language services can seriously impact on the wider learning of children.
- 4.6.4 One set of parents asked why mainstream schools couldn't work with special schools to ensure that their facilities could be accessed by SEN children within mainstream settings. Parents felt that more and more children in mainstream schools were leaving to come back to special schools because of the support and level of facilities available.
- 4.6.5 Parents agreed that there were often problems resulting from health and education services not working together.
- "There is a need to improve the links and communication between the Health professionals and schools."
- 4.6.6 Some parents talked about shortages in certain areas:
- "Our only gripe with the system is to do with speech and language provision – you need to fight to get it."
- 4.6.7 Others told us that some children in mainstream schools end up losing school time to attend speech therapy. Specialist services should be provided at local schools rather than the child having to travel to receive services.



4.6.8 Conversely at many special schools all the specialised services are available regardless of who provides them. Therefore special schools were seen to have more comprehensive and joined up support. These facilities should be expanded and made available to mainstream schools.

“There is not enough speech and language provision. Sometimes it is non-existent. Unless it is in Part 3 of the Statement, they don’t have to provide the funding for it.”

- Services appear to be very much behind what people really need. I waited three years for speech and language support and was eventually phoned up and asked if we still needed it. Waiting times are a real problem. I needed Social Services support whilst I was going into hospital. I still haven’t been offered the support I needed and I’ve been out of hospital for three months.

4.6.9 In addition it was pointed out that there are more children these days with mental health issues and psycho/social issues. Planners of services need to be aware of this and plan services accordingly.

4.6.10 One group of parents was critical of their treatment in particular by the Housing department in getting modifications to their homes; the time and effort it took and the waste that often went with it.

4.7 Respite

4.7.1 This service is generally untapped because “they didn’t know it was available”. Parents relied on their own networks of family and friends.

4.7.2 Some parents said that they understood that respite care stops once children reach the age of 18. They felt more respite care services are required and that currently they needed a social worker in order to access it. They felt it would be better accessed via GP’s/PCT’s.

4.8 Teacher Support/Training

4.8.1 There were staff training issues about SEN especially within mainstream schools.

4.8.2 One parent said that he had found there was a lack of support for teachers to deal with his child’s profound learning difficulties, and that this was potentially an issue with how he is statemented because if his condition was precisely statemented then the support would be available.

4.8.3 Parents felt that it is important to ensure that all staff within schools have training in how to recognise and respond to the needs of children with SEN.

One day courses are not enough. Everyone in the school setting needs to have an understanding of needs (particularly in relation to Autism).”



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

“You need to know how to talk to these children. You need to be able to find the good bit first rather than always seeing the bad in the child.

“Special children need special people to look after them.”

4.9 Diagnosis, Statementing and Assessment

What is Good

4.9.1 One group had generally had good experiences of the statementing system, where all went as planned. One parent commented that the system was “spot on”.

“Our child was statemented while still at nursery. The statement has been a life-saver for him and has helped him reach his potential. The school is fulfilling the statement 100%. The statement is reviewed annually which is a useful, open process conducted by the school. The statement is growing with him.”

4.9.2 Another group generally agreed that once a child is statemented most parents find that the level of support provided is good.

“You don’t get everything you need. We could do with a central resource to assist parents so that they know what they are doing.”

4.9.3 Another parent said the Head Teacher had worked really hard to make sure that a child in need was statemented and welcomed this support.

4.9.4 Parents felt that Statementing brings with it whole package of care and support.

4.9.5 Some parents felt that the statementing process is good because it provides overviews/assessments from lots of different people and brings agencies together that can help to meet the needs of the child.

4.9.6 Another parent told us once the diagnosis was done and provision was in place the support was excellent.

“My child is now making real progress. This label makes a peg to hang it all on and allows funding to be accessed.”

“Although I have complained about the statementing process once a timescale was given to me they did keep to it.”



Problems Encountered

Problems of getting detailed enough classifications of needs from doctors and consultants were highlighted.

4.9.7 One parent commented that people tended not to think of ASD as a serious condition, however at the other end of the spectrum children are very disabled, and perceptions are often wrong about this.

4.9.8 Many parents of children with Autism felt that they hit a brick wall with the health authority because the condition was difficult to judge and diagnose.

“It is invisible and people tend to judge you by what they see. Then you go into the assessment phase and the education dept says you don’t need a statement.”

“Dsypraxia is another condition that is difficult to diagnose. Teachers think the child is naughty or lazy, particularly in borderline cases.”

4.9.9 One workshop group felt that a particular problem in this area was classification of ASD. One parent was concerned that statements for children with ASD are ‘fudged’ in order to make autistic children stay in mainstream schools.

4.9.10 **Some parents felt that it was a postcode lottery to reach the point where a child was statemented, depending on where they lived and the school they attended. Some felt that it was dependent on whether the parents could work out how the system worked and how much support they had from the school.**

4.9.11 One parent said she felt that children could get stuck in School Action Plus unless the Head fought for a statement.

4.9.12 The process was described as being “daunting”, “time-consuming”, “demoralising” and “frustrating”.

4.9.13 Parents felt that there is a lack of signposting as well as a lack of independent advice.

4.9.14 Parents felt that there is just “too much jargon”.

4.9.15 Parents spoke about “barriers”, “the constant struggle” and “fighting the system”.

“It was also purely though parental pressure that we got our son statemented. It was being on the phone all the time that finally made a difference.”

“It was a real battle. However, not everyone is able to articulate their case or fight. I worry that their children will fall through the net.”



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

“Rubbish to start with, very frustrating as my child was not in the right sort of provision”.

“Parents need support until they can get their children labelled.”

“Feels like banging your head against a brick wall.”

4.9.16 Some parents felt that it was very hard to get a statement for a child but more so if the child was in a mainstream school as:

- many schools do not acknowledge that there is a problem;
- there is a lack of funding;
- there is a lack of support from the school and Local Authority;
- there is a lack of understanding (particularly if the child is not displaying a “visible” disability); and
- even if mainstream schools accept there is a issue, they are ill-equipped to deal with it.

4.9.17 Support can depend on how proactive the mainstream school is. “We were told that our child could not go for an assessment as the (mainstream) school already had one child who was statemented and could not resource having another one.”

- The mother of the pupil with severe physical disabilities said that she felt parents of children who had serious health needs did not need the additional stress of chasing paperwork when they were already attending many hospital appointments and trying to alleviate their child’s suffering. They needed support to help them, rather than to be told that they needed to arrange their child’s special education too.

4.9.18 Many parents felt that if the child has a physical disability it appears easier to get a statement rather than a child with a mental/behavioural disability i.e. a physical disability is visible and it was felt that Statementing was usually done earlier in the child’s school career for a physical disability. It was felt that where children had significant special needs the statementing process went well but it was more of a struggle if the children were border line or were late presenting.

4.9.19 Some found it was hard to achieve a statement, particularly when children were in Nursery School. Parents felt that the Assessment process should take place earlier when children were around 2-3 years old.

4.9.20 Assessments in particular should **NOT** be based on a single time limited meeting. It was felt that these are not always accurate and yet they are the basis on which support is provided to the child



“Assessments are biased towards scoring in total they do not seem to look at the detail within that score. Assessments need to be conducted over weeks to be accurate as some children can seem to be ok with some things but are actually just good at guessing the answers. For example they cannot recognise the same words in different books.”

