

Reading Families' Forum

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

COFFEE MORNING 4th JUNE 2020 VIA ZOOM

Deb Hunter, Service Manager for SEND, and Steve Devlin, SEN Team Manager joined 7 parent carers, Mencap staff and a SENCo for the Forum's first coffee morning via Zoom. Acknowledged that this was a very stressful time for families of children with additional needs.

Risk Assessments

Schools have been asked to complete risk assessments for all children who have Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and other children who are classed as vulnerable during the pandemic by the govt. Brighter Futures have reminded them that these assessments should be conducted with the family and include education, physical and emotional health and social care. The risk assessments should be sent to Brighter Futures – all but 2 schools have done this. The assessments are analysed by an Educational Psychologist or similar. Schools may have put in strategies to minimise the identified risk already.

Where there are ongoing risks identified, the case is taken to a weekly and multiagency EHCP panel. This would look at the risks eg lack of physio.

Where there are needs identified such as emotional well-being or family stresses, the case is considered by a weekly One Reading.

Whilst there is a clear structure in place as above, 4 parent carers at the coffee morning had not seen a risk assessment for their child, or been involved in completing one. Another parent's child had a risk assessment but this had not been updated. One parent had been involved and her child had a good risk assessment.

Liaison with School

Most parents had regular contact with their child's school and found this very helpful.

Most had found home educating their child hard, with the stresses impacting on their relationship with their child. Home educating with more than one child, with very different needs, is hard and some children's emotional well being had to take priority.

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Some parents had been able to resolve problems with their school eg too much work for the child, and others had very helpful support from the school. However, some parents had not been able to resolve their concerns with the school.

Deb has sent a letter to parents via schools but the coffee morning heard that many parents had not received it. **Ramona Bridgman will send this out to Forum members.**

Deb will send Ramona more information for parent carers.

Some families have felt disempowered, not knowing what they should expect or who to contact. If parents can't resolve their concerns about a child with SEND with school, they should contact the SEN team. One parent had difficulty getting SEN case officer to take action. Deb to take back to team.

The SEN team have been able to provide online tutoring and are looking at this for small groups and friendship groups around a special interest run by and Educational Psychologist.

Particular concerns raised were:

- Lack of physio when school staff are not available due to shielding and
- Lack of education, especially when children had already missed a lot.

Therapists are only offering hands on physio to those at risk of choking and those who have just had operations and offering the rest online physio. However, as the pandemic continues, the risks for many children without physio will increase. **Liaison needed with BHFT**

Parents should contact the school if their child is not getting the education they need and alert the SEN case officer if they have not been able to resolve this with the school.

Social Care and EHCP

Steve and Claire Lewis, Service Manager for disabled children's social care has done a lot of work on making sure the social care part of ECHPs is improved and this is due to be finalised today.

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Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (to decide if EHCPs are needed)

During the pandemic, Local Authorities must make reasonable endeavours to complete these assessments and may take longer than the usual 20 weeks. Brighter Futures are trying to complete the assessments within 20 weeks, the main problem is when the child needs an EP or OT assessment which requires face to face assessment. They will use independent reports that may have been done. 85% of needs assessments are being done on time.

Annual Reviews

Deb has employed 2 locums to get Annual Reviews done and EHCPs amended as needed.

Returns to school

Primary schools and Early Years settings are using small bubbles of children with staff to minimise the risk of the coronavirus spreading and this is supported by Brighter Futures. The government has clarified the use of Personal Protective Equipment. Deb would prefer that visors are used rather than masks so that children can see facial expressions and to use visors where children may spit or lick, in agreement with schools and parents.

Future Plans

Please let Deb Hunter know of any ideas to improve the situation for children during this pandemic deborah.hunter@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

Deb agreed to attend coffee mornings like this every week/2 weeks. **The Forum to arrange.**

Deb will arrange monthly meetings with the Forum, her team and social care, looking at monthly figures and any themes from complaints. She will also invite Maria Young assistant director for disabled children's social care

RB 09/06/2020.

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