

Reading Families' Forum

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

COFFEE MORNING 11th May 2022 VIA Zoom

Fiona Hostler, the Safeguarding and Children Missing Education officer from Brighter Futures for Children, joined 10 parent carers at our coffee morning to talk to families about children missing education, giving generic advice.

Fiona does not hold cases but she can provide advice to parent carers and signpost to the best support cme@brighterfuturesforchildren

Three parent carers had autistic children in Reception, or children in Reception on the waiting list for an assessment who were struggling with school. Either the children were reluctant to attend or they were only being offered a part-time timetable. Other older children had been out of school for over a year, three years or struggling with attendance for all of secondary school.

Reduced Timetables

There is little legislation about reduced timetables but it is expected that there will be a reintegration plan and it is good practice to involve other agencies such as Early Help, the SEN Case Officer if involved, or Educational Psychologists. Some parents said that this had been going on for months with no communication from school. Fiona advised that parents should expect schools to review the reintegration plan regularly.

If a school has refused a part time timetable and there is no reintegration plan, parents can contact Fiona for advice.

Fixed Term Exclusion/Suspension

It is unlawful to give a child a fixed term exclusion/suspension if a school is unable to meet a child's needs. It can be difficult for schools to accurately judge as it is lawful to exclude a child if they are causing harm to others but this may be a consequence of unmet need. Parents can challenge an exclusion.

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It is not lawful to just send a child home to cool off. Schools have to formally exclude a child or keep them in school. This means that there is documentation so that school and others can see any pattern. If a child has been sent home with no paperwork, talk to the head teacher. Parent carers can use the complaints process at the school if needed.

Recording an Absence

Schools can decide whether they record an absence as authorised or not authorised. Some ask for a GP to sign a child off sick although not all parents want that; they want their child to be getting an education.

Schools should notify the Local Authority if a child misses 10 consecutive days which are unauthorised and/or if a child's attendance is less than 60%. This is passed to either Fiona or the Education Welfare Officers. The local policy have been finished. Fiona will send this to the forum who will distribute it.

Reasonable Adjustments

Fiona does talk to schools about the need to make reasonable adjustments for children with additional needs. Parent carers can become very frustrated with the lack of support if their child is missing education and their child's needs are not being met. One parent queried if it saved money for the school.

Parent Carer Views

There was a wealth of knowledge at the coffee morning.

- ✚ The child's voice is vital. It is important to understand their trigger points and map what makes them anxious
- ✚ Behaviour is communication and often a sign of unmet need. If needs are met there would not be a need to exclude SEND children and children wouldn't feel too anxious to attend. Leaving a lesson/school becomes the only power that they have.
- ✚ Often the adjustments SEND children need are small, such as leaving class a little earlier to avoid the crowds in the corridor, low noise environments

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and/or ear defenders and wobble boards. Some schools refuse as they believe it is not needed or they don't want all children to have this.

- ✚ It is not helpful to threaten parent carers with an Education Welfare Officer or fine if their child is too anxious to attend school. A more collaborative approach is needed. Fiona advised that EWOs can be helpful. Parents would like this used in a supportive way rather than a threat.
- ✚ Parents are usually doing all they can to support their child and blaming them is not helpful. Saying a parent is overthinking the problem or exaggerating is not helpful either. Equally, SEND children do not "choose" to behave like this.
- ✚ It would be good if schools can look at the whole picture both home and school. Some autistic children have to mask at school so much that they become very exhausted and distressed after school.
- ✚ Families don't want their child to have to reach crisis to get help.
- ✚ Being too anxious to attend school or attend lessons once they are there not only means a child is falling behind their peers but affects the child's mental health and leaves them isolated.
- ✚ It is helpful for the Local Authority to be proactive. Some parents are told by the school that they can't meet needs but special schools have turned the child down and parents don't know why.

The new Director of Education Brian Grady has just started in Reading and the forum will talk to him and Alice Boon, School Improvement, about the issues families have raised.

Reading is redoing its Autism Strategy and they are going to attend a coffee morning on 25th May to get families views on the proposed priorities.

The Autism Growth Project is using the Autism Education Trust training and a video done by Special United, Reading's SEND youth forum to train school staff.

Other sources of support are IASS for SEND in Reading, SOS!SEN and IPSEA are good

Next coffee morning Wednesday, 25th May at 12 pm with Nina Crispin and Amanda Nyeke, about the proposed Autism Strategy Priorities.

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