4.9.21 It took one parent four years to get a statement and “felt like moving heaven and earth”. They were told by the nursery school their child had problems interacting and suggested they speak to the Council, in the reception class the parents were then told there were no problems and it was just that the child was “not ready to read” - The parents persevered and got the a statement in Year 4.

“I had to take the Council to a tribunal to get a statement. The Council agreed on the morning of the tribunal. They could have done this at any point before we got to that stage.”

4.9.22 It was felt that once the parents achieved a statement, it was often vague and non-specific; some parents thought that the type and level of support and care that was needed should be specifically defined on the statement.

4.9.23 Parents also felt that individual learning plans should also be more focussed and detailed.

4.9.24 Parents felt that the wording in the statement is often “watered down”.

“It was as if they wanted to keep their options open.”

4.9.25 They also told us it was too jargonistic – parents often accept what is written in the statement even though they don’t understand the terminology.

4.9.26 One parent said that a slight change of wording in a statement could make a huge difference to the education provided and parents did not always appreciate that this would be the result.

4.9.27 Some parents felt that there appears to be a resource implication in mainstream schools because it was they are not fulfilling the needs of the statement i.e. physiotherapy, speech training etc is not being provided.

4.9.28 Parents were concerned that statements no longer specify hours for certain provision so parents were unclear how much support their child should receive.

4.9.29 Some parents felt that the interface with the Council was not so good. The whole experience of getting a statement for one parent was a huge effort and when the statement arrived the sex of the child had been changed from a girl to a boy. It took several exchanges of letters to the Council to have the statement amended.



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- 4.9.30 Parents from ethnic minorities who did not have the language skills to help them to navigate through the statementing system also needed help. One mother said that she and her husband had begun their own support group for other parents when they realised that there was a need for this help.
- 4.9.31 Not all parents are aware that they can request a statutory assessment.
- 4.9.32 Parents felt that they didn't have enough information when they were trying to make a choice about whether to choose special or mainstream education for their child.
- 4.9.33 Some parents thought that often the professionals involved in assessing their children did not take their views seriously. One parent said he knew what his child was like and that this could not be summarised in a 30 minute psychological test.
- 4.9.34 Parents agreed that there is a lack of clarity, understanding and consultation with parents throughout the statementing process. They felt that everyone has their own agenda and there is no impartial adviser. They said that the Parent Partnership was useful but that not all parents were even aware it existed.

“Where is the support unless you have a statement? Not everywhere has parent support workers. I used to come away from the school in tears, parents do need support.”

- 4.9.35 Parents also found that it can be challenging to get statements updated and amended.

- One parent said a child, attending a mainstream school, had not had their statement updated regularly in 10 years. Even after the child had received a transition plan the statement was still not changed

“It takes time for some issues to be taken up even when they are mentioned time and time again – years in some cases.”

- 4.9.36 The annual review of statements enables parents to maintain pressure on schools. They said that they needed to keep following things through especially with the annual reviews. However it was feared that the more inarticulate parents may lose out.

- One parent had attended a review of his daughter's statement, and then received the revised statement with something on there that was totally different to what had been discussed. He said that the letter only gave 15 days to respond until the statement was permanent, and that the letter was received 9 days after it was dated, giving him only 6 days. He said that some parents might not even understand what is being said on the statement and this was a real concern.



- 4.9.37 Some parents commented that getting the statement was actually the easy part of the process it was when they made the decision to send their child to special school that they encountered difficulties. They felt they had been kept in the dark and had to fight their way for a place in a special school.
- 4.9.38 Others said that when their children were first assessed as having SEN, they assumed that things would automatically be in place and that they would be receiving all of the support available for them. It is not until later that they realised there was much more available to them that they needed to fight for. Parents felt that there was a "he who shouts the loudest" problem concerning the provision actually given to children with SEN, regardless of statements or CRISP.
- 4.9.39 There was a concern that "Statements seems to be focused on what's available rather than on the needs of the child".
- 4.9.40 Some parents felt that Statementing should be undertaken independently from the LEA. At the moment "the poacher and gamekeeper are together".
- "I think a positive thing about all of this is that it teaches you to become very vocal."
- 4.9.41 Parents felt there was a lack of clarity around the CRISP criteria, and they described it as being "useless" and "it does not result in adequate levels of support in a mainstream school." (The Criteria for Special Provision (CRISP) is a process for matching descriptions of a pupil's needs with descriptions of special educational provision and other arrangements).

- The recommendations in the CRISP Report are useless for children on the autistic spectrum. The report recommends that my son needs 10 hours of support a week. The report only looks at behavioural issues and not autism which means you only get support of your child exhibits behavioural issues.

- 4.9.42 Parents saw that the emphasis is moving away from statements towards CRISP, but they said that as a result of this, statements will be watered down because CRISP does not follow the needs of the child it is just a big pot of money. In addition, The tick box process can be frustrating for teachers and does not enable them to interpret behaviour difficulties.
- 4.9.43 Delays and frustrations are caused by the trying to get the input of specialists in the views of some parents. As the process takes so long it does not always keep up with the way the child is developing.

4.10 Funding

- 4.10.1 Parents made the following comments regarding funding.



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4.10.2 Delegating finance to schools should reduce the importance of statements as money available to schools anyway. However if many children do not have statements then how can individual support be evaluated especially when there are competing demands?

“The funds allocated to specific children should be ring fenced.”

4.10.3 Integration specialists used to be employed to give one to one support for each child. Now that funding was not ring fenced children no longer received specific support.

4.10.4 There was concern from some parents that if finance for SEN care is no longer ring fenced - this could lead to this money being divided out. In addition, if the issuing of statements is reduced in number, then there is less of an obligation on the school to use non-ring-fenced finance. Therefore statementing is very important to attract finance.

4.10.5 Some parents were not happy that financial support goes to the school as a whole and not to the individual concerned.

4.11 Transport

What is Good

4.11.1 Some parents felt that there is no problem with the current provision of transport.

4.11.2 They felt that providing transport for children is very important in providing social interaction with peers. A number of parents felt that the minibus service gave children a good opportunity to socialise with their friends, although they did say that one hour fifteen minutes was the most they were prepared to allow their children to travel, especially without air conditioning on the minibuses.

4.11.3 Parents felt that having a 'guide' on each minibus was very important and that often this guide acted as a link between the parents and the school, informing parents of what their children have done during the day and how they have been.

4.11.4 Some parents felt that the travel training their children had been given at special school was an important stepping stone for their children to become more independent (being able to travel on some public bus routes) and was very valuable.

4.11.5 Parents said that the service also listened to the needs of one parent and took their child, even though they lived too close to be covered normally.

4.11.6 Some wheel chair based children enjoy long bus rides to school because they get an opportunity to view the world.

4.11.7 One workshop group thought that although the service provided by mini buses was generally good, they could see benefits in having taxis for individual children with certain types of needs.



They thought that it could be worth having a mixture of taxis and mini buses, but there was also some concern over children's safety when alone in taxis.

