Increasing Parents' Confidence in the Special Educational Needs System: Study Commissioned to Inform the Lamb Inquiry

INTERIM REPORT

Nick Peacey[1], Geoff Lindsay[2], Penelope Brown[1], and Anthony Russell[1]

[1]Institute of Education, University of London, [2]CEDAR, University of Warwick

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Interim Report provides the reports on a range of evidence gathered for the Lamb Inquiry into parental confidence and special educational needs by the Institute for Education (IoE), University of London, and CEDAR, University of Warwick, between December 2008 and September 2009.

Over the course of the Inquiry we were commissioned to carry out a series of tasks to contribute to the process of investigation and recommendation supporting the development of Brian Lamb's advice to the Secretary of State in his final report[1]. Although the present report is the summation of our work, the process was fluid and interactive. We fed emerging findings into the Inquiry and provided evidence to support Brian Lamb's interim reports to the Secretary of State, which were published on the Lamb Inquiry's website as the Inquiry progressed, as well as the final report of the Inquiry.

This Interim report presents evidence on two elements of our work:

- Local authorities' learning from the eight projects that were commissioned by the Inquiry and
- the results from consultation questionnaires completed by parents, students, school staff and other professionals working with children, schools and families on the special educational needs system. This section also includes submissions to the Inquiry, many by email, from individuals and organisations.

Our full report, available shortly, and will also contain a further section

- SEN and disability: Evidence concerning school inspection and accountability

together with an extended Introduction and Executive Summary of the full report.

To avoid confusion we present this Interim Report using the section numbering for the final report

EXCUTIVE SUMMARY – to follow

2. SEN AND DISABILITY: EVIDENCE IN SCHOOL INSPECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY – to follow

[1] *Report of the Lamb Inquiry*

3. LOCAL AUTHORITIES' LEARNING FROM THE EIGHT PROJECTS

3.1 Introduction

Eight LAs were funded to undertake innovative projects that were concerned with improving parent confidence in the SEN process following a request for submissions to which over 50 LAs replied. Requests from the eight LAs were in the region of £20k - £40k for one year, September 2008 – July 2009. LAs were required to select one of five topics for their project: one was not selected by any LA, the other projects represented a good spread, with a preference for i) sharing best practice in developing good relationships between the authority and parents, through effective parent partnership services and other local mechanisms; and ii) effective practice by schools and local authorities in meeting the needs of children at School Action Plus – topics 2 and 3 in Table 1. LAs worked in partnership with other agencies, e.g. parent partnership services and each project was evaluated locally. Parents were required to be involved in each project including the evaluation of changes in parental confidence: most LAs ensured that this was a key factor in their project. LAs were supported by the National Strategies SEN adviser team who acted as critical friends, providing both a support and challenge function.

The LAs were required to provide evidence of good capacity for SEN such as a recent Joint Area Review or by annual performance data. The LAs were also required to be willing to share information as their project progressed. In one case the LA (North Tyneside) engaged with a partner (Sunderland); all LAs presented interim findings and reflections at national meetings of all the projects with Brian Lamb and the Inquiry team.

The LAs were also selected to provide a spread of geography and LA type. Of the original 50 expressions of interest, 18 detailed bids were invited from which the eight projects were selected.

The intention was that each project would be monitored to pick up any changes in parental confidence and other benefits, if these were apparent. Again, parents were required to be part of this process. In practice this was variable with not all LAs being able to collect the amount of evidence that would provide a sound basis for evaluation and/or not investigating change in parental confidence. In some cases evaluation reports presented quantitative data (e.g. from a survey) but unfortunately no statistical analysis, conclusions apparently being drawn by visual inspection of the data.

Table 3 Projects undertaken by the eight LAs

	Project focus	LAs
1.	Making the provision of educational psychology advice "arm's length" from a local authority	-
2.	Sharing best practice in developing good relationships between the authority and parents, through effective parent partnership services and other local mechanisms	Portsmouth, Durham, Kent, Oxfordshire
3.	Effective practice by schools and local authorities in meeting the needs of children at School Action Plus	Blackburn and Darwin, Newham, Durham, Oxfordshire
4.	Developing the 'team around the child' approach in the school stages.	Wolverhampton
5.	Other activities:	
	i) Extending the use of provision mapping to increase the capacity of schools to have positive dialogue with parents about how they are making provision to meet children's SENs	Durham
	ii) Increasing parental confidence in schools' use of delegated budgets to meet identified need	N. Tyneside,

The present study was conducted in June-July 2009 towards the end of the project. Interviews were undertaken with the LA lead (in some cases more than one person, at the LA's suggestion) for all eight LAs and with a parent proposed by the LAs in six cases. The other two other LAs considered that a parent would not be able to contribute as their projects comprised evaluations rather than developmental initiatives. There were a total of 17 interviews (10 LA officers, 1 evaluator, and 6 parents).

The focus of the study was primarily to examine LAs' learning from their project and how they intended to develop the work. In some cases the project was clearly part of a development previously underway. In two LAs the project was essentially an evaluation of the LA practice; in some LAs the project was basically a developmental project of which this was an early phase.

The interviews with both LA officer and parents addressed five main questions:

- To the extent that outcomes were achieved, why they were achieved?
- To the extent that they were not achieved, why they were not achieved?
- Over and above the evaluation of the project against its own aims and objectives, were there wider benefits/drawbacks arising from running the project?
- Is the work transferable? If so, what would need to be in place to make it work elsewhere?
- How sustainable is the project in your LA and, in the light of that, what plans does your authority have for taking the work forward?

These were modified as necessary to fit the project and the interviewee. Given the nature of the study, parents were advised that neither they nor their child would be identified but complete anonymity could not be guaranteed as the LAs would be named.
In addition to the interviews, information was available from the original project proposals; the project summaries presented at the London meeting 12 June 2009; and the evaluation reports produced by local evaluators.

3.2 What have LAs learned?

This section will discuss the learning from the projects as a series of themes rather than an analysis of each project – the evaluations provide this information. Of course, the fact that LAs undertook projects with different foci resulted in different learning occurring across the eight.

3.2.1 The challenge of information exchange

The SEN system is complex. LAs have statutory duties to provide information and others such as voluntary bodies also provide extensive assistance. But it is apparent from experience as well as other studies that parents are often insufficiently aware of important information, confused or overwhelmed. However, if communication exchange is handled well this can improve parents' confidence as they are treated as real partners with an important contribution. As one parent interviewee said: 'It gives you a sense of input… you feel like you do have some influence'.

It is important to distinguish different aspects of the information collection/dissemination system; various processes are involved. For example, North Tyneside have found that it is

possible to engage parents in determining *what* information is necessary and helpful for parents whose child has SEN. What is evident here is that initially parents did not know what was necessary but that groups of parents could contribute productively to developing a form of information template. Furthermore, the fact that parents contributed to this process, and their views were taken seriously was empowering. The LA is now developing a booklet that will guide parents on questions to ask, for example the teachers' expertise in different SEN domains, the presence of pupils with similar problems to those of a parent's child and the outcomes achieved. The mother interviewed from this LA was very positive about the development and compared it with the situation she had been in herself when she was initially seeking information concerning her own child: 'I would have liked this information when I was going through'.

Developing such a system requires both foundation work and careful cooperative engagement. The LA's experience was that it was important to seek and develop commitment from schools 'so you're not having to twist people's arms'. Parent forums must be real, not tokenistic. Furthermore, as the parent noted, 'involving parents takes quite a lot of work'. The LA and parent also stressed the importance of recognising the shift of powers and responsibilities: the school rather than LA is now in many respects the key organisation although the LA also has important statutory responsibilities as well as a key strategic role.

3.2.2 Developing communication

A frequent message from the projects was the need to develop 2-way communication between parents and the LA and schools, and indeed with other services. This goes beyond the examples of information exchange. A number of examples were given. Kent's project included setting up two types of meeting. Parents were offered an 'initial' meeting at the stage when a request for a statutory assessment had been made, with a Parent Partnership Officer (PPO) from Partnerships with Parents (PwP), funded by Kent LA but with a remit to operate at 'arms length' from the authority. A second part of the Kent project comprised contacting parents and offering a meeting when a statutory assessment request was declined: the 'no decision' meeting. The involvement of PwP was considered positive by the LA interviewee because of its perceived independence and the high parental trust in the organisation, although use of such a service in this way also has the danger of compromising its perceived independence when offering support to individual parents. Parents were pleased to have early access and an opportunity to discuss their child and the evaluation report suggests improvement in parents' increased their knowledge of and their confidence in the LA's statutory assessment system, including an increased confidence in

their views being taken into account. As the parent interviewee noted, the initial meeting's taking place so early was very helpful: 'these were not people you have to wait 8-10 months to get help from'. The 'no decision' meeting, as in this mother's case, could enable professionals to explain why and how they considered particular provision could meet the child's needs. Importantly, this system also set up the provision, without need of a statement, at this stage so avoiding the need to wait for a statutory assessment and statement *before* provision was put into place. Hence early communication plus appropriate action was positively regarded. In the event, this mother's son was not made the subject of a statement as she had initially sought but her confidence in the decision was enhanced by the opportunity to have the discussion at her 'no decision' meeting with the PPO.

Early engagement and communication was also stressed in the project run by Blackburn with Darwen designed to develop an alternative package of support directory and then to develop further this approach. Again, a parent was very positive about early discussion of his child's needs. Interestingly both of these parents also noted how, in their view, so much of the available literature and guidance on the SEN system available to parents was negative: 'If you go on the [name of voluntary body] website they provide material that implies a fight is necessary'. Their experience showed that an alternative outcome was possible.

Parents in other projects also expressed both their wish for *real* communication – not tokenism – and that their confidence in the SEN system had improved as a result of effective communication, even in some cases where they didn't achieve all their originally desired outcomes. The communication process had shown respect for them as parents and provided an opportunity actually to influence decisions. This was the case both for work focussing on their own child and also when parents contributed to wider discussions to develop policy and practice. In Durham, for example, parents of children with SEN contributed to professional development meetings of the SENCOs within the Community of Learning (CoL) schools undertaking the project. These events were judged by participants to be much enhanced by parents' contributions providing personal accounts - the evaluation of school staffs' self perceptions indicated very positive and widespread increases in their own confidence. The decision to use parents from outside the CoL was found to be a success by 'taking the tension out' as no SENCO was directly linked to any parent's narrative.

The third element of Kent's project comprised workshops to improve knowledge of the SEN system and communication. Three workshops were run for parents/carers, school-based

staff, LA services staff and other professionals and a further four workshops were run for parents. Overall substantial increases in knowledge and confidence were found but the numbers of parents involved overall (37), disappointingly, far exceeded the number of professionals (10). If communication is to be productive it must be two-way; it cannot be assumed that the professionals are communicating effectively as these two quotations from parents taken from the evaluation indicate:

- *"Many parents have negative experiences with schools/LA … communication is the key, but I feel schools are very defensive."*

- *"There needs to be careful, frequent, accurate, truthful communication … without communication parents are antagonised and disempowered."*

These examples, and many others across projects, indicate clearly the central importance of effective and appropriate forms of 2-way communication. Not only is this a fundamental *right,* that parents should have every reason to expect of a service provided, it is also an effective approach to increase their confidence, from which their trust also increased.

