

Aiming High For Disabled Children Consultation Day

Working with teaching staff - feedback

Facilitator – Hannah Piper

Group 1 – 10 participants, all with children on the autistic spectrum in mainstream education. None of the children had statements or were on the I-count register.

Group 2 - 10 participants, most with children on the autistic spectrum in mainstream education, half with statements, 2 or 3 in units attached to mainstream schools and 1 in a special school.

Discussion 1:

Participants give current personal experiences of working with teachers, TAs, SENCOS, Heads in different educational settings. Views on current ways of operating - perceptions/experiences of group. Good/bad practice.

- Delays in diagnosis common – unwillingness to diagnose on part of doctors, gave rise to worries about children slipping through the net.
- No support from schools when parents seeking statutory assessment
- Children treated as “naughty” by schools – children were reported by schools to “choose” their behaviour
- Behaviour policies applied across the board with no recognition of disability
- Schools varied greatly in terms of support, recognition of disability etc – Our Lady Immaculate singled out as particularly unsupportive. (It was mentioned that 6 children on SEN register have been withdrawn from the school since November)
- Teachers varied greatly – very hit & miss, a good teacher one year and then a negative experience the subsequent year.
- Heads can be very influential in terms of the inclusivity of the school – if ethos is positive, inclusive and supportive, the rest of the school tends to follow BUT see above re individual teachers.
- Teachers, Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants often not trained enough/if at all
- Teachers often not willing to listen to parents’ ideas of effective behaviour management – see selves as experts
- RBK doesn’t support schools enough
- Parents need outreach support
- SENCOs are mixed bag, have too much to do, have other roles e.g. Deputy Head.

- No support at playtimes/lunchtimes when most needed by some children
- **Communication** styles, speed and modes were criticised greatly – felt standard procedures were needed for all children in RBK on SEN register. Lack of communication highlighted – unavailable personnel, “lost” letters, unreturned phone calls etc. Some schools doing a good job in this respect – what’s the secret? Was suggested that the “open house ” held by one school post-IEP writing was v effective – parents could choose to attend.
- Too hard/impossible to get statement for children on Autistic spectrum if they are performing ok academically whatever their other needs
- Quiet, well-behaved children on Autistic Spectrum left behind, not reaching their potential, left to be sad etc, all focus on the “disruptive” ones. What about Every Child Matters?
- Other parents of ASD children not doing right thing – allowing their children to be disruptive (minority view)
- Some good and bad uses of home-school books were discussed – guidelines needed for teachers
- Broken promises – re support e.g. Social Skills classes never materialising or being cancelled or “teachers” being changed at the last minute, re consulting professionals, re provision of helpful items e.g. visual timetables, workstations etc
- Discrimination – one parent felt excluded as the parent of a child with SEN – never chosen to accompany groups on trips, make cakes etc, also asked to transport child separately on excursions, child often excluded day before trips.
- Parents of children with home-school transport often felt out of the loop
- Funding unfair – North Kingston cluster gets less because socially/economically more advantaged (minority view)
- Parents concerned about how included children in units were – in one unit, no procedure for informing parents of the school’s plans for inclusion re number of hours a day, sessions etc
- Two parent, economically advantaged parents have trouble accessing certain services e.g. FAS
- Less advantaged parents cannot access what other parents choose to pay for because RBK doesn’t supply
- Concern about who is delivering support – experts or TAs (“Mums”) – real lack of confidence in training and ability
- Some children have had years of support in social skills with no progress made

**Keywords used –
BEG, BATTLE, FIGHT, and UNFAIR**

Discussion 2:

Proposals for future ideal model of working with teaching staff especially class teachers and TAs.

- Early diagnosis of ASD to be prioritised (for obvious reasons) – role of Health Visitors (no. of checks they carry out recently cut?) and early years settings crucial.
- Ensure that all schools accept reports from recognised private practitioners
- Cut waiting lists for OT etc – make more available
- Make processes faster – for statutory assessment/statements as well as for seeing EPs etc
- Reset and enforce criteria for who gets a statutory assessment – at present too dependent on whim of individual SENCO
- Foster climate of consultation, have procedures for listening to parents' views and advice
- Always have meeting with new teacher at before beginning of each school year – build this into policies
- School to initiate communication and ensure smooth lines of communication and procedures – not always parents having to ring, beg and battle
- More and better training – not theory but practical experience in special schools, units or with experienced/expert practitioners
- Schools to have an expert practitioner with particular skills re ASD to act as advisor/trainer of other staff, have pastoral role with parents.
- Make some schools centres of excellence – (minority view)
Other parents concerned it would mean other schools were less inclusive. Parents felt that this happening with the units already.
- Have policies re crucial elements in education for ASD children – e.g. staff changes, reporting to parents, behaviour, make provision mapping clearer, accountability, effective use of home-school books, info sheets about children in front of register so supply teachers are informed, support at playtimes to be factored in.

Key issues mentioned repeatedly –
TRAINING, COMMUNICATION and ETHOS