Problems Encountered

- 4.11.8 Parents in a number of the workshop groups placed attending the school that best met the child's need above everything else. They felt that the cost of transportation needs to be balanced against the services/facilities they can access at a particular school/location. One parent said she would have been prepared to do almost anything to obtain a place at the right school for her child, even if that meant making some form of monetary contribution.
- 4.11.9 We were told that children with wheelchairs need transport. As wheelchair users get older their transport challenges tend to grow. The child/parent daily lifecycle also needs to be taken into account when considering transport issues.
- 4.11.10 Some parents felt that there should be more communication when there was to be a change in the transportation service, changes to the minibus service cause anxiety to some of the children, and the group were particularly concerned by the number of times the drivers are changed around so that there are no familiar faces. They also felt that there were gaps in the training that the drivers receive. Parents felt that there was a real issue with communication, whereby the minibus service is not telling drivers and parents what is happening, for example in changes to the route. In addition there is a lack of consistency in picking up times.
- 4.11.11 The children of some members of the workshop group experienced long journeys to school on mini buses because of limited provision. Parents felt that it was not fair on children when they had to stay on the minibus as late as 5pm.
- 4.11.12 Transport provision raises many other questions for parents such as:
- How to access for extra curricular activities
 - Reliability
 - Quality
 - Attitude of some drivers
- 4.11.13 Assistance with the cost of transport was not always given – parents felt that it should be. One mother said that her son needed to attend activities to help to overcome his social difficulties which meant staying for after-school activities. Transport could not then be provided to enable him to return home, so she had to leave work early in order to collect him. Parents had noticed in the newspapers, that assistance transport was being phased out and that only parents currently receiving help with this would continue to have it.



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4.11.14 We were told that that children at special schools had an absolute right to transport to and from school. For those at mainstream schools, provision was income related. It was uncertain about provision for those attending a special unit in a mainstream school.

4.11.15 The biggest concern with transport for some was not the distance that needed to be travelled, but more the organisation of the routes. Parents felt that if the routes were better managed the service would be improved and distance would not matter.

4.11.16 Some parents spoke about the inaccuracy of the assessment of their child's ability to get to school independently.

“He has to cross two main roads to get to the bus stop... he has no road sense and even if he got on the bus he wouldn't know how to pay.”

4.11.17 Most parents felt that the provision of transport was a real help to parents but this was not always available in the summer holidays. It is particularly helpful where a family has more than one child that they need to get to different schools.

4.11.18 One parent explained transport was withdrawn when their statemented child attended mainstream secondary school. The parent had specifically chosen the school, which was some way from home, because they felt it met their child's needs better than the local mainstream school.

4.11.19 Some parents felt that because their child had to travel outside of the local area to attend school they had less of a chance to socialise with other local children as many of their friends lived outside of the local area.

“They do not have many friends in their local area and this is a real problem.”

“It costs so much money to send children all the way across the city. This also means that nobody in your community gets to know your child. I'm worried that when my child becomes an adult he will be isolated in the community because he didn't grow up there. I would like it that when he is 50 and a vulnerable adult that someone knows him well enough to be able to notify someone who can help if he looks ill. Schools think about the child's immediate need whereas parents think about what their child will be like once they grow up.”

4.12 Location of Schools

Parents had a variety of views regarding the location of schools.

4.12.1 Some parents wanted provision to be more local to them to remove the transport issue and improve socialising of children with SEN within their own communities.



“When new schools are built perhaps they should look at providing services that can be used by special needs children as this would mean less children having to travel huge distances to access provision.”

“A school that meets the child’s needs can be located too far away.”

“My son needs to go all the way across the city even though there is a local school that is suitable. The local school doesn’t have a place for him.”

- 4.12.2 However again other parents stressed that, that children being able to attend a school that can provide for all of their needs is much more important than children attending a school which is geographically close to their home.
- 4.12.3 It was pointed out that provision is not spread out equally across the City, some areas of the city have very good SEN provision whilst other areas have very little.(No specialist ASD provision in the North of the city)
- 4.12.4 It was suggested that the disability register could be used to identify where more provision is needed, but one parent said that this would not be fully effective because it is parents’ choice whether their child is on the register.

4.13 Transition

- 4.13.1 It was felt by some parents that if the statementing process is followed through correctly then the transition process would be smoother.
- 4.13.2 Parents said that there is a need to consider all the transitions from the first statement, infant school, junior school, secondary school, FE, HE, work etc. Parents felt that SEN provision needed to be centred on the idea of lifetime provision.
- 4.13.3 Parents knew that it is necessary to plan very far in advance to get the right place for their children. They said that for secondary schools they had been advised to plan six or seven years in advance, and for 16-19 provision, if a place is not obtained by the time the child is 14 then he/she will not get the right place.

- One parent commented that often she tried not to think about her child’s future because it is a constant worry, and as parents of children with SEN tend to focus on the ‘here and now’ schools need to be proactive in informing parents about transition.

“There are issues for children moving between primary and junior and secondary school – planning for change seems to be left until the last minute and doesn’t involve key people”.



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- 4.13.4 One parent had a very positive experience of their child moving from a primary to a secondary school. The move was from the Institute of Conductive Education to a local special school; in this instance the parent felt that the transition was very smooth as staff from the school had visited the Institute to discuss the needs of the child prior to the move.
- 4.13.5 Having primary and secondary schools on the same site seemed to work well for some parents. Parents asked if there was the potential to extend such facilities.
- 4.13.6 It was suggested that children need specific continuity of support and some consistency, or a stable point of reference through this time as it is a period of considerable change. One suggestion was that perhaps classroom assistants might move with the child for a short period of time to assist with this process. Another suggestion was mentoring.
- 4.13.7 An example of good practice from a special secondary school was cited where the Teaching Assistants visited prospective pupils at home before they joined the school.
- 4.13.8 Parents highlighted a problem with the lack of statementing for young people in further and higher education. One workshop group felt that transition at 19+ was particularly daunting. Parents had experienced difficulties in obtaining a social worker and information on this transition period.
- 4.13.9 Many said that there is a lack of inclusive further education and they also felt that further education should be extended up to 25 years.
- 4.13.10 One suggestion was for a Transitional Support Worker, provided by BCC, to help/advise parents at the point of transition.
- 4.13.11 It was felt by parents that ConneXions staff are not qualified to deal with all special needs children.
- 4.13.12 It was suggested that there needs to be more 'joined up' working between departments and agencies.

“The same information is requested time and time again.”

- 4.13.13 There were concerns about the lack of engagement of Social Care in transition planning – both when there is movement between schools and when the young person leaves education.
- 4.13.14 We were told that Social Care does not always allocate a social worker to the child – this can cause problems.

4.14 Parental Choice

- 4.14.1 Parents told us that they do not always have a choice of school but have to fight for the school they feel best meets the child's needs.



“You have to know what the options are before you make a choice and choice is limited because there are not enough SEN places in Birmingham. Parents are not made aware of what is available at special schools compared with main stream schools.”

4.14.2 They felt that there are not enough places in special schools and parents felt that there are capacity problems. Mechanisms need to be in place to maintain a range of provision.

“Psychology Service is actively encouraging inclusion in mainstream schools not special schools.”

“There is inequality – those who fight, and have the ability to fight, get what they want.”

4.14.3 Parents said that they had not been fully informed of the options available to them. Improvements need to be made regarding the availability of information and communication/support from education professionals, regarding the choice of special education provision available and the paperwork needed to obtain a place.

4.14.4 Many of the parents said that they had been offered no support from the LA.

4.14.5 Many parents stated that they had had a constant battle with the LA to have different options made available to them, for example, parents were being forced to go to a tribunal in order to get a final statement. It was suggested that not only was it incredibly draining and taxing for the parents and children but was also inequitable as it was felt that some parents would drop out before the end of the process.

4.14.6 One suggestion was to organise main stream and special schools into groups and employ a group worker to explain SEN process to parents in group area.

