

Written Evidence for the Commons Education Committee inquiry on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Date: June 2018

Submitted by: Pinpoint Cambridgeshire, the parent carer forum for Cambridgeshire and a local charity helping parent carers of children and young people (aged 0-25) with additional needs and disabilities.

About Us: Our parent carer forum aims to deliver better outcomes for families living with SEND by working with local authorities, education settings, health and other providers to make sure the services they plan and deliver meet the needs of disabled children and families.

Our written evidence represents the views of parent carers in Cambridgeshire and has been gathered through:

- direct request through an online survey of parent carers
- our parent survey for the Local Area SEND Ofsted Inspection in March 2017
- our day-to-day work engaging and involving SEND parent carers to improve local services such as education, health and social care since the reforms were introduced in 2014.

1. Assessment of and support for children and young people with SEND

- General view of our parents is that assessment journey is too complicated, too long, and poorly explained. A large number of assessments get turned down (either because eligibility thresholds are not reached or the right evidence is not provided). Parents are not getting what they wanted – or are being turned down.
- There is a lack of consistency in the SEND system – success in getting SEN Support or an EHCP is often dependent on the personalities/skills of SENCOs and parent relationships or on SEND demand in a particular setting.
- A hidden group do not get as far as assessment even though they may merit it because their parents lack confidence/language/skills to successfully navigate the SEND system and/or question and challenge actions and decisions on behalf of their children and young people
- Patchy performance in Cambridgeshire – some good examples but far from consistent
- Too many priorities/SEND demands in classroom
- Not enough training for schools and colleges about outcomes
- Health still not fully part of the loop
- Too many families are still having to go through the tribunal process after being turned down for assessment.
- Hearing whispers that it is cheaper for LAs to generate an EHCP than take a legal action through courts – so parents are hopeful of an assessment if they challenge and manage to hold on.
- Parents who do go through the tribunal process have told us very clearly that it is adversarial, wholly unsatisfactory and feel very strongly that the legislation is inadequate
- There is a lack of clarity between the legislation and the SEND Code of Practice around those that “may have an additional need”

Cambridgeshire parent carers told us:

“Assessment is very slow following lengthy waiting times. Support doesn’t follow a diagnosis. Parents have to seek information for themselves”

“Very poor. Services not joined up or co-ordinated. Legal obligations ignored and not met. Parents isolated and unsupported. Children not treated as individuals. Best endeavours not used and children not reaching full potential. Plan, do, assess review poorly carried out.”

“The school have been very supportive of my son since he started in foundation. We have worked closely together during the referral and diagnosis of ASD stage and are continuing to work together as we complete our EHCP case.”

“Constantly fighting a battle for my son.”

“Statement/EHCP moved funding around the system. Had no real impact on effectiveness of provision in dealing with child/young person. Post-16 provision in FE college particularly

poor. FE college did not follow 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle and appeared not to know that was what they should be doing."

Our 2017 Ofsted Local Area SEND Inspection parent survey highlighted:

EHCP: Many requests for assessment for an EHCP are not agreed. If you do get one agreed, you have a good chance of getting a plan but getting an assessment is the first hurdle. Should assessment be denied so often? Requests are often denied due to lack of information, although reports and information are not forthcoming or timely from professionals. Some go to tribunal just to get an assessment.

EHCP: Criteria to be two years behind to be considered for an EHCP. If child is youngest in the year, they are even further behind. Waiting for a child to fail before intervening means they can't get early intervention, which is often far more effective short and long term.

SEN Support: Schools ignore child's needs, parents' views and advice given; early intervention is needed. Some schools still seem to ignore issues and put barriers in place perhaps in the hope that the child will be moved by parents – inconsistency by schools

Assessment and acknowledgement of problems when a child is unable to attend school because of MH problems is not being dealt with quickly enough. Often approach is to threaten parent with legal action rather than support the child/YP.

Good outcomes for the child/young person still seem to depend on the ability of the parent to fight and push for support, where parents are unable to do this the child is being failed.