Furthermore, LAs and schools benefitted as effective communication facilitated their ability to carry out their roles and address the children's needs. But this requires development for parents and both LA and school staff. Newham identified the importance of effective communication between parents and schools, not only the LA, as schools' independence made their role increasingly critical. This point was echoed by Kent, a very large LA, whose project included workshops, one designed to improve communication skills while others were planned to improve understanding of the SEN system among both parents and professionals. In both cases, but particularly for the latter workshops, the evaluation found evidence for an increase in parent/carer knowledge of school based provision; however, the numbers of professionals attending were disappointing so limiting the potential impact on school practice.

3.2.3 Provision

Communication is essential but so too is appropriate provision to meet the needs of individual children and groups/communities. Making provision to meet the needs of children with SEN has been a major challenge conceptually and in practice. Relevant issues concern location (e.g. mainstream or specialist provision), teaching approaches, staff to deliver interventions and support, suitability of physical resources (e.g. access, acoustics) and funding. Some projects focused on aspects of provision including funding models and sought parents' views on previous development (through an evaluative study) or the further development of an existing approach.

The background to Oxfordshire's project was the decision in 2006 to delegate all centrally held funding for secondary aged pupils with statements to schools, There were positive indicators that this had been successful. The aim of the Oxfordshire project was to review overall levels of delegated funding and share good practice for pupils with higher levels of need as a means to further improve relationships between the LA, secondary schools and parents. In particular the project sought to explore whether, by reducing reliance on statements, pupils' needs could be met appropriately, their outcomes could be as good or better, and parents would be confident that appropriate provision was being made, and that thy trusted the LA and school.

The project comprised a number of activities but was essentially an evaluation of practice, drawing mainly on the views of parents of Year 7 pupils with statements or at school action plus. Their main focus was on secondary school practice but it is interesting to note that parents gave more positive judgments of provision in secondary schools than their children's previous primary schools when interviewed in term 3 of Year 7. Furthermore, levels of satisfaction were similar for parents of pupils with a statements or at school action plus. A range of approaches to support transition were implemented by different schools, with positive comments from parents whose children experienced different approaches – see Section 2.5 below. Parents also stressed their wish for specialist teaching support (e.g. for dyslexia or speech and language difficulties). The issue has been picked up also by Sir Jim Rose in his recent report on the teaching of pupils with literacy difficulties. Parents also sought intervention that recognised their child's particular needs rather than their being 'fitted into' an existing package. However, the project identified good practice in schools with which parents were satisfied. Furthermore, parents did not seek statements, indeed there had been a substantial reduction in numbers of new statements since 2006, and the LA's approach in this respect had a good degree of parental confidence in its appropriateness.

The LA was intent on using the results of their project this year to share good practice across the authority.

Other LAs such as Newham and Blackburn with Darwen also explored models of funding that reduced reliance on statements. Again there was a good deal of parental support where they had confidence that the provision would meet their child's needs: these projects did not find a strong demand, in general, for statements. Newham's survey of parents found that parents of children with statements and those who were subject to exceptional resource funding (ERF) were more likely to consider that the funding had made a positive difference to their child, across a range of domains including being happier and making progress, than parents whose children had statements. However, there was some evidence that the latter group of parents had a focus on the resources and appeared to have doubts about provision at secondary school, the statement therefore being seen as providing security in this respect.

Blackburn with Darwen had introduced Individual Pupil Resourcing Agreements (IPRAs) in 2004 to provide enhanced funding at School Action Plus and reduce the need for a statement. This funding for IPRAs was delegated to schools and had gained the confidence of schools and parents. This project developed the approach further to fund more flexible packages of support that addressed the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes and addressed training needs (see below). This was positively received by both parents and schools. As a result the LA was moving on to develop this approach further. This included Provision Mapping designed to show clearly the support being received by a child and the costings of the elements of this provision. Other LAs had also found support for provision mapping. This approach acknowledges the concerns of parents, including several of those interviewed, that they were insufficiently aware of the provision package for their child. The inclusion of financial information assists audit but parents were less interested in the *funding* available to a school than the *provision* being made by the school to support their child. Provision mapping may also usefully include details of external services as well as the use of the school's own resources, so providing a comprehensive account for parents.

3.2.4 Involving parents in SEN panels

Decisions regarding provision to be made by LAs for children with SEN typically involve a panel of LA officers and others including representatives of professionals involved by law in statutory assessments (typically educational psychologists and consultant community paediatricians) and in many cases teachers (heads, SENCOs). Portsmouth's project went

further. Parents were recruited and 44 were trained to become members of the authority's Inclusion Support Panel (the panel that advises the LA on whether or not to carry out a statutory assessment or issue a statement), a greater number than originally expected ('vastly oversubscribed' stated the LA officer, a fair judgement as the aim was about 30). Our parent interviewee reported that the 'training was excellent – couldn't fault it' and he was strongly of the view that other parents involved had equally positive views about the initiative.

Since December 2008 at least two parents have sat on every panel. Evaluation of the project indicates very positive findings. These parents/carers reported feeling much more knowledgeable, empowered and enthusiastic to continue on panels. These findings were reinforced by our parent interviewee who was very willing to continue as a panel member as he could see how beneficial the system was for parents whose children were being considered by the panels. Furthermore, he commented that 'I've found the whole thing very rewarding' and compared this with his own experience when his children were going through the SEN system (in another LA) when 'I didn't know the process and I didn't have a lot of confidence in it'. Interestingly he also noted that being involved in this way had other benefits 'also building up your own self esteem and passing on the confidence to other parents'. The evaluation found that almost all parents (those on panels or not) expressed more confidence in ISP decisions once aware that parents had become trained and voting members of the panels.

Interestingly, there has so far been no change in the pattern of decisions made by the ISP. This can be interpreted in different ways, of course, but the parents themselves considered their responses have been broadly in line with the majority, suggesting consensus rather than their views being sidelined. Furthermore, professionals on the panel were also positive and other LAs in the 8- project initiative have expressed great interest in this project. The LA's perspective on the success of this initiative is that it had the benefit of being 'hands on' – not simply a consultation exercise which typically received little interest and engagement. Training is crucial and the initial phase made a higher than expected demand on officer time (but this reflected the 50% over-subscription of parents). Positive spin offs identified by the LA included an increase in the number of parents wishing to attend panels that were considering their own child.

It is also of note that the ISP requires panel members to consider relatively limited amounts of information, avoiding parents being confronted with large files on each child. An e-system was already in place which was also helpful. Running costs are low, just expenses but with a small fund to recompense those parents who lose financially by attending a panel. Our

parent interviewee also commented that there was now interest in extending support 'we're looking at different ways to do this for other parents', for example by going out to meet with them.

This model appears to be readily transferable to other LAs at low cost after initial training of the first group of parents. Issues to consider include the existing operation of the panel which should be parent friendly before introducing parents to its meetings, e.g. limited documentation to read; positive, effective and supportive relationships between panel meetings; effective interpersonal and communication styles; setting up effective training; and a clear system for dealing with confidentiality, including part of the training programme. There is also a benefit in reviewing the system periodically and offering parents the opportunity for feedback and debriefing – some cases may be particularly difficult, even distressing, and support for parents to discuss their own emotional feelings would be useful.

3.2.5 Supporting parents at transition

Children are subject to a number of significant changes in their school careers. The first and arguably the most significant is the transition from home to their first educational or care setting. The nature of this transition, including age at which it occurs, varies depending on early child care (e.g. at home or with a child minder, playgroup) and the provision available. Later transitions include Key Stage 1 to 2 and Key Stage 2 to 3 (primary to secondary school); finally there is the transition from compulsory schooling (end of Key Stage 4) to post-16 education, employment or training. The Wolverhampton project focused on the transition into school provision at around age five years.

The LA had a well established system, the Team Around the Child (TAC), which included regular meetings of professionals and parent(s) at pre-school to discuss and plan for a child with complex needs. Central to this system was the key worker and Wolverhampton's policy that the key worker should be chosen by the parent(s), not allocated by the LA. This system had run successfully for several years at pre-school and the project focused on extending it into the first year of school, in most cases special schools. The project identified that the extension of the TAC into school continued to enhance parental confidence but also that changes were likely to be appropriate, as the child moved through the school. This was partly driven by the relatively high person-time allocation required but it was also judged appropriate to the child's and parent's changing needs.

However, there continued to be strong support for the parent choosing the key worker, at school as well as pre-school. This required a careful transition process so that the parent could get to know potential key workers and so make an *informed* choice. Initially after transfer the pre-school key worker continued with the child but this was reviewed after TAC meetings in school. Interestingly, many parents have chosen non-teachers, perhaps a teaching assistant or speech and language therapist, for example. At interview, one parent noted she had chosen a nursery nurse as she was 'more a guardian than authority figure' and had both personal and professional experience of children with SEN, as well as personal characteristics that were similar to those of the mother. This example indicates the range of factors a parent may take into account to gain confidence – ultimately, however, 'you want somebody who bonds with your child'.

The project in Wolverhampton indicated that the TAC could usefully be amended with a reduction in numbers of meetings and a number of professionals attending as certain inputs were no longer necessary. However, the LA also appreciated that numbers of TACs will increase year on year from this pilot and so sustainability would require careful review in the future in order that parents' high confidence at present would be maintained. But, the central importance of informed parental selection of the key worker would remain.

The Oxfordshire project was a study of existing practice and included a focus on primary-secondary transition. Parents were generally positive about transition arrangements, although schools did vary, and the evaluation report identified a number of activities found helpful, including:

- secondary school SENCO attendance at year 6 reviews
- personalised packages of visits for children whilst in year 6
- summer school introductions to secondary school
- a transition worker providing individual preparation before transition and individual support for the term following transition
- teaching assistant key workers supporting before and after transition
- lunchtime clubs for vulnerable children
- buddy systems
- staggered school opening and closing for year 7

When asked what advice they would give to other parents about transition, the parents involved in the project focused on effective communication, taking advantage to see and talk with the secondary school and maintaining that dialogue once their child had transferred.

The importance of being assertive in discussing their child's needs was stressed and then monitoring the provision that was provided. One parent interviewed for the evaluation identified a 10 week programme of initiatives in their child's primary school which, collectively, had clearly been seen as very beneficial.

3.3 Can LA learning from the projects be generalised?

The eight projects were relatively low cost (£20k – 40k) and took various forms. Two were essentially evaluations of existing provision but the other six comprised development initiatives. Each project has produced interesting and very worthwhile findings but a key issue is whether the learning experienced by the project LAs can be generalised so that other LAs may also produce positive outcomes and, if so, what is necessary?

Discussions with project LAs indicated that all considered their project was indeed generalisable to other LAs. In some cases questions of the relevance of demographic factors was raised, including LA size (population and geographic spread) and ethnic composition. However, these were not seen as inhibitory to generalisation. Neither was finance a very significant factor: the budget was relatively small, although not insignificant, and could be prioritised. Nevertheless, the fact that there was a financial input from the DCSF was welcomed as it indicated both seriousness and importance attributed to the initiative, and reinforced the need for considered bids and accountability for the implementation.

What then are the main issues? These may be summarised as follows.