4.14.7 Parents would like to be able to visit a number of schools prior to making a decision.

“There was not enough information given about available choices in good time. Information often given out at end of term and difficult to follow up issues during the summer holidays.”

“Parents aren’t consulted enough. It should be about parental choice. We were told what was going to happen, not asked for our opinion.”

4.14.8 Conversely, a few Parents felt that in the information provided on schools available for their children there was actually **too much** choice, parents were expected to sift through a wide variety of special schools and mainstream schools without any direction on whether the school could cater



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for their child's needs. They felt it would be very helpful if they were only given information on schools that could cater for their children's needs.

- 4.14.9 **Many of the parents had heard about their child's school simply through word of mouth, they put their success at finding the right school down to chance. They also thought that there was not enough help and support from professionals in the process.**
- 4.14.10 Parents wanted access to a range of provision to exercise the right to choose the best for their child, whether it is mainstream or special school provision. "If you take away special schools, you take away a parents right to choose what is best for their child."
- 4.14.11 Some parents were generally pleased with the level of choice that they had, they said that every child is different and the service offered the chance to get what is right for the child rather than for everyone else.
- 4.14.12 One parent had a child who had been through mainstream infant school, but had then spoken to the head teacher and decided this was no longer suitable. He was then moved to a special unit, and then later to a special school. The parent was glad that she had these options and people to help her decide what was best for her son.
- 4.14.13 Parents felt that whilst there are special schools there is a choice of provision. All parents and children need to have access to the broadest range of provision so that they can work out what will suit their needs best. The systems need to bend to suit the need of the children not the force children to meet the needs of the system.
- 4.14.14 One parent felt the social worker lacked understanding of condition and family needs to support parental choice; another parent with a more positive experience was encouraged by their social worker to talk to other foster parents.

4.15 Information and Support

- 4.15.1 Parents told us that the amount and level of information, advice and support they received varied tremendously.
- 4.15.2 One Parent commented that "when your child is disabled, it feels like you are also disabled because you are put into that world, and have to search out information and support. The system makes you feel like you are disabled."
- 4.15.3 Other parents felt that they had been lucky, that if they hadn't been able to speak out for themselves then they wouldn't have been noticed. Many parents are fed up of fighting for everything that they are entitled to, having to prove their need for each and every requirement.
- 4.15.4 One parent said it took them 2 ½ years of research to track down support agencies. The information leaflet they were given had out of date contact information. They borrowed books from the local library but were later told by a home visitor that these also contained out of date information. Whereas some parents were given information packs by their paediatrician.



4.15.5 One parent said how the special school explained everything to them and gave them literature about their child's condition and this really helped.

4.15.6 Many parents told us that the service provided by the Parent Partnership is invaluable.

"I used Parent Partnership and they have been great. Parent Support has lost its funding which is bad. Sometimes parents just need someone to listen to them."

"One thing I have found that is positive is the Parent Partnership, they have really helped and provided an excellent service." (All agreed)

"The support provided by the SEN Parent Partnership workers was invaluable."

"The school never told me about the Parent Partnership."

4.15.7 Some schools provided workshops at the schools which the parents enjoyed attending as it gave them the chance to meet other parents in the same situation as themselves whilst at the same time giving them the opportunity to interact with their children within the school environment. They wanted to see more activities like this however others said,

"We asked for advice as to what school would best suit the needs of our child but were not given any support, just a booklet explaining the schools available."

4.15.8 In some cultures the wider family do not want to acknowledge that their children have special needs and there is a need for more support for these parents and families in understanding their children's needs. Children in mainstream schools need to be educated in disability so that they can understand it better. Some special schools do this with both staff and children.

4.15.9 There were a number of parents from ethnic minority communities who felt that they did not have a voice in the system. They had interpreters arranged by the school, but outside this they did not have the support.

4.15.10 Parents said that they thought there were many services out there that they didn't know about, and that due to an archaic system information was just not getting through to them.

"I have found that it is common to have to fight to get anything?" (All agreed)

4.15.11 There were mixed experiences with social workers of fostered children - One foster parent felt their social worker lacked understanding of the child's condition and didn't support parents to find the right SEN provision. They felt "the social worker was toeing the LEA line by suggesting a mainstream school rather than challenging the council's inclusion policy".



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4.15.12 An absence of support to parents whilst they were seeking an appropriate placement for their child created real difficulties for those with very ill children, and those whose English language skills were not equal to navigating a complex system.



5 What Needs to Change

5.1 Listen to Parents!

5.1.1 Parents told us about the need for improved communication throughout all stages of the process.

- Everyone needs to listen more to parents. Schools are under pressure not to tell people if they cannot cope with children. They do not put their hands up because it looks like the school is failing. It is not failure to ask for support for the children. In some schools, I've seen children with no statement and no recognition that there is even a problem.

“What needs to change is the battling culture”.

“Improved communication is needed as well as being given time for changes to happen”.

5.2 Planning Future Provision

5.2.1 Parents raised a number of suggestions regarding future provision.

5.2.2 Parents wanted to lose the tag of “special school” to remove the stigma and labelling associated with this and have it replaced with the more positive sounding “Specialist School” descriptor.

5.2.3 Parents agreed that the new provision should focus on the child as an individual, better communication, happiness and not just results. Parents said that results do not tell the whole story and focusing on results can mean that mainstream schools do not want to include children with SEN, that inclusion and good results do not go together.

5.2.4 They said it is essential that a full range of provision is maintained so that parents can exercise choice. It is essential that this provision is flexible.

5.2.5 Some parents felt that that was a need to move to having more specialist facilities in future so that people with the same type of disabilities are taught together.

5.2.6 Parents were concerned that SEN provision is being ring fenced and that eventually under the new strategy only the very disabled will have access to the specialist provision; the rest would be put into mainstream provision.

“Birmingham needs more schools that can cater for various specialisms not less.”



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

An increase in “secondary” special school provision is needed. As well as more services for the North side of the City. We should also look at the spread for all different learning difficulties.”

- 5.2.7 Definitions of the range of the autism spectrum need to be broadened and at the same time there needs to be tighter classification of specific needs.
- 5.2.8 Teachers were seeing more children diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and many people would like to see research into why there was this increase.
- 5.2.9 One parent suggested that maybe we need to create Centres of Excellence (as in Scotland).
- 5.2.10 Parents felt that a more consistent and secure future was needed for special schools and more resources for mainstream schools for specialist provision were required. Resources also need to be used more sensibly/ effectively (can they be pooled?)
- 5.2.11 Some parents felt that mainstream schools need to be held accountable for the money they are given for children with special needs, as they did not feel this is monitored.
- 5.2.12 In the short term there is a need to extend opportunities and provision for 16 to 25 year olds with SEN particularly in terms of accessing Further Education opportunities.

5.3 Earlier Intervention

- 5.3.1 A crucial issue for many parents is for early years identification of needs and pre-school services.
 - Children with ASD need effective early intervention programmes and a multidisciplinary approach-an ABA is needed in the team.
 - It was suggested that there should be multi-disciplinary teams for groups of schools to help them with their early intervention and that special needs audits could be carried out in primary schools to proactively seek to identify children early who might need extra support.
 - Parents felt that there was a need for more Educational Psychologists to assist with early identification of needs and arrangement of provision.