Cambridgeshire has one of the highest rate of tribunals in the country which for parents causes huge anxiety and stress and it becomes an adversarial battle which is very demoralising for all concerned. Very hard to repair the damage done to parent staff relationships and enable parents and staff to work together to achieve the best possible outcome for their child afterwards, whoever 'wins' the tribunal.

Outcomes for dyslexic children and young people often poor because dyslexia not identified, so no early intervention or allowances made, so child gets frustrated, thinks they must be stupid and may give up and drop out and start truanting, develop depression or challenging behaviour or escape into drugs and alcohol. Same often true for children with other forms of 'neurodiversity' – Aspergers/ASD, ADHD, dyscalculia, dyspraxia/DCD.

2. The transition from statements of special educational needs and Learning Disability Assessments to Education, Health and Care Plans

- A mixed bag here in Cambridgeshire. We are aware that initially, many parents found it a long, drawn-out process requiring a lot of effort – even with an Independent Supporter (this provision ends at the end of July 2018).
- Transitions to further education have been difficult: a huge learning curve for post-16 settings
- Not enough training for schools and colleges about outcomes
- Cambridgeshire is broadly on track to meet its transition to EHCP deadlines but we have picked up concerns about whether the quality matches previous statements

Cambridgeshire parent carers told us:

“School did not fully understand the new system and the structure required in the new plans. Lots of vital info left out as a result.”

“Do not have either but need to be assessed - awaiting tribunal.”

“Absolutely rubbish and confusing. A win for the professional but a loss for a child and parents.”

“Provision ignored statement then provision ignored EHCP. LEA cut-and-pasted statement into EHCP format. Parent then rewrote EHCP. Only difference is in format of paperwork.”

Our 2017 Ofsted Local Area SEND Inspection survey highlighted:

EHCPs: Parent’s and child’s voice (and physical input) must be heard, supported and valued, plan must reflect child

EHCPs: Processes and decisions take too long, child not always supported in the interim or school arrangements cannot be made

EHCPs: Multi-agency input, especially health, needed for EHCP meetings to speed up processes and decisions which take too long, need contacts for each person in the plan

EHCPs and SEN Support: Parents do not feel they are treated as equal partners in developing their child’s care and support.

3. The level and distribution of funding for SEND provision

- General perception is not positive. Parents feel they have to fight for support/funding for their child or young person. Although, theoretically, there is a SEND allocation in school budgets, schools are failing to identify/ringfence the money.
- The current education funding formula in Cambridgeshire has left a gap of 47% between the average per pupil funding received by counties and Inner London authorities. This means a £2,000 gap per pupil, per year gap between what is spent on Cambridgeshire children compared to some other areas of the country
- We are aware that a number of EHCPs could be “by-products” because money is not available for earlier intervention

Cambridgeshire parent carers told us:

“Poor - more funding needed to train a wider range of teaching staff to improve understanding and in turn improve support child receives.”

“Very poor. Too much is left at discretion of schools who have a very limited budget. All too common to hear we have no money for that. We’ve needed a £300 IT Assessment for our son for 2.5 years as recommended by OT - still outstanding.”

“Terrible. A lot of issues with SEND kids could be helped if there was funding for specialist TAs and training courses available to all staff.”

“One word: shocking”

“Funding generally is poor. Funding at below minimum is not going to make a college follow an EHCP if they actually want to force high-functioning autistic young people to go elsewhere as 'too difficult'”

4. The roles of and co-operation between education, health and social care sectors

- While social care and education are working more together for SEND children and young people, health continues to be a missing link in many cases.
- Engagement with health is problematic both in engaging in formal processes and practical support
- Hugely long waiting lists for specialist services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Data sharing between family services appears problematic – different IT systems
- SEND assessments are all carried out separately by individual services and time frames vary hugely, with long waits for, say Educational Psychologists or OT.
- Big confusion for families about who can refer their children and young people for help and assessment – it is GPs or schools?
- Some children/YP are able to “mask” their problems at school and then explode at home. But parents report schools will not refer them for assessment as behaviour at school does not warrant further investigation, and GPs are not able to refer for autism diagnostic services.
- Preparing for Adulthood annual reviews should flag up health issues/GP registers for those with learning disabilities. But parents are not receiving enough information.
- Different services have different cut-off points for child/adult services – resulting in the so-called “cliff edge” for some as they drop from one into a service gap with no transition plan/service. A young person can be an “adult” in one but not be able to access specialist adult services in another. CAMHS stops at 17 and you cannot access specialist services for adults until 18.
- Parents report a lack of continuity of teams
- Social care provision seen as severely lacking with depleted, over-worked teams.

