



A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

COFFEE EVENING 7th FEBRUARY 2019

Mark Fowler, Interim Head of Education, and Sonia Aulak, Interim Service Manager for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) spoke with 22 parent and family carers to discuss education for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

Stephen Kitchman, Children's Director, was due to attend but resigned and left last Monday. Until an interim is found, the responsibilities will be shared between Mark and his colleagues Lisa Arthey, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, and Vicky Rhodes, Head of Early Help.

Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) are about to advertise for another permanent Head of Education. Mark expects to stay in post until the summer. His aim is to ensure the positive starts such as the Reading SEND strategy continue and acknowledged that a lot of work still needs to be done.

https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/reading/enterprise/files/approved_send_strategy_august_2017.pdf

A key aim of the SEND Strategy is to ensure children's needs can be met locally as far as possible by building provision in Reading.

- Schools are bidding to open 2 new resource units in mainstream schools for ASD and speech and language difficulties.
- Reading have bid to open a new special school in Reading that will be shared with Wokingham and West Berks. Decision on this will be made in March 19.

Agreed that parents and carers know their children best. Teachers and parents must listen to each other.

How long does it take to decide whether to place a child at a special school?

It should take the school 15 working days to write up the annual review and send to the SEN team. The SEN team then has 15 working days for its panel to decide whether a special school is necessary. If it is taking

www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 1166585



A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

longer than this, contact your child's SEN case officer. One family have been waiting since November for a decision.

How our children prepared for a move to secondary school? Many move to special school at Year 7?

BFFC encourage schools to start preparation in Year 5.

Agreed that parents can feel very overwhelmed and need good information. CAMHS send letters with a diagnosis of ASD just let families know about Autism Berkshire and Parenting Special Children.

What should parents do if their child is not getting the right support at school?

One family's child was recently diagnosed with ASD. The child has been out of class for 2 months in primary school. Another family's child was not getting the right support at school so the family have had to educate them at home.

It is a statutory requirement that school age children have access to proper education. If the family are not happy with the support their child is getting they should:

1. Speak to the teachers to understand what is happening.
2. If still not happy, speak to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) at the school. Some parents didn't know who that was or that person was not available.
3. If can't get hold of SENCo or not happy after speaking to him/her, speak to the Headteacher.
4. If still not happy, contact the school's Chair of Governors.
5. If a child is missing their education eg on part-time table and a parent hasn't been able to sort it out with the school, contact the children missing out on education in Brighter Futures for Children gill.dunlop@brighterfuturesforchildren.org
6. If the school is an academy or free school, and a parent remains concerned, despite doing all the above, the parent can contact the Regional Schools Commissioner.

www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 1166585



A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

If a parent is not happy that the Education, Health and Care Plan is not being followed, the parent should contact their child's SEN case officer.

What happens if my child needs support but they are on a waiting list and it make take 1 – 2 years before they assessed for ASD?

Sonia advised that an assessment for and Education, Health and Care Plan will be considered on need, schools and parents don't need to wait for a diagnosis. Several parents advised that schools were telling them to wait for a diagnosis or that their child won't get one, despite their children being behind in their work and/or finding school extremely stressful.

Mark advised that schools have funding to meet most children's needs. It is only the 2% of children with the most need who are likely to need an Education, Health and Care Plan. Parents can request that their child is assessed direct to BFFC.

Sometimes, parents feel that the problems could be easily resolved by the school. One example would be allowing a child to take off shoes indoors or ties as they can be very uncomfortable for a child with sensory issues. Another example would be helping a child with anxiety so that it doesn't escalate.

There are times when a parent feels more is needed but schools have been reluctant to ask the Educational Psychologist to assess a child, or reassess an older child, when they are not making progress, even if 2½ years behind their peers.

Parents were reminded that they can look on the Reading Local Offer <http://servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/family.page?familychannel=3> for information. They can also phone Gill Seagrove or Maryam Makki from the Local Offer on 0118 937 3777 OPTION 2.

Reading's Independent Advice and Support Service for SEND can be contacted on 0118 937 3421 Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9.30 am-2.30 pm. You can leave a message at any time or email: iass@brighterfuturesforchildren.org.

www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 1166585



A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Families described very powerfully how hard it was to constantly have to fight battles to get the support that their child needs. BFFC say that schools should do more and schools say they haven't got the funding and/or BFFC should do more.

Although staff are dedicated, parents feel like they are "piggy in the middle" between schools and BFFC. Some parents have had to be signed off work due to stress or reduced their hours because of the time and energy it takes to fight for their child's needs.

Parents need someone to voice their concerns to and don't want to be made to feel they are just making a fuss. We want to be listened to and to work collaboratively with schools and Brighter Futures for Children. Parents would also like opportunities to learn from each other.

It was agreed that

1. Communication needs to be improved with better signposting. For example, better communication with parents at point of referral and at diagnosis plus Pop Ups so that families can ask questions and learn from each other.
2. Brighter Futures for Children need to encourage schools to listen to families. The new Therapeutic and Trauma Informed training for schools should help with this.
3. Trailblazer Funding for Mental Health Support Teams for children and young people could be really useful. Deb Hunter, Principal Educational Psychologist, will attend the next coffee evening to hear parents' views on how this should be developed.
4. We also need to identify how to improve systems so that parents are not left "Piggy in the Middle", constantly fighting for their child's needs to be met.

RB 09/02/19

www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 1166585