5.4 More Training for School Staff and Professionals

- 5.4.1 There is a need in all schools for much more awareness training and increased support for professional training in all settings.
- 5.4.2 Regular and consistent training for all staff within schools (not just teachers) is needed to give them the skills to deal with SEN children. As part of their training, Teaching Assistants could spend time in special schools to increase their awareness of SEN issues.



- 5.4.3 It was also suggested that there should be more training for mainstream SENCO's to increase their knowledge and understanding of a child's needs, particularly with "non-visible" disabilities.
- 5.4.4 More training for staff within mainstream schools is needed to support children with SEN, for example with regards to needs from the physical environment (e.g. where it is best for the child to sit).
- 5.4.5 It was suggested that there should be a Service Level Agreements with the PCT so that GPs are obligated to have an awareness of local health/SEN facilities. it was felt that currently GPs do not provide enough information on specific needs and should be encouraged to do so.
- 5.4.6 Nurseries and primary schools should have more experience training for teachers, as teachers do not always spot special needs children. (It was said that teachers only receive 2 weeks SEN training).
- 5.4.7 There is a need for mainstream school teachers to get more experience in dealing with children with special needs e.g. secondment to specialist schools in order to get 'hands on' experience.

5.5 Improving the Statementing/Assessment Processes

- 5.5.1 The statementing process needs to be properly supported and needs to be more specific with regards to the level and types of care that was needed E.g. The LA should include specific details in Part 3 of all statements and Speech and Language provision should also be included in Part 3.
- 5.5.2 Parents felt that they should not have to fight to get their child into a school that was suitable for their needs and felt that the amount of time taken to get children assessed and Statemented should be reduced, (it was felt that 3 years was wholly unacceptable.)
- 5.5.3 More information was needed on statementing for parents and it was suggested that a Link Officer should be employed to help parents through the statementing process.
- 5.5.4 After initial diagnosis, a system of support needs to be put in place that would aim to provide amongst other things emotional support for the parents/carers as well advice and guidance with all of the paperwork.
- 5.5.5 **Some parents wanted the Council to provide workers who are employed to help parents understand the statementing process and ensure that statements are updated. Parent needs are frequently greatest prior to the initial Statement and during transitions. They felt that there was a severe lack of information from the outset.**
- 5.5.6 Reviews of children in special schools need to be better co-ordinated and inclusive of all relevant people e.g. parents, foster carers, psychologists, speech and language therapists
- 5.5.7 Some parents wanted to see an independent assessment team, the Service was seen as being the "poacher as well as the gamekeeper". In addition, it was suggested that an independent panel should be created to review the decisions made by the school and the LEA.



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

- 5.5.8 Parents wanted to see the availability of clear and concise information on statementing (free from jargon), as well as more information made available on-line.
- 5.5.9 They felt that all children should be assessed annually (not just SEN) to make sure it is spotted when they are starting to struggle. School Action/Action Plus facilitates this if the teacher recognises that a child has problems. Then the SENCO makes a judgement about what needs to be done but resources are limited.
- 5.5.10 There needs to be a stronger, formal recognition of the rights of parents and a formal procedure for appeals against decisions such as statementing.

“A statementing decision shouldn’t be made purely on a half hour assessment recorded on a piece of paper but assessing the child in different environments e.g. home, school etc.”

5.6 More Information and Support for Parents

- 5.6.1 It was suggested that there should be far more support from the LA and that there should be more facilities and resources in place to identify issues at an early stage.

“There is a lack of information for parents – from Health, Social Care and Education. Parents have to be skilled researchers if they want to understand the system.”

“The process is explained initially but you learn, as a parent, as you go along. There should be someone provided to advise parents. Perhaps a Liaison Officer to provide an induction to parents.”

- 5.6.2 The Parent Partnership should have a strengthened role in advocacy. It needs to advertise its service more, to raise awareness as some parents had not heard of it. This will require more resources. Some parents felt that the Parent Partnership should be independent – not be involved with local authority. In addition, it needs to be made aware of all parents of children with SEN not just those that are statemented.
- 5.6.3 Other parents called for more Link/ support or Parent advocates to help them all the way through the process.
- 5.6.4 Some parents wanted to see a package put together for parents to show them what services they have access to and to explain processes fully, they thought that they shouldn’t only rely on the school when there are other services available. This pack could go out to newly diagnosed children’s parents and could include links to other organisations e.g. Autism West Midlands, MENCAP etc.



5.6.5 Better support is needed both in the community and within schools for example Parents/carers said their children need more social activities outside of core school time and during the summer holidays. The free provision of some kind of activities for all children with special needs during the long summer holiday should they want it, would be a huge improvement for many children and families.

5.6.6 Some parents wanted to see the setting up of a "Crisis helpline", somewhere parents can ring up to get advice, guidance and support and some felt that a forum for parents of children with special needs was needed.

5.6.7 "There must be more information at all stages in the journey through education". By this parents meant they needed support at all the key points of transition i.e. Early years to primary, primary to secondary, secondary to further education and beyond.

"Listen to the parents first and the professionals second."

5.6.8 Parents said that they did not always feel comfortable approaching professionals within the system, as they were worried about what to say because the professionals are part of the department. They agreed that some sort of independent advocacy service is needed. They felt that all professionals seemed to have their own agendas.

"I want more advice/support/diagnosis from health visitors – perhaps they need more training to recognise special needs children."

5.6.9 Some parents felt that there is a lack of information regarding benefits/help on offer and more family support is needed especially for the wider family and siblings of a child with SEN.

5.6.10 Some felt that there is no support for parents who want to educate their children pre-school themselves. They felt a Home Education Service with a bank of teachers who can work with parents could be useful.

"The City Council website needs to be improved – it should include the SEN and CRISP criteria. "Ordinary people do not understand CRISP."

"Any criteria such as CRISP should be written in plain, clear language. Parents need to understand the funding arrangements – to help them understand what their child is entitled to."

5.7 More Health/Support Services

5.7.1 Parents wanted more sensitivity and support for parents whose children have just been diagnosed.

5.7.2 Parents felt that there was a need for a lot more physiotherapists. They said that there was a lack of continuity with physiotherapists constantly changing.



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

- 5.7.3 Parents also said that there was a need for more occupational therapists, and more support workers in classrooms. They said they need increased access to specialist services including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists and pastoral services in schools.
- 5.7.4 Parents said that there are real problems with access to equipment for their children at home, and having adaptations made to their houses. They said that the process was too long and full of bureaucracy. This should be improved.
- 5.7.5 There is also a need to extend opportunities for respite care. Many parents had not used respite care, one parent was concerned that there was not enough information about what services are available.
- 5.7.6 **Parents felt that a link worker or child's champion to support both child and parents through their education could be of real value to many. There was a gap for some between educational provision and health provision and a support officer who understood this, and could help a child across the divide between primary and secondary education could be really helpful. Such a person would need a degree of impartiality so that they were acting in the child's best interests, not as a part of the system.**

5.8 Curriculum Development

- 5.8.1 Parents want to see more variety within the curriculum they felt that children with SEN would like a greater choice of vocational based training.
- “A curriculum tailored towards the needs of the child rather than the child having to fit around the curriculum.”
- 5.8.2 There is currently too much pressure being placed on children because of exams and tests. This needs to be reduced.
- 5.8.3 Consideration also needs to be given to provision for talented and gifted children. For some children with Aspergers who cannot settle in mainstream settings a more stretching academic regime needs to be developed.
- 5.8.4 There needs to be an equal focus on academic achievement as is given to behaviour management.
- 5.8.5 More access to and creative use of ICT including MSN Messenger and Skype to link up teachers and pupils and remove isolation and more educational use of gaming technologies which are particularly suited to helping children with ASD is required.