Cambridgeshire parent carers told us:

“Health involvement in EHCPs has been very poor to say the least. Even with the benefits of technology and media they do not take part. It still seems to be education led rather than holistic.”

“Dire, no co-ordination, completely unable to refer or support each other. The solution is to pass the buck as quickly as possible.”

“Positive. During our appointments with paediatrics, the doctors praised the school’s evidence and record keeping.”

“School been reasonable but CAMHS is like hitting my head on a wall.”

“Doesn't happen.”

Our 2017 Ofsted Local Area SEND Inspection survey highlighted:

How well do services and professionals work together to support your child/young person?

Very well 5%, Quite well 20%, Satisfactory 20%, Poorly 50%, Don’t Know 5%

5. Provision for 19-25-year olds including support for independent living; transition to adult services; and access to education, apprenticeships and work

- For many young people in further education, “full time” courses are THREE days a week
- Education courses for up to 25s are limited – so too are outcomes and aspirations are
- Apprenticeships are not really accessible to many young people with SEND – even though the Government has relaxed entry requirements. Why not create a more appropriate SEND apprenticeship scheme to help young people show their worth and highlight their unique skills – such as motivation and loyalty
- Supported internships are better but the range is limited and do not end in job opportunities at the end.
- Colleges are trying to set up links with employers but businesses are still frightened to take on a young person with a disability or additional needs. They do not have the right support to help employ a young person with SEND and need the right facilitation.
- Young people want to work and do something meaningful if they are able to. They want to be independent

Cambridgeshire parent carers told us:

“My child is only 10 but I am so scared for him in the future as it can only get worse.”

“No change in the last 4 years. Existing provision has been re-badged with shiny new logos but we have the same limited and unsuitable options. Only change is the Job Centre referred us back to education as we have an EHCP, instead of onto the replacement for the 'work choice' program.”

Our 2017 Ofsted Local Area SEND Inspection survey highlighted:

Need to develop a road map to help young people Prepare for Adulthood - to clarify process for education, health and social care. No cliff edge and clear understanding of what happens next!

Need to address gap in health services between 16 – 18 years old and transition from children’s to adult’s health services.

Statement from Pinpoint Cambridgeshire

We want to reflect back to you what parents have shared with us over the last few years on where special needs assessment, provision and support is in Cambridgeshire today.

- Our local authority is in “listening” mode and working closely with us on all the aspects raised. We are working hard to involve parents and we are optimistic about the future.
- However: national policy and resources may be able to help to make systems and processes work more seamlessly for families and better target resources earlier to improve outcomes for our young people across the county.
- It’s hard enough raising a child or young person but raising one with additional needs or a life-long disability to ensure that they have every opportunity in life is so, so much harder.
- We welcome the Select Committee’s inquiry in reviewing the reforms and looking at their impact.
- These children and young people deserve as much opportunity to have a really good life as those who have perhaps much more straightforward paths, with fewer challenges.
- Despite numerous requests to parents to respond to your inquiry, take up was low and we worry response nationally may also be small in number. Please note that this does NOT reflect lack of need or challenge but that for many parents caring for SEND children and young people, their **caring responsibilities are all-consuming**.

Recommendations:

- The SEND system does NOT work smoothly and needs clearer facilitation between the different stands of government – such as social care, further education and health.
- There needs to be a much more joined-up approach to all the aspects that support a child or young person with SEND and their family – including benefits.
- Please help us be ambitious for our families, help us make the system work better for us and our children and young people. Don’t settle for just “good enough”.