- *Commitment to and engagement with parents*
  All project LAs had a history of parental engagement but this varied in degree and nature. The experience of the project indicated that, even so, LAs developed new learning from their experience, identifying aspects of work with parents that they had not sufficiently recognised in the past. Nevertheless, a fundamental commitment to engage with parents as partners was crucial.
  The degree of engagement of parents by the eight projects varied. Two were essentially evaluations of past practice whereas others involved development work with parents. There is certainly a benefit in evaluating past practice but a clear benefit from the developmental projects was where evaluation took place of that project. In these cases parents were involved more comprehensively in the projects rather than only as providers of feedback regarding practice. They were able to

comment not only on failings (or successes) of the system but more particularly on attempts to improve it by innovative practice, in which they were involved.
The means whereby parents were engaged will vary with the nature of the project, but a fundamental commitment to parent involvement coupled with active implementation of this value position in the project are keys to success.

- *The project as a vehicle in itself*
  It would be unrealistic to expect all LAs to want and be able to run with all of the development projects. Each takes time and resources to organise and implement properly. It is important that each LA considers priorities, among these initiatives or others, but perhaps the key issue is the active engagement with a project. The focus is, of course, important – it needs to be important and manageable - but so too is the nature of the learning from the engagement, for LAs, parents and schools.
  Experience of these LAs suggests that there were some common experiences and gains from undertaking a project per se, in addition to any project-specific benefits. Furthermore, there seemed to be added value in that engagement in a project aimed at increasing parental confidence on occasion generalised to other LA authorities.

Some key factors to consider for the nature of future projects include:

1. The project should be developmental not just an evaluation of existing practice
2. Parents must be central in a number of aspects including:
   a. collaborating with the LA in conceptualising, creating and confirming the project;
   b. being actively engaged in an element of new practice;
   c. contributing feedback on their experiences;
   d. as recipients of feedback and evaluation in order to contribute to the interpretation of findings.
3. Projects should also include LA and school staff – system development must engage those involved in operating the system, not just parents and their children.

- *Support and challenge*
  Also important for the success of the projects, and acknowledged as such by LAs, was the requirement to formulate a bid meeting specific parameters and associated processes and the involvement of the National Strategies SEN Advisers who contributed to the planning, design and analysis of the projects and acted as critical

friends, checking that the projects were on target and on timetable. They provided a welcome and respected balance of challenge and support which LAs valued. LAs also had the benefit of national meetings where they presented their interim findings and had the opportunity to learn about each others' work. The association with the Lamb Inquiry, and the presence of Brian Lamb and the Inquiry team, provided an additional benefit that would be more difficult to match in future but regional seminars could be useful. Furthermore, the presence of both LA staff and parents was both a further opportunity for joint learning and another opportunity for LAs to make clear statements about parental engagement and the value of their involvement.

- *Local authorities and schools*

  Several LA officers made the observations that generalisation to other LAs, and indeed sustainability within their own LAs, depended on the relationship between the authority and the schools. As power has shifted from LAs to schools so the relationship has altered. These initiatives had benefited from good LA-school relationships which recognised that LAs needed to work collaboratively and seek schools' engagement, which schools could decline. As one LA officer noted, in their project 'the schools were very, very committed'. Improving parental confidence in the SEN system was not simply a matter of confidence in the LA system: parents needed confidence in schools' contributions. Furthermore, it was at school level where ultimately the main basis for confidence lay, in the day to day experiences of the pupils. One LA officer stressed that 'with [number] of schools, we [LA] don't have the resource. the governing bodies have to take this on'. The evidence from these projects indicates that parents are often lacking knowledge and understanding of and confidence in the school's approach to meeting their child's needs and also that particular effort is necessary to engage schools with the projects – take up/responses were low in some LAs.

  However, some aspects of the SEN system are LA issues, not least their statutory responsibilities. Parents who were interviewed recognised the different responsibilities and highlighted specific issues pertinent to schools or LA as relevant – which indicates how they had personally benefitted from the project with which they had been involved. However, they also identified some common factors at school and LA level, perhaps particularly well summed up by this parent's explanation of the benefits of the project with which she was engaged: '…..taking the bureaucracy out of it and putting the human touch back in'. Compare this view with that of the parent who also had very positive views on the project but who commented on the negative

information available, for example on the internet: ‘every bit of literature tells you to prepare for a fight’.

- *Evaluation of projects*
  The evaluation of future projects would benefit from a combination of qualitative (e.g. interviews, group discussion) and quantitative (e.g. surveys with rating scales) measures. The evaluations undertaken for this initiative were all small scale – all developmental projects had small budgets for their evaluation as the majority of the grant was, appropriately, for the implementation of the innovative project. The use of interviews is time consuming but potentially rewarding for producing richer data, and the evaluation reports of the Lamb projects show the benefits of this method. Surveys have the benefit of larger numbers of respondents to provide breadth and address representativeness but some surveys here had limited numbers of respondents, substantially below expectation at times.

  The use of combined methods seeks to gain the benefits and reduce the disadvantages of each. However, to gain these benefits requires an appropriate sample – e.g. in terms of size – and preparation of participants so that they are able to provide as full information as possible. Furthermore, if reasonable sample size is attained for a survey then the use of statistical analysis rather than visual inspection of the data is indicated.

  It is also important to consider the most appropriate way of accessing parents, whether through an organisation such as a parent partnership service or directly to individual parents. In the former case there are issues regarding the nature of the organisation, e.g. their independence, pressure group, organisational ability to support the project. In the latter case there are issues of ensuring coverage of the relevant parent population and avoiding overload on small numbers of willing and committed parents.

3.4 Can the project be sustained?

Local authorities were confident that their initiatives could be sustained after the funding ceased. This was aided by several factors:

- *Part of a developmental process*

The projects could generally be seen as part of an initiative that had started prior to the Lamb Inquiry. Although not necessarily specifically focused on improving parental confidence, all were seen as offering important contributions to improve practice for children with SEN. As such, improving parental confidence in the SEN system was also possible. The LAs were implementing actions as appropriate to maintain and enhance momentum. In some cases this involved making modifications to the original ideas to improve sustainability in the future – e.g. Wolverhampton's scaling down of the Team Around the Child at school age on the basis of the experience of the project. In some cases proposals for future work had been put forward to the appropriate LA officer or committee; in other cases specific plans had been made to roll out the initial pilot – e.g. Durham which has a conference planned for the autumn to roll out beyond the original Community of Learning group of schools.

- *The degree of embededness*
  The project could enable an initiative to have achieved its objective and become part of practice – e.g. Portsmouth's inclusion of trained parents on the Inclusion Support Panel where sufficient parents had been trained and the system was established, although, in time new parents would need to be recruited and trained.
  The projects concerned with funding for pupils with SEN had reached different stages of development but in each case there was commitment to the approach being taken by the LA in question and increasing consolidation taking place, although Newham discovered that, despite their system of Exceptional Resource Funding at School Action Plus being well established, and evidence for its acceptability, there continued to be parents who were less than fully convinced and sought the 'security' of a statement.

- *Limited financial commitment*
  The limited funding of the projects was a plus as LAs had demonstrated success at low cost, so providing support for sustainability, especially in the present financial climate.

- *Commitment*
  In addition to such factors a primary consideration was the LAs' commitment to engaging with parents and improving their confidence. This was characterised by the ways projects had been set up, with true partnerships. Of course, this was built into

the remit but, even so, the LAs' genuine commitment was confirmed by those parents that were interviewed as well as by the local evaluations of individual projects.
True partnership with parents and a commitment to engage with them also require recognition that parents' responses may not be in line with the ideas, policies and practice of the LA and schools. In the developmental innovative projects parents were engaged and were generally positive, albeit with some caveats. Furthermore, these LAs wanted to develop and improve practice; in the two evaluations of existing practice, some potentially uncomfortable findings were revealed including parents' differential confidence in primary compared with secondary schools – interestingly the results were contradictory in the two LAs - and the continuing concerns of parents for the 'safety/security' of a statement for their child despite prior work attempting to reassure parents by alternative systems. Developmental projects benefit from an ability to tackle these challenging perspectives and attempt to build in responses to the feedback received.

3.5 Conclusions

The initiative to fund eight projects through the Lamb Inquiry to improve parental confidence in the SEN system may be judged a success. Four of the five original types of project were implemented across the LAs. Most were clearly developmental projects with two focusing on evaluation of previously established procedures concerned with funding. Each project had a local evaluation which provided interesting and generally useful evidence although this varied: in some cases proposed pre- versus post- project comparisons were not carried out and some surveys had very low numbers of respondents; one project had a late deadline for responses and will analyse their findings in the autumn term. Overall impact for future LA practice was enhanced where parents were actively engaged in the projects.
These low cost projects provided very useful vehicles for LAs to work productively with parents and to develop practice that improves parents' confidence in the SEN system. Furthermore, there is evidence both for sustainability and the potential for generalisablity to other LAs. Although at this stage there is only limited evidence for the success of any one project, or for its generalisablity to other LAs, the aggregated evidence indicates the success of the initiative overall. For a modest financial outlay important improvements in parental confidence can be achieved. Fundamental to success was the commitment of LAs to *true*, not tokenistic or paternalistic parental engagement and a clear aim to improve confidence and work collaboratively with parents. The focus of the project was an issue of importance to the LA and its parents but the specific focus was less important than the manner in which it was carried out, including the commitment of the LA and its engagement with parents.

In taking forward the learning from the Lamb projects there are two issues to consider: whether and, if so, how an initiative from one LA might be implemented by other LAs; and whether and, if so, how a further phase of similar projects might be run.

First, the evidence from the Lamb projects suggests that each could be undertaken by other LAs. The following guidance is proposed to any LA wishing to undertake a project with a similar focus.

- Examine the LA's final report to the Lamb Inquiry, including the results of the local evaluation.
- A project needs to be developed relative to the existing policy and practice in the LA. This requires consideration of the pre-existing situation relevant to the project, for example the current level of parental engagement in the LA's SEN system; the nature of the current funding system for support of students (e.g. where new funding models are under consideration); the LA's system for supporting groups of schools (e.g. area-based, training and development); the existing nature, including membership and procedures, of panels determining provision (e.g. the inclusion of parents on such panels).

Other LAs may prefer to develop a different project. In either case the following factors should be considered for new projects designed to improve the SEN system and parents' confidence:

- Parents should be involved throughout the project. They should be fundamentally engaged in:
    - Identifying the focus and aims of the project
    - The provision of data, providing information and opinions relevant to the topic
    - The evaluation design including the identification of information to collect and sample
    - The interpretation of the findings to provide parent perspectives on the outcomes
    - Identifying the learning for the future and the future planning on the basis of the project's findings

- The project should have a clear parent focus, with parents actively engaged in the project itself. This could include, as appropriate to the project:
    - Providing input e.g. into the training of professional staff

    - Developing support for parents e.g. to receive information; opportunities to engage with the school or LA to influence decisions
- The project should be developmental rather than a review of past or existing practice.
- It should address an issue of importance for policy/practice
- Evaluation should be built into the project in order that learning can influence subsequent practice and sustainability

Second, national support for a further phase of projects would provide an important element in a framework to optimise their delivery. The following two points are relevant: External support and challenge should be included, and two complementary forms are proposed:

    - Involvement of the National Strategies SEN team as 'critical friends' who would be involved in the planning, design and analysis of projects, including regular reporting by the LA (e.g. once a term), so providing support and challenge.
    - Presentations at seminars where practice and learning arising from the projects is presented and shared with other LAs.
        - Parents should be active participants in these seminars
        - They should be relatively small scale to optimise engagement of attendees, suggesting a regional format
        - National contributions should be included to signal their importance and seriousness, and to facilitate further dissemination of practice
- Projects can be successful with relatively modest financial support; however, financial input is an important factor, not only in real terms to enhance resources but also to support commitment and accountability. A similar sum (£20 - £40k) would seem appropriate.