5.9 Better Transport

- 5.9.1 Parents wanted to see a more streamlined transport service, smaller vehicles with less pick ups and better routing to avoid long journey times.
- 5.9.2 It was felt that there is a need for better communication methods to be developed between parents and transport providers. (to ensure parents are informed when a service is cancelled or running late). They also felt that guides should also be trained to provide emergency treatment.
- 5.9.3 It was suggested that if and when a child had respite, they should have a separate taxi rather than spending most of the day on the bus doing the rounds picking people up and dropping them off back home.
- 5.9.4 Another suggestion was that a transport officer should be involved in the Placement Panel meetings.

5.10 Joined Up Working

- 5.10.1 More joined up work between agencies and more cooperation between the professional services is required in particular, education, health and social care services need to work together better.
- 5.10.2 If not already available, there needs to be an audit of all resources/ organisations across the whole spectrum of need for parents and children. This should be done across a local (citywide) and regional basis (to uncover those specialisms which the city itself does not offer).
- 5.10.3 Some parents felt that their child's health needs were met by the health service and received their education from the Local Authority, but that there was a gap in the middle with no provision made by either for the learning of social skills.
- 5.10.4 Social workers also need to have a greater understanding of conditions and families needs.
- 5.10.5 A transport officer should be involved in the Placement Panel meetings to ensure that a more joined up service could be provided in terms of the allocation of transportation for the children.
- 5.10.6 Multi-agency working must be improved during assessments, statementing, reviews and transition. When there are "grey areas or gaps in provision these are "exploited" by agencies. Gaps between services need to be filled.
- 5.10.7 Transitional planning needs to be improved – it is too often left to the last minute. In the worst cases these young people are not assessed until they are about to leave school or college. There also needs to be better systems in place to ensure smooth transition from primary to secondary schools. It could be improved perhaps, by providing a more gradual easing into it. For example spending some time over the summer preparing for it with the child.
- 5.10.8 There was a call for greater networking and collaboration between mainstream and special schools so that children can share provision. This needs to happen so that they can build greater



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

understanding, share good practice, facilities and expertise. (e.g. joint sports days) It was also felt that special schools cannot work in isolation. They have to enable children to develop the skills to communicate in the wider world and prepare the wider world to receive them.

- 5.10.9 It was felt Inclusion Mentors are important and developing trust is important if inclusion is to take place with other schools. It is most important that what takes place is appropriate to the child's needs and abilities.
- 5.10.10 One idea was to introduce "buddy schemes" to pair up children from special school with children from mainstream school. This helps in the short term but also helps to change attitudes and reduce the stigma in the longer term.
- 5.10.11 There needs to be links between research establishments and schools, e.g. Aston University.
- 5.10.12 It was suggested that perhaps there could be a Service Level Agreement with the PCT to provide a transition service.



6 What Will Scrutiny Do Next?

- 6.1.1 This report will facilitate an informative debate at City Council led by Scrutiny Members around this important area of service delivery.
- 6.1.2 The issues raised at the Council debate together with the contents of this report will then feed into the Cabinet Members "Emerging Thinking" report.
- 6.1.3 As the Cabinet Member starts to develop the next phase of the final strategy, we will use this report as an ongoing reference to ensure that the issues raised within it are being fully taken onboard.
- 6.1.4 More specifically, Members of the Scrutiny Committee have now been asked to be directly involved in the next stage of the development of the strategy. They, along with other stakeholders and partners will do this by attending and contributing to a series of workshops focussing on both geographical areas and special group needs. The workshops will explore detailed data and information and begin the identification of options and priorities for future Special Educational Needs provision.
- 6.1.5 Updates on the work of the Scrutiny Committee in this area will be available on the Scrutiny website.(www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny).



APPENDIX ONE: SEN Public Consultation Events

Introduction

The SEN Overview is currently being carried out by a group of members from the Children and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The scrutiny committee is overseeing the development of the city's strategy for special education currently being undertaken by a "Strategic Working Group" led by Cabinet Member, Cllr Les Lawrence.

Part of our exercise as set out within the project brief states that scrutiny will be involved in looking at an effective process for engaging with parents/carers of children with special educational needs.

A series of public meetings across Birmingham to speak to parents/carers and ask for their opinions was suggested as a possible way forward to achieve this. The review group decided that a "Scrutiny Roadshow" was an ideal way to meet parents/carers from across the city. The events would give parents a chance to meet the members of the committee and share their experiences of SEN provision within the city.

The Scrutiny Roadshow ran alongside ongoing consultation work that is currently being undertaken by the Executive via the "consulting with parents workstream".

The results from the consultation will be used to establish principles to ensure the final strategy delivers improvements for children and young people with SEN within Birmingham.

The public consultation events targeted parents of children with special educational needs within special schools, mainstream schools and special units (mainstream school with additional resourcing to meet particular needs)

We have had a great response from all the parents who attended the events, the quality of the discussion was excellent. We have heard stories of dedication and commitment on the part of both parents as well as schools that have been both heart warming and uplifting.

We have collected some really constructive and helpful comments which we hope to feed into the development of the new strategy.

Distribution and Publicity

Considerable planning went into the organisation of each the events. A planning group consisting of Elected Members, Officers and school Head Teachers met on three separate occasions to organise and plan the events. The group consisted of Head Teachers from special schools, mainstream primary and mainstream secondary schools.

Following discussions with the group members, suitable schools venues were identified, the programme of events agreed and a publicity campaign developed.



In terms of publicising the events to the widest possible audience. It was agreed that a leaflet and poster campaign supported by articles in the press and interviews on local radio would be the best way forward.

A copy of the leaflet is attached.

Invitations were sent to the Head teachers of every school in Birmingham, the SENCO's (SEN Co-ordinators) at each school for distribution and to the clerks to the governing bodies of all the schools in order to encourage parent governor representatives to attend as well as various voluntary and community organisations. All Neighbourhood Offices within the city were sent posters and leaflets. Posters and leaflets were also displayed in the Central Library and the Childcare Information Bureau.

Cllr Hunt was also interviewed for the "Ed Doolan show" on BBC radio WM and local "NewStyle radio". The events also generated a great deal of publicity from local newspapers including the Evening Mail, Birmingham post, Birmingham News and the City Councils own newspaper, "Forward".

This information was also sent out via the Schools Electronic bulletin (E-briefing).

Just over 1800 leaflets and 100 posters were distributed across the city

Information on the events was published on the website and this was updated during the course of the meetings. For those parents/carers that couldn't attend the events, an online facility was created to allow them to feed back any appropriate comments.

The planning group was key to the development of the roadshow. Without the help and support of the Head Teachers involved, these events would certainly not have been as successful as they were. We were offered venues, offers to distribute the leaflets, publicity at the three main Head Teacher forums (primary, secondary, special) as well as the facilitators for the workshop groups. The host venues also played a vital role in ensuring that as many parents as possible at their respective schools were made aware of the events and ensured that parents made a commitment to attend.

Events

The Public Consultation meetings took place over 2 weeks, beginning from June 7th and running until the 21st of June. The events were spread out all over the City and the geographical spread of events was based on the six "Excellence in Cities" areas and this ensured that all areas of the city were covered.

The venues consisted of both special as well as mainstream schools and the timings of the meetings were also varied with both morning as well as evening, weekdays and one Saturday.



