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| **Updating the graduated response to needs and provision for** **children and young people with SEND in Cambridgeshire:** **Parent meetings: 6th, 7th and 13th March 2023****Organised via Pinpoint****The following reflects the feedback from parent carers who attended the sessions** |

SEND4Change met with families on behalf of the Local Authority. Parents were invited to discuss the following key issues relating to SEN.

* What challenges do you think parents/carers face with the current SEND system?
* What are your views on schools being able to access additional funding without an EHC plan and what could that look like?
* Has your child’s school talked to you about funding and finance around SEND and what are the key messages?
* What needs to be in place to achieve increased confidence in the SEN Support offer?

The feedback from these discussions has been arranged into the themes presented below.

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| **The Law** |

*Whatever changes are made, the LA needs to adhere to the law (Children and Families Act 2014) and the SEND Code of Practice*

* The legal framework for SEN describes a graduated response which includes duties relating to SEN Support.
* Some children need a little bit of help and might not need a statutory assessment and an EHC plan.
* Families want to be assured that any proposals do not make it harder to get resources and would be pleased if it means getting support easier and earlier.
* Some families feel more secure with an EHC plan which is a legal document that describes the levels of resources that their child needs.
* A slightly more flexible system may help lots of parents.

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| **Accountability** |

*Who holds schools to account*

*both for the way in which they behave and for the way in which they use high needs top-up funding?*

* Accountability is key for all, including parents.
* There is a concern as to whether the LA is aware that some schools are not making simple reasonable adjustments or using funding appropriately.
* Could schools hold each other to account for SEND funding?
* There is currently inconsistency and inequity regarding access to the EHC assessment process. Some schools are supportive while others are not.
* There is a concern that EHC plans are helpful in setting out resources but often once written “they sit on the shelf” and are not a “living” useful document.
* EHC plans need to be clear and specific so that they can be used to ensure that the child gets what they need (and schools can be held to account).
* Clarity is required about the use of money allocated to schools and the need to deliver specified outcomes associated with the funding allocation. Schools should be made aware that: this is the money, this is what it is being provided for and this is what we expect the outcome to be.
* There is a concern that not all school leaders seem to understand what is needed/expected or wanted by parents whose children have additional needs.
* Schools should be encouraged to be centres of excellence for inclusive leadership.
* There needs to be a way of escalating as well as de-escalating spend on pupils with SEN.

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| **Parents as partners** |

*Schools should stop blaming parents for the cost of provision and the “ inconvenience of SEN”*

* We understand our children better than most (we are experts).
* Schools and the LA need to work in equal partnership with families and provide more transparency, honesty and clarity through a better funding system.
* Schools often feel threatened by parents who speak up for their children.
* Some parents reported that the School “doesn’t support me through the system - it’s very frustrating”.
* Parents want multidisciplinary assessments of needs to be completed as part of the EHC planning process which ensure that all needs have been identified by professionals (educational psychologists primarily but also SALT, OT and paediatricians).

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| **Communication** |

*Information about funding systems should be shared via the local offer*

* There needs to be more transparency about how decisions are made.
* Communication between the LA and parents needs to improve.
* Schools need to know their legal obligations to support children with SEND.
* There is a lack of support for parents going through the EHC assessment process.

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| **EHC process and resources** |

*There are pros and cons for having the EHC process as the main vehicle for allocating resources*

* The EHC plan contains specified financial resources and sets out a legal entitlement, which some parents find helpful.
* The only way to access funding in Cambridgeshire is through an EHC plan.
* Some parents will be nervous about losing the legally binding “back up “ provided by a plan if high needs funding is available without the need for an EHC plan.
* There is too much emphasis on the need for an EHC plan to access resources.
* The quality of EHC plans is a concern.
* Quicker access to SEN funding would be helpful in some circumstances.
* The LA needs to ensure that SEN funding is not diverted by schools to plug “budget holes”.
* An Early Intervention model would be beneficial.
* Many reasonable adjustments in the classroom do not cost anything (regular movement breaks, reminders to drink , toilet breaks, quiet corners etc).
* It is difficult to obtain information from the health service.
* A less bureaucratic system for accessing funding is needed.
* Waiting months for an EHC plan to allocate resources can cause unnecessary delay.

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| **SEN Support Offer** |

*The SEN support offer is very inconsistent. In some schools it is very good in others, it is very poor*

* There needs to be more focus on SEN support in schools and this offer needs to be more equitable across all schools.
* Providing good SEN Support may prevent escalation to the point where an EHC plan is required.
* The quality of a school’s SEN Support offer depends on the leadership in a school, training of staff and the knowledge and skills of the SENCO.
* There needs to be a better description of how schools should spend top up funding which sets out provisions and adjustments that would support pupils with SEND.
* SEN Support needs to be properly funded.
* Access to provision which is already in place in some schools for pupils with an EHC plan is difficult to access for those pupils with needs who do not have an EHC plan but who would benefit from some small group support.
* Schools need a directory of ideas and interventions for pupils with SEN.
* Could schools group together to provide shared therapy interventions?

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| **SENCOs** |

*Not all SENCOs seem to understand pupils with SEN. There is variance in the quality of this key person in schools.*

* SENCOs should not be split between schools on a part time basis. They seem to be undervalued and unsupported.
* A supportive network for SENCOs would seem helpful.
* Training for SENCOs would be beneficial which enables the effective implementation of the knowledge and skills learned.
* There needs to be clear standards for SEN support which sets out expectations for all schools.
* Some schools do not seem to understand what should be “ordinarily available”.
* There appears to be recruitment issues in relation to Teaching Assistants. Although funding is allocated, some schools are unable to fill vacant posts.

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| **Transformation** |

*The transformation programme looks good on paper but parents feel that they need to see evidence of real change*

* The transformation programme in Cambridgeshire looks promising.
* Parents feel that the current system needs to be improved.
* Changes need to take into account parents’ views.
* There needs to be a focus on outcomes.
* There is a fear that it will take resources from those with EHC plans and reallocate to SEN Support.
* The NHS demonstrates good practice in accountability and outcome focussed planning.

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| **Notional and Top Up funding** |

*There is not enough money in the system*

* Schools say they do not have enough money to fund provision for pupils with SEN.
* Is there a way of increasing Notional funding?
* Schools with many children with SEN and EHCP plans need to find lots of notional funding to provide the first £6,000 of support for each pupil.
* Some parents with an EHC plan fear that funding will be removed or diverted away from their children under a new system.
* Reasonable levels of funding are essential to help schools to be reasonable and put reasonable adjustments in place
* Pupils in early years settings can access funding without an EHC plan and this seems a good idea.

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| Misconceptions are still common |

* Sometimes children with less complex needs do not have access to a diagnosis or specialist service and therefore don’t meet the threshold for an EHC plan. They then can’t access additional funding and resources.
* Schools say pupils must fall behind academically for 2 years before applying for an EHC plan. This means children can fall significantly behind their peers before support becomes available .
* Schools make special arrangements and provide group sessions for children with an EHC plan. Children without an EHC plan are not allowed to access these sessions.

12.4.23