Looking to the future, the use of a low cost project format, as evident here, provides a potentially very useful model for widespread roll out across the country. Ideally a similar initiative with a small budget for a group of LAs should be implemented with increased coverage, possibly by LAs continuing with one or more partners and by the organising of regional rather than national meetings. An evaluation of that further initiative could build on the evidence of the Lamb projects to identify areas of policy and practice that have a high priority and where there projects across several LAs provide strong evidence of success and potential for generalisablity to other LAs.

4. CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE – VIEWS ON THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SYSTEM, BY PARENTS, STUDENTS, SCHOOL STAFF AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES.

4.1 Summary of questionnaire findings: the responses at a glance

The Institute of Education and the University of Warwick, with advice from the Lamb Inquiry team, designed, ran and analysed a largely web-based survey for the Inquiry. The survey involved the preparation of four questionnaires to seek users' and professionals' opinions about their experience of the SEN system. The questionnaires were differentiated for parents, school staff, other professionals[2] and school students, so covering much of the same ground in slightly different ways.

The main results of the survey are set out below. Detailed findings follow in Sections 4.2ff.

Outcomes (full account at 4.3)

Questions to parents:

- What sort of outcomes do you want for your child over the next year or more?
- Has the school discussed these outcomes with you?

Questions to school staff and other professionals**:**

- Do you discuss medium term outcomes (over the next year or more) with parents of pupils with SEN?
- If 'yes', what sort of outcomes do parents say they want?

Key findings

- Parents wanted success for their children in a wide range of outcomes.
- 39% of parents responding said that the school attended by their child had not discussed the child's outcomes with them.
- 22% of school staff responding said that they did not discuss children's outcomes with parents

Children's learning and progress (full account at 4.4)

Questions to parents:

- What helps your child to learn and progress?
- What gets in the way of your child's learning and progress?

[2] 'Other professionals' included anyone working within SEN system who was not a member of a school staff. Respondents included LA staff, educational psychologists, therapists and other health service staff and many others.

Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- What helps children to learn and progress?
- What gets in the way of children's learning and progress?

Questions to students:

- Think of three things which help you to learn and do well at school.
- Which three things make it hard for you to learn or do well at school?
- Which three things could we change to make it easier for you to learn and do well at school?
- Do you get extra help with your learning at school?
- How does it help you?

Key findings

- The teaching style or environment praised by one parent was often criticised by another. Many items recorded as helpful by some parents were seen as unhelpful by others.
- Most frequently, respondents considered that good teaching, adapted to the child's needs, strengths and interests, along with an appropriately adapted curriculum was helpful in supporting progress.
- Training was mentioned frequently. It was acknowledged that staff needed to have knowledge, expertise and understanding. Many respondents felt that lack of these impeded students' learning and progress.
- Many parents appeared to take the view that one-to-one and small group support was the best way for their child to be involved in the curriculum although some reported a lack of training for those delivering the support.
- School staff and other professionals had more doubts about the appropriateness of children being supported in this way, with some pointing out that the children most in need were being supported by the least trained staff.

Parental confidence in the SEN system (full account at 4.5)

Questions to parents:

- What gives you confidence in the SEN system?
- What reduces your confidence in the SEN system

Questions to school staff and other professionals[3]:

[3] It should be noted that this was a survey of the views of individuals. The school staff and other professionals who responded are not necessarily those who work with the parents or students who responded to the questionnaire

- What gives parents confidence in the SEN system?
- What reduces the confidence that parents have in the SEN system?

Key findings

- The people working within the system were often reported as giving parents confidence; but the system itself was often seen as reducing their confidence.
- A quarter of the parents responding to this survey reported that they had no confidence in the SEN system.
- Parents welcomed positive, informative and supportive communication, including 'being listened to'.
- School staff attitudes and overall competence in SEN matters, together with specific interventions, were seen as fundamental to parental confidence.
- Parents value being consulted and treated as partners.
- Early identification of children's needs and having these needs met are of critical importance for parental confidence in both LA and school practices

How well the SEN system works: additional views from the professionals (full account at 4.6)

The professionals were asked two questions not asked of the parents.

Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- What works well in the SEN system?
- What doesn't work well in the SEN system

Key findings

- The responses covered a wide range of elements of the system.
- School staff and other professionals appreciated the expert input from local authorities and other agencies
- Although many professionals liked the idea of delegated funding, just as many did not, citing a lack of ring-fencing for SEN and the fact that there was no apparent monitoring to ensure that it was actually spent on SEN.
- Lack of funding was understood but the time it took to receive funding was not.
- The SEN system was regarded by some as bureaucratic, complex, difficult to initiate and overly long.
- Some argued for more special schools as some children with SEN 'could or should never be integrated into mainstream schools', whilst others believed that there should be no special schools and inclusion could work very well but not whilst special schools still existed.

- Other responses commented on conflict in a system that promotes inclusion while emphasising performance tables.
- The importance of correct placement was mentioned. Specialist provision, in units or special schools was seen as important but the supply of places was a concern.
- Responses suggested that knowledgeable, skilled and trained SENCOs, teachers and support staff were highly beneficial. But badly paid, unskilled and untrained staff put children with SEN at risk.

Parental views on statutory assessment (full account at 4.7)

Questions to parents:

- If your child has a statement or if you've tried to get a statement for your child:
- What did you find helpful about the process?
- What did you find unhelpful about the process?

Key findings

- 19% of the respondents stated that they did not find the statutory assessment process helpful.
- Parents reported that support from individuals and organisations was extremely important and sometimes the only thing that helped them through difficult times.
- Not all parents received the help they wanted. Lack of support, poor attitude and working practices of some schools, individuals and organisations was strongly remarked upon and added greatly to the unhappiness and stress of parents
- Parent Partnership services were generally considered extremely helpful and supportive although some parents felt that they were not impartial enough and worked too closely with local authorities
- Respondents saw the procedure of statutory assessment as complex and bureaucratic to the extent that other parents might not be able to go through it successfully owing to lack of time, money or education.
- Some parents found the process a positive one since it had clear timescales, included parents and gave opportunity for meetings to discuss the children.
- Many parents felt that having the children assessed and diagnosed was beneficial, since it led to others taking the children's needs seriously and provided a complete picture of needs.

Views on statements (full account at 4.8)

Questions to parents:

- If your child has a statement:
  What is helpful about your child's statement?
  What is unhelpful about your child's statement?

Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- If you work with one or more children with a statement:
  What is helpful about the statement?
  What is unhelpful about the statement?

Key findings

- Parents saw the statement as a document that would provide statutory access to provision, but felt that schools and LAs did not always implement statements in full. Some parents felt that there was little they could do about this.
- Statements were appreciated by parents because they contained information about the children's needs and allowed them to be understood by everyone. School staff and other professionals liked the fact that the statements contained information about the best ways to teach and support the children.
- Statements were not always felt to be an accurate representation of what the children needed, for example, in relation to the hours of therapy included.
- Statement wording was often vague and 'woolly' with provision and support not quantified, or else was so prescriptive that schools and staff felt forced to carry out actions which they considered were not in the best interests of the children.
- Statements were sometimes considered to use complex jargon that was not easy for the lay person or school staff to understand.

How to improve the SEN system (full account at 4.9)

Question to parents, school staff and other professionals:

- How can we improve the SEN system?

Key findings

- The wide range of views resulted in very low response rates for most categories.
- Greater training and recognition for those working with students with SEN was desired.
- Respondents suggested that SENCOs should only be concerned with that role and should always be members of the schools' SMTs.

- Respondents wanted the SEN system to be made less bureaucratic, less complex, more open and transparent, easier to access and more flexible.
- Funding was felt to be inadequate and delegated funds were considered a mixed blessing - clear auditing and monitoring processes were requested. Parents wanted a greater say in how the money was spent; some requested an individual budget for their child to use as they considered appropriate.

Additional views on the SEN system (full account at 4.10)

This section presents responses to the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire.

Question to parents, school staff and other professionals:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SEN system?

Key findings

Parents

- Some parents had had to fight at length for provision for their children. For many this meant a huge financial and emotional cost.
- For many children, having a statement was no guarantee of their needs being met.
- The focus of the school system was academic, on targets and exams, whilst placing little emphasis on the social needs of children. This meant many pupils left school with no qualifications and low self esteem.

4.2 Introduction

The Institute of Education and the University of Warwick, with advice from the Lamb Inquiry team, designed, ran and analysed a largely web-based survey for the Inquiry. The survey involved the preparation of four questionnaires to seek users' and professionals' opinions about their experience of the SEN system. The questionnaires were differentiated for parents, school staff, other professionals[4] and school students, so covering much of the same ground in slightly different ways.

The four questionnaires were made available on the Lamb Inquiry website and publicised through the Inquiry's Reference and Advisory Groups. In this way they were made known to charities, forums, unions, parents, teachers, students, educational psychologists, social workers, SENCOs, and staff in children's services. The questionnaires were advertised and paper versions distributed from the start of May 2009. The website remained open for completion of the questionnaires until the end of June 2009.

Structure of the report

This section introduces the survey, its structure, the respondents and the format of the report. Sections 4.3-4.10 set out the responses to particular questions. Section 4.11 reports on the many emails sent to the Inquiry team. Section 4.12 suggests some conclusions. Each section reports on:

- the question(s) covered
- the respondent groups
- the key findings
- more detailed issues, including relevant quotations to clarify points of view

Note: Responses are not directly comparable: the questions for each group are slightly different and do not relate to different reports of the same experiences.

[4] 'Other professionals' included anyone working within SEN system who was not a member of a school staff. Respondents included LA staff, educational psychologists, therapists and other health service staff and many others.

4.2.1 Respondents

Just over 3,400 questionnaires were completed. Responses were received from 1,941 parents, 544 school staff, 516 other professionals working with children[5], schools and families and 400 students. Approximately 90% of the questionnaires were completed online; approximately 10% were paper returns.

Those completing the questionnaires were generally a self-selecting group and many, particularly the parents, were aware of the Lamb Inquiry owing to a heightened awareness of and involvement in SEN issues due to difficulties they had experienced. It is likely that those who had no concerns about the SEN system were less likely to complete the questionnaires. As shown below, the overall profile of parents responding to the questionnaire differed from that of a national sample of parents of children with SEND in several respects. The findings therefore should be interpreted with this in mind.

4.2.2 Approaches to reporting

Some findings below are based on samples of respondents owing to the large number of completed questionnaires (see Table 9 in Appendix B). Not all the responses to the questions are analysed in this report. A single question generated many different comments. Only the issues mentioned most frequently are reported upon unless they provide a comparison with other comments.

For each open-ended question, the respondents were given space in which to write up to three separate answers. So, if a respondent felt particularly strongly about their response to a particular question, the same or similar answer could be stated for all three. For this reason the figures are given as a percentage of the coded comments made, rather than of respondents.