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

The table below gives a breakdown of the number of people who attended each of the events.

| Venue | Date | Ward | Excellence In Cities Area | Number of Workshop Groups | Attendance |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Wilson Stuart special school | Tuesday 7 th June, 10am | Erdington | North | 6 | 78 people |
| Holte School (secondary) | Tuesday 12 th June. 7pm | Lozells | North West | 2 | 35 people |
| Four Dwellings High School (secondary) | Wednesday 14 th June. 7pm | Quinton | South West | 3 | 39 people |
| Calthorpe special school. | Saturday 16 th June. 10pm | Sparkbrook | Central | 3 | 42 people |
| Hillstone primary School | Tuesday 19 th June. 10am | Shard End | East | 2 | 26 people |
| Queensbridge School (co-located with Fox Hollies special school) | Thursday 21 st June 7pm | Moseley | South | 6 | 77 people |
| Total | | | | | 297 people |

The meetings were very well attended by both Councillors and members of the public.

In the case of one particular meeting, parents braved torrential rain in order to attend an evening meeting at Four Dwellings School.

The Parent Partnership played a key role in the meetings. They were able to facilitate workshops and more importantly, they were able to assist parents who needed additional advice, guidance and support.

The meetings offered parents the opportunity to hold discussions within workshop groups.

They were asked to discuss three main issues:

- What they have found good about SEN provision.
- Any problems that they had encountered.
- How they would like to see the service improved.

Depending on the size of the groups, the workshop discussion lasted between 45-60 minutes. Each workshop group nominated a speaker to report their key issues back to the rest of the audience.

Detailed notes were taken at each of the meetings and an initial summary of the key issues arising from each plenary session were made available on the Scrutiny website and are attached.



Parents were also given the chance to ask the members any questions that they might have had.

As mentioned earlier, parents were also offered the opportunity of sending in their views via the scrutiny website, a total of 16 responses were received by the deadline and 24 were received during the drafting of this report. The key themes from these have been included in the body of the main report.

We would like to thank all the parents/carers who took time out of their busy lives to attend these meetings and for giving us the opportunity to listen and understand all of their experiences.



Special Educational Needs Consultation Events

More information available at www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny

**We need your views on special educational needs provision.
Please come to one of our events.**

What is happening?

The Council is reviewing its Special Educational Needs provision and has organised a range of ways to get parents involved in the process. The Scrutiny Committee for Education will publicly oversee the process and carry out a programme of consultation with parents. The Scrutiny Committee consists of Councillors, Church Representatives, Young People and School Parent Governor Representatives. This is your opportunity to meet them.

What will we be doing?

The Scrutiny Committee will be holding a series of public meetings across the city in June. All six events will be workshop based and will provide an important opportunity for you to tell us first hand about what you have found good about the service; identify any problems encountered and most importantly, how you would like to see the service improved. Unfortunately we won't be able to deal with individual cases. However your involvement will help the Council to shape the future Special Educational Needs provision for the city's children.

Spaces are limited so you will need to reserve a place in advance by completing a booking form or by calling 0121 464 8263. If you are unable to attend any of the events, we would still appreciate your comments (please complete the comment boxes overleaf and post). You can also send your views to us via email, or by completing an online form at www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny. Have your say! Reserve your place now.

Thursday 7th June 2007

10:00am – 12:00pm

Wilson Stuart School

Tuesday 12th June 2007

7:00pm – 9:00pm

Holte School

Wednesday 13th June 2007,

7:00pm – 9:00pm

Four Dwellings High School

Saturday 16th June 2007,

10:00am – 12:00pm

Calthorpe School

Tuesday 19th June 2007,

10:00am – 12:00pm

Hillstone Primary School

Thursday 21st June 2007,

7:00pm – 9:00pm

Queensbridge School

Full school addresses overleaf

Contact Us

Address: Scrutiny Office, Room B153,
The Council House, Victoria
Square, Birmingham, B1 1BB.

Telephone: 0121 464 8263 or
0121 303 1729

Email: scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk

Booking Form

Please enter the number of places required in the box next to the event you wish to attend, and complete your contact details.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Wilson Stuart School (07/06/07) | <input type="text"/> |
| Holte School (12/06/07) | <input type="text"/> |
| Four Dwellings High School (13/06/07) | <input type="text"/> |
| Calthorpe School (16/06/07) | <input type="text"/> |
| Hillstone Primary School (19/06/07) | <input type="text"/> |
| Queensbridge School (21/06/07) | <input type="text"/> |

Alternatively you can complete the booking form online, send an email or telephone 0121 464 8263 or 0121 303 1729.

Contact Details (Please complete in block capitals)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Alternative Requirements (Please state):

Have your say! Share your views:

- What have you found good about the service?

- What problems have you encountered?

- What would you like to see improved?

Public Meetings

Thursday 7th June 2007, 10:00am – 12:00pm

Wilson Stuart School

Perry Common Road

Erdington

B23 7AT

Tuesday 12th June 2007, 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Holte School

Wheeler Street

Lozells

B19 2EP

Wednesday 13th June 2007, 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Four Dwellings High School

Dwellings Lane

Quinton

B32 1RJ

Saturday 16th June 2007, 10:00am – 12:00pm

Calthorpe School

Darwin Street

Highgate

B12 0TJ

Tuesday 19th June 2007, 10:00am – 12:00pm

Hillstone Primary School

Hillstone Road

Shard End

B34 7PX

Thursday 21st June 2007, 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Queensbridge School

Queensbridge Road

Moseley

B13 8QB



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

Plenary

Overview and Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Public Consultation Event Wilson Stuart School, 7th June 2007, 10am

The Children and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee's first public consultation meeting regarding Special Educational Needs provision was held on Thursday 7th June 2007 at Wilson Stuart School. Parents and carers shared their views with Councillors involved in the review.

A wide range of issues were discussed at the meeting and some of the key points raised are listed below. This is by no means a definitive list of issues raised and a more detailed report will be available on the website towards the end of July.

What have you found good about the service

- Parents felt that the special schools are very good at dealing with a wide variety of needs through "in house" services. Parents were generally happy with the services currently provided in specialist environments.
- Parents said that it was important for their children to attend a school that met all of their needs and this wasn't always necessarily their closest school.

Any problems that you've encountered

- Some parents of children at mainstream schools felt their children were missing out given the facilities that were available at some of the special schools.
- Some attendees also felt that the Local Authority did not fully understand the role of special schools, and failed to take into account the views of parents.
- Statementing was felt to be a long winded and complicated process especially for children attending mainstream schools
- There are problems accessing services and facilities of children over the age of 16.

How would you like to see the service improved?

- The availability of information and communication/support from education professionals has to be improved. Parents felt that they didn't know who to turn to for guidance and support.
- There is a need in mainstream schools for more training and support for professionals working with children with SEN.
- Improvements need to be made to the provision of physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy for children mainstream schools.



Overview and Scrutiny
Special Educational Needs Public Consultation Event
Holte School, 12th June 2007, 7pm

A wide range of issues were discussed at the meeting and some of the key points raised are listed below.

What have you found good about the service

- Not broke so why change it
- Once children are diagnosed and statemented things are ok and children can access provision

Any problems that you've encountered

- Parents need access to appropriate and early/ up to date information about procedures so that they can better understand the system.
- Postcode Lottery – depends on where you live
- Children fall through the nets of NHS and Schools - Pushy parents can get through this others cannot
- Transport provision raises many questions for parents
 - How to access for extra curricular activities
 - Reliability
 - Quality
 - Attitude of some drivers
- Mechanisms need to be in place to enable children to develop social skills.

