

Green Paper Consultation

Summary of responses from Northamptonshire parents

1. Welcome the Aspiration

Parents generally welcomed the aspirations of the green Paper to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEN or Disability. However, they were concerned with the lack of detail as to how these aspirations will be met by the proposals contained in the document. A real idea of how any new system would work in practice will not be clearer until after the pathfinders report, parents felt this made it difficult for them to truly respond to the proposals.

2. Early Identification & Assessment

Early Support & Identification

Parents agreed it is essential that difficulties are identified as early as possible and effective support put in place to address needs. Those parents who had or currently have access to Early Support praised its multi-agency approach to support and welcome a move to extend this. This level of support is only available for the more complex needs and parents could find no evidence in the document of who would be covered by this extended support and therefore how it would impact on children with less complex needs.

From experience parents find that it is the attitude and ethos of a school and its head teacher that determines the effectiveness of provision. Where the school is positively inclusive parents are confident that issues raised are addressed but this is not always the case. Parents could not see, in these proposals, how schools already unwilling to engage effectively with parents and their children with SEND would be enforced to do so.

Education, Health and Care Plan

A majority of parents welcomed the move for the plan to cover 0 – 25 as long as it was responsive to the changing needs of the child. The aspiration of multi-agency engagement was applauded but the reality of current experience and lack of detail in the paper regarding responsibility, monitoring and accountability did not give confidence this change would lead to better outcomes for their children. Again it was difficult from the document for parents to understand how this new Plan would differ from a current Statement and how it would work effectively for all children not only those with the most complex needs. Who triggers an assessment? Who will the

Plan cover? What would be the appeal system re assessment and/or provision? How does the Plan fit with working documents e.g. support or transition plans?

Key concerns were raised about the commitment of Social Care and Health to this single Plan. Engagement between Health, especially, and schools needs to be improved but this paper does not clearly address this nor indicate how all services would be obliged to engage effectively with the new process.

Current process

A number of parents felt the current process works well; for those who had not had a good experience it did not. The reduction by 6 weeks, whilst welcomed, did not really tackle parent concerns – the time issue is with initial identification of need (getting professionals engaged with parents) and speed of getting to statutory assessment stage; not the statutory process itself.

Concerns were raised re the necessity to change the coordination of the assessment process to involve the voluntary and community sector. Whilst understanding the drive to separate assessment from provision of services it was felt this would be a change for change's sake and would not be better value for money (a possible additional cost would be incurred to make the change); would not increase parental confidence as this sector also has it's own 'agendas' and concern over accountability and sustainability.

3. Giving parents control

Local offer

Parents would welcome a single point of access for information and acknowledge that this exists for some services already. However with greater autonomy for schools parents were not sure how a local authority would be able to provide a comprehensive local offer with so many variables and then the difficulty in keeping the information up-to-date. Any statutory offer would therefore have to ensure engagement from all suppliers of services including schools.

Personal budgets

Parents felt not enough detail in the paper to really comment as no clear idea of what this could involve/cover. Over the sessions there was a mixed response with some parents definitely not wishing to take on personal budgets and seeing this as an additional burden, to those who would welcome the idea. It is therefore essential that this is an optional element.

The paper mentions key workers to support parents and many of these exist now in both statutory and non-statutory services. Ensuring a consistent quality of knowledge and training and increased availability of trained key workers for all parents who wanted their support is welcome though parents were somewhat sceptical as to why the money to enable this was being given to the voluntary sector.

Schools & parental choice

“Removing the bias towards inclusion” as a statement from the document does not reflect current experiences. Parents described difficulties getting their child into their chosen mainstream school and ensuring they are welcomed and supported and also that special schools too do not always act inclusively e.g. trips.

Funding issues are constantly used as an excuse to not assess and/or not put in place required interventions. The paper and separate consultation on funding asks the questions but parents felt unable to comment fully as whilst welcoming transparency do not know what the funding will be and how this can meet all expectations.

Parent forums

Parents welcome the continuation of funding for these as it will give more time to ensure local sustainability.

4. Learning & achieving

Over-identification

Most parents were unsure as to how creating a single category for SEN in schools and settings would reduce over-identification. The document says a new definition of SEN would be given in the autumn, it would have been better to give that definition in the document to enable better understanding of what this new category would cover. Perverse incentives whether financial or results driven need to be eradicated to remedy over-identification.

Accountability

A requirement to publish results of lowest attainers may lead to a better focus and accountability for their progress.

Training & CPD

All parents supported improved training for teachers and all school staff on SEND. Concerns were raised as to the lead time for new teacher training to impact on school practice. Could all staff be set minimum requirements for CPD on SEND issues

to ensure a minimum level of training in all schools? Could parents ask for specific training for staff in school to support their child?

Greater autonomy

Parents would welcome schools to innovate and transform SEND provision, however the reality is that some would rather ignore or remove the 'problem' than work with parents and others to enable positive outcomes for SEND. Again, no detail in the document as to how schools will be expected to take ownership rather than pass to another school.

Behaviour & Exclusions

Exclusion and attendance rates are a grave concern for children with SEND but these are not covered in this document. The Bill currently before Parliament, does not seem to link into this documents' aspirations for SEND and therefore raises concerns over how this group of children will be protected.

The current category of BESD does not serve pupils well. The 'B' can be used as an excuse and tends to usurp the needs of those with 'ESD'. Children are often categorised as BESD (for the B) rather than undertaking a proper investigation into their needs which might then give other indicators e.g. other diagnosis; issues at home; G&T bored at school, poor teaching etc.

5. Preparing for adulthood

All parents concerned re the lack of information and opportunity for their children as they reach adulthood. The cliff face when moving from children's to adult services in social care, health and education needs to be effectively addresses. Parents felt the move for the plan to be 0-25 may help this, enabling more effective joint planning and allow for flexibility of timing so transition could be discussed earlier if appropriate or detail added later as the young person became surer of their aspirations. The key concern was the engagement of all services and how they would be held accountable for service delivery. The work already being started through AHDC was acknowledged but still a long way to go to provide access to more college courses and work opportunities.

6. Services working together for families

Joined up services

Parents concerned with significant change to all three services how this will impact on provision and enable the aspirations in this paper to be realised. With changes to health (locally parents have very little involvement with GPs with their children) parents not convinced GP Consortia understand enough about SEND to commission

services effectively. The localisation agenda could lead to a postcode lottery making things difficult if families need to move. To enable an informed choice parents need the information (see earlier comments).

Collaboration

Services can work together now if they choose to do so, they do not consistently. Aspirations of greater collaboration are welcomed but cannot see how it will work in practice without sanctions if it does not happen. Lack of therapy services a key area for parents but not sure how changes outlined will improve this.

Freedom & flexibility of funding

Simple, transparent funding systems will help everyone.