All quotations are reproduced as they appeared in the original response, without alteration of syntax or spelling.

[5] 'Children' refers to 'children and young people' throughout this document. 'Parents' refers to 'parents and/or carers' throughout.

4.2.3 Demographics of the respondents

Parents

In many cases the parents ticked multiple boxes to indicate the range of difficulties experienced by their children. Results will therefore not add up to 100%. (Table 4)

Table 4 Parents' specifications of the special educational needs of their child

Special Educational Need reported	% of parents reporting need
Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	49
Speech, language and communication difficulties	43
Behavioural, emotional and social needs	34
Moderate learning difficulties	27
Severe learning difficulties	14
Profound and multiple learning difficulties	5
Specific learning difficulty	22
Physical disability (unspecified)	16
Visual impairment	9
Hearing impairment	8
Multisensory impairment	8

Table 5 Prevalence of children with ASD or SLCN according to School Census

Special Educational Need recorded	% of primary need in DCSF census
ASD	17.5
SLCN	12.8

The latest 2009 DCSF[6] census results put the number of students in primary, secondary and special schools with ASD as the primary need at 17.5% of the SEN population; 12.8% are recorded as having SLCN the students' primary need (Table 5). While the figures are not directly comparable, as the DCSF census figures only include the primary need of a child, the comparison indicates that the questionnaire sample differed from more national prevalence of SEND.

[6] All census figures referred to are from DCSF (2009) *Special educational needs in England 2009: An analysis.* Nottingham: DCSF. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STA/t000851/Main.pdf

Table 6 Stage of SEN Code of Practice

Intervention level: SEN Code of Practice	% of parents reporting
Had a statement of special educational needs	70
School Action Plus	20
School action	6
'Don't know'	7

The large majority of parents had a child with a statement of special educational needs (70%) whilst 20% of the children were at School Action Plus and 6% were at School Action (Table 6). 7% of the parents responded 'don't know' to this question.

Table 7 Educational context of the children of parents responding

Education context	% of parents reporting
Children still at school	82
Pre-school children	6
Home educated	6
College	3
No longer in formal education	2
Excluded	< 1
Pupil referral unit	< 1

82% of the parents were writing about children still at school whilst 6% had pre-school children and 6% were home educated (Table 7). The remainder were at college (3%) or no longer in formal education (2%). Just under 1% were excluded as were those at a pupil referral unit.

Only 14% of the children of parents who responded were eligible for free school meals compared with national prevalence of 29% of students at school action plus and 27% of students with statements, indicating that the questionnaire sample is less socio-economically disadvantaged than the SEN population as a whole.

A third of the parents reported that they were paying for extra support for their child to help with his or her special educational needs. They were paying for a range of activities and support including additional maths and literacy tuition, specialist dyslexia tuition, ABA tutoring, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy.

Table 8 Ethnicity of the children of parents who responded

Ethnicity	% of parents reporting
White British	86
White Irish	2
White 'other'	3
Indian	1
Other	< 1
Did not wish to state their ethnic origins	2

Note: Percentages are rounded

The majority of parents reported that the child was White British (Table 8). However, DCSF census figures suggest that the SEN population in schools is made up of similar proportions of white, mixed race, black and Asian children overall[7]. Minority ethnic groups were underrepresented in the sample responding to the questionnaire. Over 99% of stated that their child spoke English easily.

Conclusions

The demographics of the parents responding to the questionnaire may be summarised as follows:

- The prevalence of parents stating their child had ASD in the sample was high (49%).
- 43% of parents stated that their children had speech, language and communication difficulties.
- The prevalence of children eligible for free school meals was low for an SEN population
- Few parents gave their ethnicity as other than White British, making the sample atypical for the parents of the SEN population in England

The overall profile of parents completing this questionnaire therefore differs from a national population of parents with children with SEN. Their children are largely identified within two very specific areas of need, are less eligible for free school meals and more often of White British origin than parents in the national SEN population.

School staff

[7] *DCSF (2009) Children with special educational needs 2009: an analysis* Nottingham: DCSF

Table 9

Mainstream/special schools	% of school staff reporting
Worked in mainstream schools	89
Worked in special schools	11

89% of the school staff responding to the questionnaire worked in mainstream schools with the remainder working in special schools Table 9). As with the other professionals they worked in many different LAs with pupils of various ages.

Students

Virtually all those responding to the students' questionnaire were teenagers. Of the 400 questionnaires completed, just over 300 were returned from the same special school for pupils with mixed needs.

4.3 Children's outcomes

Questions to parents:

- What sort of outcomes do you want for your child over the next year or more?
- Has the school discussed these outcomes with you?

Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- Do you discuss medium term outcomes (over the next year or more) with parents of pupils with SEN?
- If 'yes', what sort of outcomes do parents say they want?

Key findings

- Parents wanted success for their children in a wide range of outcomes.
- 39% of parents said that the school attended by their child had not discussed the child's outcomes with them.
- 22% of school staff said that they did not discuss children's outcomes with parents

4.3.1 The range of outcomes

While parents' responses naturally varied depending on the age and specific needs of their child, most reflected concerns across the whole range of Every Child Matters outcomes, rather than narrow academic expectations. So, for example, while a few parents with children in secondary school referred to GCSEs and others from primary and secondary phases mentioned speech, language and communication skills and literacy, the majority

were particularly concerned with outcomes relating to safety, independence, successful transition and social inclusion. Social outcomes were of great importance to parents. They were mentioned in 44 % of parent responses, and slightly less frequently in responses from school staff (29%) and other professionals (30%).

- Parents' responses

  Right to choose whether my child can stay at school in 6th form, or choose an appropriate college course
  Parent of a secondary school student with ASD

  For her not to be permanently excluded from her school
  Parent of a student with ADHD, a specific learning difficulty, ASD and behavioural emotional and social difficulties

  Achieving academically within the restrictions of his ability
  Parent of a young primary school child with moderate learning difficulties
  Gain good GCSE's
  Parent of a teenager with moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and ASD

  To cope with the transistion to secondary school, assisted by Autism Outreach and input from both primary and secondary SENCO's
  Parent of a primary school aged pupil with behavioural emotional and social difficulties

  Smooth transition between schools to ensure continuity of effective provision/intervention to support the main outcomes for their child
  Learning support advisory teacher

  To be happy and fulfilled in school
  Parent of a primary school aged child with ASD

  To feel safe and secure enough to be able to learn
  Parent of a young primary school aged pupil with behavioural emotional and social difficulties

  We want our child to be able to communicate confidently and coherently with her peers
  Parent of a young child with Downs Syndrome

To develop strategies to manage his own stress and aggression
Parent of a student with ASD in a residential school

Functional life skills eg bathing, dressing
Parent of a young secondary school pupil with MLD behavioural, emotional and social difficulties speech, language and communication needs, ASD and a physical disability

Being able to get a job and support a family
Parent of a primary school child with MLD, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, speech, language and communication needs and a specific learning difficulty

- Staff/professionals' responses

Leisure and work opportunities
Specialist teacher for students with ASD

They want the children to get into the secondary school of their choice
SENCO in a mainstream school

Their son/daughter is able to lead an independent life
SENCO in a mainstream school

Pupils accepted in the real world
Learning support worker in a special school

For their children to be happy and enjoy their learning
SENCO in mainstream school

To be fully included in school and take part of everyday all day activities.
TA in mainstream school

Being able to be an active member of the workforce and contribute to the economy
Parent of a primary aged child with speech, language and communication needs and epilepsy.

Of those parents completing the outcomes question, 60% said the school had discussed outcomes with them, whilst 39% said that they had not.

77% of school staff answering the question stated that they had discussed outcomes with parents and 22% said that they had not. Of the 'other professionals' that replied, 84% stated that they had discussed outcomes with parents whilst 16% said that they had not.

4.4 Children's learning and progress

Questions to parents:

- What helps your child to learn and progress?
- What gets in the way of your child's learning and progress?

Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- What helps children to learn and progress?
- What gets in the way of children's learning and progress?

Questions to students:

- Think of 3 things which help you to learn and do well at school.
- Which 3 things make it hard for you to learn or do well at school?
- Which 3 things could we change to make it easier for you to learn and do well at school?
- Do you get extra help with your learning at school?
- How does it help you?

Key findings

- The teaching style or environment praised by one parent was often criticised by another. Many items recorded as helpful by some parents were seen as unhelpful by others.
- Most frequently, respondents considered that good teaching, adapted to the child's needs, strengths and interests, along with an appropriately adapted curriculum was helpful in supporting progress.
- Training was mentioned frequently. It was acknowledged that staff needed to have knowledge, expertise and understanding. Many respondents felt that lack of these impeded students' learning and progress.
- Many parents appeared to take the view that one-to-one and small group support was the best way for their child to be involved in the curriculum although some reported a lack of training for those delivering the support.

- School staff and other professionals had more doubts about the appropriateness of children being supported in this way, with some pointing out that the children most in need were being supported by the least trained staff.

4.4.1 Teaching

When asked what helped and hindered children's learning and progress, the vast majority of the responses were about the teaching and support the children received.
Responses frequently mentioned the impact upon pupils of the teachers' methods and decisions, plus the way in which teaching is carried out: 29% of responses by parents and school staff and 25% by other professionals cited it as important. The respondents considered that good teaching, adapted to the child's needs, strengths and interests was important as was an appropriate curriculum, differentiated to allow the child to work at the correct level.

11% parent, 12% school staff and 13% of other professionals' comments suggested that teachers could have a negative impact on pupils. Examples given included inconsistent teaching methods, failure to set work at the correct level and inflexible teaching styles. Despite the sample of parents responding including many who had concerns about the system, the numbers worried about poor teaching were much lower than those who were positive about it.

The detrimental impact of an inappropriate curriculum was mentioned frequently enough to warrant its own category. This was mentioned by 4% of school staff responses, 2% of other professionals and 1% of parental responses.

- Helpful to learning and progress

Adapting teaching methods to suit the student
FE support coordinator

Meaningful education designed to help him specifically
Parent of a home educated teenager with a profound specific learning difficulty

Exciting and engaging lessons.
SENCO in a mainstream school

An appropriate and differentiated curriculum

Behaviour and support advisory teacher

Clarity and consistency of teaching methods
SEN teacher in a mainstream school

Differentiated work to match ability
Head of learning support in an independent prep school

- 'Get in the way of learning and progress'

Being moved down to a lower set because of speed of work
Parent of a teenager with a specific learning difficulty

The pace of lessons - not having enough time to think or revisit learning
Acting deputy inclusion manager in a mainstream school

Lack of differentiation and rigidity in school systems
Parent of a primary aged child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, and ASD

The over emphasis on the written word to communicate understanding of learning
Parent of a primary aged child with a specific learning difficulty and a physical disability

Insufficient thought to helping pupil access curriculum
SEN specialist in a mainstream school

Limited teaching styles
Assistant Headteacher in a mainstream school

Poor scaffolding and visual support / differentiation in class from subject teachers
SENCO in a mainstream school

Rigid adherence to the National Curriculum when it is obviously inappropriate for that particular child
Educational Psychologist

4.4.2 The student responses

When asked to think of three things that helped them to learn and do well at school, the students also mentioned the beneficial effect of good teaching. 11% of their responses mentioned liking ways in which the teachers gave them good explanations, worked with their learning styles, gave extra time to complete work and used appropriate vocabulary. However, when asked what stopped them from learning, 10% of their remarks were about the work being too hard with not enough explanation, poor instructions, difficult to understand or difficulty in seeing or hearing the teacher.