How would you like to see the service improved.

- Need more Educational Psychologists to assist with early identification of needs and arrangement of provision
- Need increased access to specialist services including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, Pastoral services in school and Parent Partnership services.
- SEN pupils tend to get bullied in main stream settings – not every school has the pastoral / non teaching staff available to help to combat this
- Greater consistency required eg Link worker not provided by all and there is no one person to help you all the way through the process
- Better support needed both in the community and within schools
- Parents/carers and children need more support during the school holidays and for social activities outside of school time.



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

Overview and Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Public Consultation Event Four dwellings High school, June 13th 2007, 7pm

A wide range of issues were discussed at the meeting and some of the key points raised are listed below..

What have you found good about the service

"if not broken, why fix it" (quote referring to special schools).

Parents were happy with the service provided by the assessment service and wanted to see it continue.

Overall parents are very happy with the services provided by the special schools, particularly with the staff.

We also heard of some examples of good provision within the mainstream particularly within the primary school sector, this should be recognised and celebrated.

Choice: Parents wanted access to a range of provision to exercise the right to choose the best for their child, whether it is mainstream or special school provision. "if you take away special schools, you take away a parents right to choose what is best for their child".

Any problems that you've encountered

Process of assessment and Statementing described as "daunting", "time-consuming". "demoralising" and "frustrating". Parents want to be supported through the whole process.

Lack of signposting.

"too much jargon."

Lack of "independent advice."

Parents felt that there was a lack of joined up working between health and education professionals.

How would you like to see the service improved?

A Link Officer should be employed to help parents through the statementing process.

Parents wanted to see the setting up of a "Crisis helpline", somewhere parents can ring up to get advice, guidance and support.

Transition: Parents felt that they needed support at all the key points of transition ie. Early years to primary, primary to secondary, secondary to further education and beyond.

Curriculum Development: Want to see more variety within the curriculum, felt that children with SEN would like a greater choice of vocational based training. "a curriculum tailored towards the needs of the child rather than the child having to fit around the curriculum."

Regular and consistent training for **All** staff within schools (not just teachers) to give them the skills to deal with SEN children.



Joined up agency work.

Parents wanted to see a more streamlined transport service, smaller vehicles, less pick ups.

Need better communication methods between parents and transport providers. (what happens if a service is cancelled or running late).

Need more resources to be targeted at employing more health professionals. "there are no shortage of children, therefore there should be no shortage of staff."



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

SEN Public Consultation Event Plenary Session, Calthorpe School Saturday 16th, 2007

A wide range of issues were discussed at the meeting and some of the key points raised are listed below.

What have you found good about the service

- Parents felt that special schools were better at information sharing and building relationships with parents
- Centralization of services: all the key services were under one roof (access to nurses, speech therapists)
- Parents felt that there was a real positive ethos present in special schools, all children were seen as being gifted and talented.

Any Problems you've encountered:

- Statementing process: Seen as a difficult process.
- Some parents felt that mainstream schools tended to concentrate on league tables and achievement rather than the individual needs of a child.
- Parents within the mainstream sector felt that they weren't being listened to.
- Lack of clarity around the CRISP criteria, "what is the criteria?"
- SENCO's: not always aware of the needs of the child, their role was seen by some parents as being more managerial.

How would you like to see the service improved?

- Parents wanted to see an independent assessment team, the Service was seen as being the "poacher as well as the gamekeeper".
- The Parent Partnership should have a key role in advocacy. Need to raise more awareness of their services.
- Parents wanted to see the availability of clear and concise information on statementing (free from jargon), as well as more information made available on-line.
- Access to activities for children during the school holidays.
- Greater networking between mainstream and Special schools.
- "Educating the rest of the world!"
- More opportunities for children once they leave school.



Overview and Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Public Consultation Event

Hillstone primary School, Tuesday May 19th, 10am

A wide range of issues were discussed at the meeting and some of the key points raised are listed below.

What have you found good about the service

- Parents felt that the Special schools do an excellent job and the teachers are welcoming and dedicated.
- Some parents felt that the Special schools provided the children with more support in promoting self worth and self-esteem.
- The service provided by the Parent Partnership is invaluable.
- Some of the schools provided workshops at the schools which the parents enjoyed attending as it gave them the chance to meet other parents in the same situation as themselves whilst at the same time giving them the opportunity to interact with their children within the school environment. They wanted to see more activities like this.

Any problems that you've encountered

- Complexities of the statement process.
 - 1) Parents felt that the whole process is far to long and complicated.
 - 2) Why do statements no longer include the "specified hours" of specialist support entitled to the children?
 - 3) The process needs to take into account the individuality of the child.
 - 4) Assessments in particular should **NOT** be based on a single time limited meeting.
- Some parents felt that the infrastructure of the school buildings needed to be looked at (leaky roofs, unreliable heating systems etc).
- Parents felt that there was a lack of understanding and support of SEN within mainstream schools.
- Provision is not spread out equally across the City, some areas of the City have very good SEN provision whilst other areas have very little.
- Parents within mainstream schools felt that there wasn't enough interaction between teachers and SENCO's

How would you like to see the service improved.

- There needs to be more speech therapists available.
- Parents wanted to see the introduction of an information pack (important contacts, Support organisations).
- More training for staff within mainstream schools to support children with SEN.
- More Early years intervention:
 - 1) SEN need to be identified at an earlier stage.
 - 2) Could a service to support parents at this stage be provided by the Department?
 - 3) Special needs nurseries.



Feedback from Scrutiny Special Educational Needs Consultation Meetings with Parents

- 4) Access to health advice and diagnosis.
 - 5) Sensitivity and support for parents whose children have just been diagnosed.
- There need to be a better systems in place to ensure smooth transition from primary to secondary schools
 - Transportation: Could an officer from the City council transportation team be involved with the placement panels to ensure that a more joined up service could be provided in terms of the allocation of transportation for the children?



Overview and Scrutiny
Special Educational Needs Public Consultation Event
Queensbridge School, Thursday 21st June. 7pm

What have you found good about the service

- Parents with youngster within special school settings were very happy with the care their children were receiving.
- *"My Child feels secure in a small school setting."*
- Access to a wide variety of resources within a special school (hydrotherapy).
- The role of the Parent Partnership.
- Parent support workers within mainstream schools.
- Transport Service.

Any problems that you've encountered

- Statementing
 - Long winded, stressful process.
 - Documentation full of Jargon.
 - *"My childs statement has stayed the same for years."*
- Parents within the mainstream found it difficult to access speech and language therapists.
- Mainstream schools are often slower in identifying SEN.
- Some parents felt that because their child had to travel outside of the local area to attend school they had less of a chance to socialise with local peers.
- Length of journey to and from school.
- *"The school never told me about the parent partnership."*

How would you like to see the service improved.

- Parents wanted to lose the tag of "special school" and have it replaced with the more positive sounding "Specialist School" descriptor.
- If improvements were made to the quality of mainstream SEN provision, inclusion might work.
- *"Listen to the parents first and the professionals second."*
- More training for **ALL** staff within mainstream schools to help them create the right environment for children with SEN.
- *"Every mainstream school should be run like a special school."*
- More collaboration between mainstream and Special schools.