- ‘help you to learn or do well at school’

  Using words I understand
  Student aged 11

  Making the lessons good
  Student aged 15

  Not being shouted at
  Student aged 12

  Not copying out of books
  Student aged 15

  I am able to work at my own pace and not be rushed.
  Student aged 14

  Going over things a lot
  Student aged 12

  Extra time in tests when the teacher remembers to give it to me
  Student aged 10

- ‘Make it hard for you to learn or do well at school’

  Cant understand work
  Student aged 15

Don't know what to do
Student aged 9

Hard to see board
Student aged 12

If I don't hear what the teacher is saying
Student aged 9

Teacher talking too fast
Student aged 12

Hard to understand teachers
Student aged 16

When asked what helped them learn and do well at school, not all the students gave quite so much detail, simply stating 'my teachers'. These were coded along with others who mentioned the teachers who were sympathetic, listened to the students and provided interesting lessons. In total these accounted for 14% of the student's positive responses.

Sympathetic teachers
Student aged 14

Have a nice teacher
Student aged 11

Techers who make lessons intresting and fun
Student 13

4.3.3 Training for teachers and support staff

All adult groups acknowledged that the teachers or support staff needed to be skilled and trained, with knowledge and expertise. Such personal attributes, along with the ability to understand and support pupil needs were mentioned in 21% of parents, 13% of school staff and 16% of the other professionals' responses. The negative impact that a lack of training and knowledge can have upon children's learning and progress was also stated (9% of parents' responses, 7% school staff and 10% of other professionals' responses.

- 'Help learning and progress'

Teachers who can empathise with pupils learning difficulties and separate from their "intelligence"
SEN teacher in a mainstream school

Good subject teaching with knowledge of asd, how to adapt teaching and learning styles
Parent of a student with ASD

Teachers who understand them and have time for individuals
Inclusion coordinator in a mainstream school

Staff who are knowledgeable and properly trained in SEN
Parent of a teenager with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and speech, language and communication needs

Well trained teaching assistant support for pupils
SENCO in a mainstream school

- 'Get in the way of learning and progress'

Absence of someone who has the knowledge, skills and capacity to champion the child's needs being met
SEN Service coordinator

Lack of understanding of their special needs by many staff - learn the way I teach rather than I will teach the way you can learn
Curriculum support teacher in a mainstream school

Staff not qualified to teach students e.g. dyslexic, autistic, deaf etc.
Inclusion manager and SENCO in a mainstream school

Untrained staff who treat him as naughty without appreciating fully his disability
Parent of a primary aged child (in a special school) with a range of difficulties including ADHD and ASD and speech, language and communication difficulties.

Untrained teachers/classroom assistants that only have 1 day's training.

Parent of a home educated teenager with ASD, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and ADHD.

Weaker teachers teaching SEN students
SENCO in mainstream school

4.4.4 Support

The issue of support for children at school arose frequently. 18% of the students' responses were about being given help and support either from teacher or support staff. Many parents saw the provision of one-to-one or small group support as vitally important although few stated how they believed this helped their children.

Parents did not always link the presence of support to its quality or content. Many appeared to view one-to-one and small group support as the best thing for their children, though the lack of training of staff was frequently mentioned. Parent responses often (10%) stated that one-to-one or small group tuition was helpful. School staff and other professionals (4% and 2% of responses respectively) placed less emphasis on this. However, 6% parents, 7% school staff and 8% other professionals responses favoured available and appropriate support without specifying that it should be one-to-one or in a small group. The school staff (4% of responses) and other professionals (3%) placed emphasis on the children participating in structured programmes tailored for their needs or being given targeted, early intervention. This type of support was only mentioned in 0.2% of parents' responses.

- One-to-one and small group support

1:1 or small group support
Parent of a young secondary school aged student with a range of difficulties including multisensory impairments

One to one teaching with experienced teacher
A young primary aged student with ASD

Small group focussed provision or one to one
Inclusion leader in a mainstream school

- Appropriate support and interventions

Extra adults to support their individual needs
SENCO in a mainstream school

Sufficient support to enable to child to be part of the class and understand what is going on
MSI education advisor

Structured multi-sensory course
SEN support teacher in a mainstream school

Targeted interventions
SENCO in a mainstream school

Following a structured programme designed to meet their needs
Retired teacher

Structured individual learning programme, progress regularly reviewed
Anonymous

- 'Get in the way of learning and progress'

Not having appropriate support in the classroom
Caseload teacher

TA doing the work for the child, not allowing the child to show their capabilities
Inclusion manager in a mainstream school

Unfocussed intervention
Specialist teacher

Singling the child out for support - counterproductive
Specialist teacher

Students' responses:

- 'Help you learn and do well at school'

Extra helpers in class
Student aged 16

Having enough support
Student aged 12

Help to hold my pencil correctly
Student aged 14

Having someone there all the time
Student aged 13

Going to my dyslexia unit
Student aged 11

4.4.5 Environment

Parents (13%), school staff (7%) and other professionals (7%) responses remarked that an appropriate environment could have a beneficial impact on pupils.
8% of parents, 1% of school staff and 2% of other professionals' responses commented that the wrong type of environment hindered children's learning and progress.

- 'Helps learning and progress'
  An environment where distraction is a minimum
  Parent of a primary school child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and a visual impairment.

  Being able to have time out when stressed
  Parent of a primary aged child with ASD

  Creating environment conducive for effective, inclusive learning
  Disability support worker/tutor

  Safe suitable environments geared to individual need
  Senior practitioner

  Flexible timetable to allow each child to access individual provision.

Resource provision manager

An environment that is focused on delivering the key provisions needed to address the child's special educational needs (especially acoustics and classroom seating arrangements in the case of hearing impaired children).
Principal of a special school

- 'Gets in the way of learning and progress'

Being made to work in an environment where he doesn't feel comfortable
Parent of a primary aged child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, speech, language and communication needs and ASD

Change in routine inducing anxiety
Teaching assistant in a mainstream school

Lack of routine/structure
Parent of a young secondary school aged student with ASD

Poor acoustic environments
Hearing support teacher

To be in the wrong environment where he feels unsafe which makes him unhappy.
Parent of a primary aged child with ASD, speech language and communication difficulties and severe learning difficulties

Lack of calmness and quiet in class room.
SEN teacher

4.4.6 Emotions and attitudes

20% of parent, 31% of school staff and 18% of other professionals' responses mentioned factors such as self esteem, anxiety levels and frustration.
Parents, school and other professionals also mentioned the children's interests, their ability to concentrate, their desire to do well and their development of listening skills.

- ‘Helps learning and progress’

  Feeling safe and supported by staff around her

  Parent of a teenager near the end of secondary school with complex epilepsy

  Increase in self belief and confidence

  Learning support coordinator in a mainstream school

  Confidence in those areas brings success that feeds progress in other areas.

  Special needs coordinator / supply teacher

  Inner determination

  Parent of a young child (in an assessment unit) with a range of difficulties including moderate learning difficulties and ASD

  Child experiencing success and enthusiastic to learn

  SENCO in a mainstream school

  Enquiring minds / positive attitude and aptitude to learning

  Teacher of the deaf

  Having a bank of strategies to overcome difficulties

  Teacher in a mainstream school

- ‘Gets in the way of learning and progress’

  A lack of social and emotional well being that leads the child to develop ‘learned helplessness’ both academically and socially & emotionally

  Principal and special school

  Child feeling stressed through being unsure of what is happening or expected

  Parent of a teenager (about to leave school) with ASD and severe learning difficulties

  Child's low self-esteem and emphasis in most schools on the academic being applauded and seen as more important than more practical gifts.

  Special needs consultant

He is significantly behind his peers and he is realising this for the first time in his life. He feels pressure and often refers to himself as "dumb" - not a word we use at home so this has come from someone else, more likely a child in school.
Parent of a primary aged child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, specific learning difficulty and speech, language and communication needs

4.4.7 Student responses

15% of students' responses were related to how learning could be impeded by emotional, social and physical issues. Some reported learning as difficult because of their inability to concentrate or focus, some said that being too tired or too ill had an effect.

Daydreaming
Student aged 16

Feeling ill or tired
Student aged 12

Getting distracted
Student aged 17

I find it hard to concentrate
Student aged 15

Nothing to keep my hands busy
Student aged 15

4.4.8 The effects of parents' attitudes and actions

Some school staff and other professionals (9% and 6% respectively) commented that parents could have a detrimental effect upon children's learning and progress. They commented on lack of support or interest from home and parents who were unwilling to participate, either because of unwillingness or perceived failings of the SEN system.

Parents did not mention this, though a few mentioned the positive effect of encouragement and support on children's progress. Given the recent emphasis findings on the importance of parental engagement (e.g. in the National Strategies' *Achievement for All* programme),

the results suggest that parents responding underrated (or perhaps took for granted) the effect that they could have upon their children's learning.

'Helps learning and progress'

Parents are most important, however we feel we dont always have the skills to help her develop as we would like. We often feel out of our depth.
Parent of a young primary school child with ASD

Good homelife - ie. supportive parents, good diet,routines etc.
Headteacher of a mainstream school

Attitude of parents to difficulties and their feedback to their children
Teacher in an inclusive literacy team in a mainstream school

Good involvement of parents
Group coordinator and trainer

Denial of child's difficulties- from parents
SENCO in an independent school

Lack of ability/willingness of parents to support child
Teacher in a mainstream school

Lack of parental encouragement
Advisory teacher

Parental over-expectation
Educational psychologist

4.4.9 The effects of others' attitudes and actions

The detrimental effect of the attitudes and expectations of others was mentioned in replies by all three types of respondents, (8% parents, 1% school staff, 5% other professionals). Their attitudes towards the children and the feelings they provoked were particularly remarked upon.

- 'Gets in the way of learning and progress'
  Negative attitudes from adults who perceive SEN as a 'problem
  Consultant SpLD assessor

Other people's attitudes and assumptions
Parent of a teenager with a physical disability and profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Low expectations 'because they have SEN'
Head of learning support in an independent school

Attitude of others towards them
Teacher in a special school

People who don't take her disability into account
Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties

Lack of understanding of their needs
Specialist dyslexia teacher

Many of the students also stated that the behaviour of others prevented them from learning (14% of responses). Other students being silly, disruptive or unwilling to be friendly were all mentioned and bullying was reported in 7% of responses.

Other children playing hard games
Student aged 8

Other pupils talking
Student aged 13

Naughty boy who stop lessons
Student aged 9

Being bullied for being different
Student aged 15

Having "the Michael" taken out of me by other students during lessons and doing it so the teachers don't catch them so when I get frustrated and annoyed and shout out I am the one who gets in trouble. This happens at least once a day on most days and sometimes I even get sent out of class where I can't learn anything.
Student aged 15

4.4.10 Students' further views on extra help and learning

Students were asked three further questions about learning. They were first asked "Do you get extra help with your learning at school?" Of the 392 students who replied, 85% said that they did have extra help[8] whilst 14% said that they did not. They were then asked "How does it help you?" The final question was "Which three things could we change to make it easier for you to learn and do well at school?"

Students gave many different responses when asked how extra help assisted them in their learning but four main types of responses far outnumbered the rest. The most frequent response(19%) was that the pupil received further explanations of what the teacher said and this helped understanding. 18% of students' responses were that the extra help ensured they did better or larger amounts of work. 16% of responses were about the individual help and its availability whilst 13% mentioned reading and literacy support.

Helps me to understand what the teacher is saying
Student aged 13

It helps me understand more on what I am doing
Student aged 17

They are trying to explained again and again and try to understand
Student aged 17

They can repeat what the teacher said sometimes using different words to help me understand what I need to do.
Student aged 7

By asking the teachers what you stuck on - helped me to join in more, and talk to people more
Student aged 16

Help quickly when I need it
Student aged 15

[8] Approximately three quarters of responses came from students in the same 'mixed needs' special school so 'special help' may have had a particular meaning for them.

Helps me with stratogies for my dilexia
Student aged 15

Writting
Student aged 17

Help my rieding and writing and with tests
Student aged 12

4.4.11 Changes suggested by students

The responses to the question of what could be changed to help students' learning produced two principal groups of responses. Students (19%) said that they would like more help and support. Some students were unspecific about the form of this help; others wanted more teaching assistants, more teachers or more time spent one-to-one or in small groups. 17% of the students' responses were requesting more lesson time, generally more of their favourite activities and more enjoyable lessons;' some wanted lessons to be longer and with more homework.

More teachers
Student aged 15

Proper support - people who understand my condition.
Student aged 11

To have lots more help
Student aged 8

Someone to sit with me and tell me what to do
Student aged 11

Choose our own lessons
Student aged 17

Extra homework
Student aged 16

Longer lessons

Student aged 14

Make it stuff i'm interested in
Student aged 11

4.5 Parental confidence in the SEN system

Questions to parents:

- What gives you confidence in the SEN system?
- What reduces your confidence in the SEN system

Questions to school staff and other professionals[9]:

- What gives parents confidence in the SEN system?
- What reduces the confidence that parents have in the SEN system?

Key findings

- The people working within the system were often reported as giving parents confidence; but the system itself was often seen as reducing their confidence.
- A quarter of the parents responding to this survey reported that they had no confidence in the SEN system.
- Parents welcomed positive, informative and supportive communication, including 'being listened to'.
- School staff attitudes and overall competence in SEN matters, together with specific interventions, were seen as fundamental to parental confidence.
- Parents value being consulted and treated as partners.
- Early identification of children's needs and having these needs met are of critical importance for parental confidence in both LA and school practices

4.5.1 Communication

Communication accounted for 9.3% of positive comments by parents, 40% by school staff and 39% by other professionals.

- Confidence-giving:

  Able to talk to a specialist who understands their child's problems
  Anonymous

[9] It should be noted that this was a survey of the views of individuals. Responses do not refer to the same experience or event.

Regular contact
Teaching assistant in a mainstream school

Being kept informed about their children's progress and seeing that appropriate resources and support are provided where necessary
Director of learning services

That they are communicated with well and often during times of change
Head teacher in a special school

Listening to parents point of view
Parent of primary school child with ASD

School making communication channels clear and prompt
Assistant head teacher and SENCo in a mainstream school

Open door policy, where you are approachable
Inclusion leader in a mainstream school

Being able to talk to someone who can explain to them
Operational Manager: Additional Needs - Learning

Somebody who will listen to their problems however trivial
SENCO in a mainstream school

4.5.2 General school issues

For many their experience of the SEN system is largely through the school.

- Confidence giving aspects of school:

The parents appreciated what the schools did for them and their children; they valued good schools which communicated well, supplied a relevant curriculum, set appropriate targets and had good IEPs (Individual Education Plans).

Effective target setting that is child-centred and parent-driven as much as school-led
Education and SEN Consultant and Specialist Dyslexia Teacher

Our current school- [name of school given] they listen, understand and take time to do the job properly-not just a paperwork exercise
Parent of a young homeschooled teenager with Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and ASD

Seeing promised actions implemented and having an effect
Assistant head teacher in a mainstream school

Engagement in the school in general - parents feel confident, welcome and comfortable in the school - often easier at Lower School level. Good communication with ALL parents
Learning Support Advisory Teacher

A curriculum that addresses core deficits of autism
Parent of a primary aged child with ASD

Demonstration by schools that they respect and listen to parents' voice
Course manager

Good relationships with school
Educational psychologist

- Confidence reducing aspects of school:

When stating what reduced their confidence in the SEN system, parents commented on the attitude of some staff towards parents and their children with SEN; a lack of good communication and access to staff; and a school ethos which did not appear to welcome children with SEN. Negative responses concerning 'general school issues' comprised 6% of parents' negative responses, 11% of those of school staff and 8% of responses from other professionals'.

School not using delegated funding
Parent of a child with ASD

Incompetence in schools and ignorance of rights of child
Specialist teacher / SENCO

Platitudes like "He'll catch up, just wait", "There are children much more needy than yours in the class" "We don't believe in labelling children" "Even if you get him privately assessed you won't get any more from school because there is no money" and more...
Dyslexia service manager

The parents feel they are only involved when their offspring have broken the rules
Assessment and Advisory teacher for SEN

Schools are being asked to 'listen', they already listen, but they don't know what to do with what they hear
Parent of a primary aged child with complex needs

Parents' wishes can be overruled by SENCOs who have never met your child
Parent of a young primary aged child with difficulties including Speech, language and communication needs and multisensory impairments

Take off SENCO register without agreement by parents
Parent of a primary school child with a specific learning difficulty

Teachers fitting SEN provision in after their targets & other obligations
Teacher, special school

No recognition of child's individual needs
Learning support tutor in FE

Failure to provide what we say we will
Student Progress and Development Leader in a mainstream school

4.5.3 Support at school

- Confidence giving:

Positive responses about school support accounted for just 2% of parents' responses, 6% of those by school staff and 5% of the other professionals' responses. The other professionals and school staff groups were likely to state that it was not just the support provided for the children but the interventions which were carried out.

Gets daily 1 to 1 help in school

Parent of a young primary aged child with speech, language and communication needs and severe learning difficulties

Giving the support when needed
Parent of a young primary school child with specific learning difficulties and speech, language and communication needs

Having appropriate support put into place in terms of intervention and in mainstream classroom
Specialist teacher

Their son/daughter receiving the help needed
Peripatetic Dyslexia/Literacy specialist Teacher for the KS4 Pupil Referral Service

Individual programmes designed specifically for their child
Head of primary department and complex needs in a special school

That the school give the support my daughter needs
Parent of primary aged child with a physical disability

Appropriate interventions
Assistant SENCO

- Confidence reducing:

Dissatisfaction with the lack of support or help for the children comprised 2% of parents' responses. School staff (9% of responses) and the other professionals (6% of their responses) also mentioned this as a significant issue.

Not enough teaching support
Parent of a primary aged child with severe learning difficulties

School not allowing child to have extra support during school day
Speech and language therapist/dyslexia tutor

In her previous school, which was a "normal" school, there was not help at all. The ignored her and her needs to the greater degree letting her do nothing, play on the computer or draw

Parent of a teenager with specific learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

Support is not provided in line with recommendations
Senior practitioner

No intervention undertaken by the school
Specialist visiting teacher

A school's inability to put in extra support due to lack of expertise or funding.
Inclusion manager

4.5.4 School staff

- Confidence giving:

When the positive qualities of the school SEN team of head teachers, teachers, SENCOs and support staff are aggregated, we find that 17% of responses by school staff, 12% by parents and 8% by other professionals apply to this area.

The proactive and sympathetic SEN staff in his school
Parent of a teenager with specific learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

An excellent school head
Parent of a teenager with a range of difficulties including severe sensory impairments

Excellent SENCO at the local school
Parent of a primary aged child with a range of difficulties including speech, language and communication needs

Teachers willing to take responsibility
Educational psychologist

SENCO is a member of the Leadership Team and is a champion for their rights
Assistant head teacher in a mainstream school

Staff who have expertise with SEN pupils
Principal of a special school

A teaching staff that understands the child and his/her needs
SENCO in a mainstream school

Dedicated and enthusiastic specially trained teachers
Parent of a young teenager with multiple sensory impairments and speech, language and communication difficulties.

Teacher & LSA expertise and knowledge
Headteacher in a mainstream school

The school staff were often viewed positively owing to the way in which they dealt with parents and the knowledge and skills they displayed. In contrast, lack of expertise, knowledge, training, and understanding of the school staff working with children with SEN was a recurrent theme: it was commented on by 8% of parents', 5% of school staff and 4% of other professionals' responses.

- Confidence reducing:

Lack of staff knowledge to deal with the severity of SEN in mainstream
Faculty head, mainstream school

Inadequate knowledge of SENCOs
Parent of a primary aged child with a range of difficulties including specific learning difficulties and a visual impairment

Lack of staff with specific SEN training of any kind - should be automatic part of training
Retired SENCO

Not enough specialist teachers to meet most children's needs
Anonymous

A poor SENCO
Teacher in a mainstream school

Teachers lack of training to meet the needs of special needs children

Parent of a secondary school aged child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and ASD

4.5.5 Local authorities, other agencies, other professionals and their working practices

- Confidence giving:

Parents often commented positively on individuals they were involved with out of school. These included non-school and unspecified staff, professionals such as educational psychologists, medical staff, therapists, local authority staff and other organisations such as parent partnerships: 13% of responses by parents, 11% by school staff and 19% of responses by the other professionals themselves.

Individuals who go beyond the call of duty to support
Parent of a pre-school child with ASD, speech, language and communication difficulties and severe learning difficulties

Good relationships with external agencies which give advice and monitor pupil progress
Assistant head in a mainstream school

Knowing that everyone involved with their child is communicating with one another to build up a clear picture of the child's strengths and needs regardless of whether they work in LA, NHS etc
Anonymous

Staff who can empathise with the child to understand what is being experiencing, in order that solutions can be found
Dyslexia coordinator

That some professionals are willing to speak out for the rights of our son
Parent of a teenager with ASD and severe learning difficulties

The opportunity to work in partnership with a Local Authority and a specified placement (the named school) that have a track record of delivering the elements of provision that stem from the careful and insightful analysis of a particular child's special educational needs
Principal of a special school

When professionals say in public what they say in private
CEO of a charity

Staff offer quality customer service by being honest and rigorous in delivering the processes
Operations manager SEN

LA's who look for solutions and think of the child's needs before how much it is going to cost.
MSI education advisor

- Confidence reducing

16% of parents' responses, 3% by school staff and 4% of responses by other professionals commented on local authorities (LAs), their working practices and poor management, the criteria set by LAs for statements, their funding arrangements, attitude to parents, and the fact that the LAs are responsible for both assessment and funding. :

The people who have the pay for the additional needs are also the ones employing to specialist advisers - a massive conflict of interest
Parent of a primary aged child with ASD

In my LEA - the system is anything other than transparent
Educational psychologist

Local authority failing pupils with exceptional needs
Parent of a student with ADHD

Poor communication by LEA and school, parents' opinions not valued.
Assistant head teacher in a special school

Local Authorities who feel that it is alright to provide a generic education for children with SEN's and not to meet individual needs
MSI education advisor

Local authority officers running the system against the interests of the child
Parent of a young adult with a specific learning difficulty and speech, language and communication needs

Patronising attitude of LA
Parent of a primary aged child with ASD and severe learning difficulties

Lack of respect by the L.A. of the parents concerns and wishes, especially when the provision is bad and you request out of authority placement.
Parent of a teenager with moderate learning difficulties

Being made to jump through hoops to satisfy local authority bureaucracy
Service coordinator

- *Non-specific*

Some responses were unspecific and did not attribute blame to any institution but stated that poor working practices such as a lack of knowledge, communication, information and transparency were all likely to reduce confidence in the SEN system (10% parental responses, 19% school staff, 24% other professionals).

Attitude of some professionals
Early years consultant

Decisions already made before consultation
Autism outreach teacher

Decisions not explained sufficiently
SENCO in a mainstream school

The lack of contact we have had with the 'system' despite the fact that our son is severely disabled and needs 1:1 support 24 hours a day. Some ongoing contact throughout his education and into adulthood might make the day to day situation and future prospects less daunting/terrifying!
Parent of a teenager with ASD and severe learning difficulties

Dismissing parent's concerns as 'over anxious' or 'blaming' parents for their child's difficulties especially for impairments like ADHD, Asperger's etc.
Parent partnership officer

Conflicting advice on when/how to start the statement process - some professionals said as soon as possible, others said wait until she is almost school age (incidentally, we think the asap answer was the best one)
Parent of a pre-school child with moderate learning difficulties.

4.5.6 Involvement of parents

Just 3% of the parents' responses stated that their involvement with the system gave them confidence. By contrast, 19% of the school staffs' responses and 24% of those by the other professionals saw it as confidence-giving.

- Confidence-giving:

  That the system listens to what I have to say about my child then acts upon it.
  Parent of a young adult (at a residential specialist college) with a physical disability and severe learning difficulties

  That our child's voice is heard
  Parent of a young primary aged child with speech, language and communication difficulties and ASD

  Being consulted. They know their child best
  Sensory support teacher

  Feeling they are heard and supported
  SENCO at an independent mainstream school

  Easy access to information about the process
  Pastoral manager to include outreach

  Clear lines of communication about successes and difficulties
  Parent partnership coordinator

- Confidence-reducing:

Parents commented upon the negative attitudes towards them and their children by both the schools and the LAs and 5% of their responses show negative attitudes from unspecified individuals. These included the fact they were not listened to or were allowed to be involved

and the lack of support received. 7% of school staff and 13% of other professionals' responses identified this as an issue.

Parents and pupils are not listened to and are expected to except whatever is given to them without argument or question.
Parent of a teenager with a wide range of difficulties including severe learning difficulties and a visual impairment

A transmitted feeling of nuisance or inadequacy
Senior project manager

Parents being accused of over exaggerating child's needs.
Parent of a young primary aged child with ASD and a specific learning difficulty

Failure to take their concerns seriously or thought to be a 'fussy parent'
Specialist teacher

Does not consider parents wishes as important
Parent of a young teenager with a range of difficulties including profound and multiple learning difficulties

Lack of support of finding a place for their child
Internal exclusion manager

4.5.7 Needs assessed and met

- Confidence-giving

2% of parents' comments concerned their children's needs being recognised, assessed and met, with actions promised actually carried out and that this gave them confidence; 17% of responses by school staff and 10% by other professionals' also emphasised this.

That his needs were noticed early
Parent of a young primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and speech, language and communication needs

That speech and language impairments are now being recognised
Parent of a primary aged child with speech, language and communication needs

Action happening to address issues as soon as possible

Teacher and SpLD home tutor

School really understanding child's needs and actually doing something about it
SENCO in a mainstream school

That disabilities of dyslexia, ADD, dispraxia are open and discussed not ignored as child being naughty
Dyslexia support teacher

Feeling their child's needs are being taken seriously and are being met through the statement of SEN
Consultant teacher

A further 2% of parents' responses commented that confidence in the SEN system had been gained by the way in which the system had proved itself to work, provision promised was delivered and the children were happy and progressing. 17% of school staff responses and 10% of responses by the other professionals stated that parental confidence came through the system being judged by its results.

He seems happy
Parent of a young secondary school aged student with ASD

He has flourished at school
Parent of a student with ASD

How the child has improved
Parent of a young teenager with moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and speech, language and communication needs

Can see significant improvement in child's behaviour/attitude/ability
Learning support tutor

Child's ability to access most areas of learning
Advisory teacher

Increase in confidence/ achievements shown by student
Specialist teacher

- Confidence reducing

The largest number (23%) of parents' responses expressed little confidence in the system, generally along the lines of "don't have much confidence" or "nothing".

How can a parent prove that the school is not meeting a child's needs???
Parent of a teenager with ASD

NOTHING at the moment - we have to fight and tell them their jobs and state what the COP states back to them to get help
Parent of a student with a range of difficulties including ASD and multisensory impairments

Nothing, I had to fight all the way for everything I got and it still was inadequate
Parent of a child with epilepsy, speech language and communication needs, and severe learning difficulties

Nothing. The parents who come to us have been failed by the system and cannot get those in authority to listen. For someone to listen and act on what they hear would give confidence.
Acting manager of a carers centre

The parents I speak to have very little confidence in the SEN system.
Specialist teacher

We don't think people have confidence in the system once they have begun to experience it.
Parent support group leaders

NOTHING. The Local Authority will not listen and make false claims over provision.
Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties

4.6 How well the SEN system works

The professionals were asked two questions not asked of the parents.
Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- What works well in the SEN system?
- What doesn't work well in the SEN system

Key findings

- The responses covered a wide range of elements of the system.
- School staff and other professionals appreciated the expert input from local authorities and other agencies
- Although many professionals liked the idea of delegated funding, just as many did not, citing a lack of ring-fencing for SEN and the fact that there was no apparent monitoring to ensure that it was actually spent on SEN.
- Lack of funding was understood but the time it took to receive funding was not.
- Some regarded the SEN system was regarded by some as bureaucratic, complex, difficult to initiate and overly long.
- Some argued for more special schools as some children with SEN 'could or should never be integrated into mainstream schools', whilst others believed that there should be no special schools and inclusion could work very well but not whilst special schools still existed.
- Other responses commented on conflict in a system that promotes inclusion while emphasising performance tables.
- The importance of correct placement was mentioned. Specialist provision, in units or special schools was seen as important but the supply of places was a concern.
- Responses saw knowledgeable, skilled and trained SENCOs, teachers and support staff were cited as highly beneficial. But badly paid, unskilled and untrained staff put children with SEN at risk.

4.6.1 Schools and their staff

8% of responses from school staff and 4% from other professionals stressed the importance of caring, dedicated, trained and skilled staff. 4% of school staff responses and 6% of other professionals' replies to "What doesn't work well in the SEN system?" expressed concern about qualities of schools and staff were not all that one might hope for, with comments about lack of expertise, training and inflexibility. The lack of appropriate staffing in some schools was also mentioned.

- 'Works well'

  Dedicated individuals who will fight the "system" to ensure that the young people they are responsible for get the provision they need

  Principal of a special school

  Having the training to understand SEN difficulties

Special needs teaching assistant

Good well - qualified support staff and tutors who know how to use them
Inclusion officer

Dedicated, trained staff eg experienced and knowledgable SENCOs
SEN Adviser & Tribunal Representative

The goodwill of staff involved
SEN teacher in a mainstream school

- 'Does not work well"

Lack of training for staff - unqualified staff working with the most challenging children!
Reading Recovery teacher

Lack of expertise to help the child stay in school and achieve
Parent partnership officer

Inflexibilty of staffing in schools. e.g. Too many support staff in Secondary Schools or not at the right time in Primary Schools.
Sensory support teacher

Limited understanding of inclusion among school leadership
Specialist teacher for autism

Ensuring that individual teaching staff fully understands the needs of a deaf child in their class. Difficulties in ensuring schools and staff are deaf aware.
Anonymous

4.6.2 SENCOs

SENCOs were specifically mentioned by school staff (5% of responses) and other professionals (4%) respectively. A good SENCO was considered important as was allowing SENCOs enough time to do their work rather than having a full teaching commitment. Some responses also argued that SENCOs should have high status and be placed on the schools Senior Management Team (SMT) to place a greater focus on inclusion and put the children

with SEN at the heart of school policies and practice. The SENCOs' knowledge of the children and their ability to train staff were also mentioned. A few responses mentioned the restrictions on many SENCO's roles.

- 'Works well'

  Having a dedicated SENCO with no other responsibilities
  SENCO in a mainstream school

  Professional SENCo with appropriate time to do the job and administrative support
  SENCO / specialist teacher assessor

  Well qualified SENCos/Inclusion managers who are part of SMT
  Team Manager Learning Support Advisory Teachers

  Good SENCOs who make time to find the right support for each child
  Director of learning services

  When sencos are knowledgeable and effective
  Headteacher in a mainstream school

- 'Does not work well'

  Lack of time for SENCOs, particularly in primary, to fulfil role
  Parent partnership officer

  Change of emphasis on SENCO to Assistant Head with responsibility for SEN. Don't have knowledge, commitment nor funds.
  Dyslexia specialist

  Low status of SENCo in school systems and lack of time to do the job
  SENCO / specialist teacher in a mainstream school

  Increasing lack of respect for SENCo status - lower now than ever
  SENCO, mainstream school

  Ineffective Sencos that wait until Y6 to identify needs of children
  Class teacher, mainstream school

4.6.3 Support staff/teaching assistants

Respondents noted the benefit of support staff being knowledgeable and committed and, if used correctly, highly supportive to children's learning. Respondents with concerns about support staff's lack of training and experience argued that children with the most challenging needs were being supported by the lowest paid, least experienced and least trained members of staff.

- 'Works well'

  Support staff that grow to know the kids have been excellent at helping the students work to their full potential.
  Literacy coordinator

  TAs are often a very valuable asset to promote learning
  SEN advisor

  Teaching assistant hours are specified on statements so school cannot make cuts
  Inclusion coordinator
  Efficient use of the TAs including using their strengths and training
  SENCO mainstream school

  Where there is a Learning Assistant involved in assisting & consolidating the lesson taught to the student in their outreach session, this has a profound, positive effect on the students rate of learning.
  Primary Outreach Literacy Support Teacher

- 'Does not work well'

  ..... a consideration that "anyone" can teach special children and it doesn't really matter anyway.
  Teacher, special school

  Adapting successful models such as TEACH and PECS but always implementing them incorrectly and half heartedly causing the systems to fail. VERY WRONG
  Private ABA tutor

  Not enough training for support staff enabling them to assist in the child's development in the most beneficial way

Teaching assistant, mainstream school

Help not always fairly distributed for pupils who get a set number of hours of TA support, I don't always know when they will have support in my lessons so hard to plan
Teacher, mainstream school

Many support staff do not push students merely appease them.
Teacher, mainstream school

Non Qualified teachers (TA's/HLTAs) supporting our pupils with the most complex needs
Team manager, learning support advisory teachers

Children with the most (complex and severe) educational needs are supported by the least experienced, least trained and least paid memebers of staff e.g. Teacher Assistance. Teachers seem to be deferring their responsibilities of the children with significant SEN to the TAs which does not always ensure that the children are best served. In doing so teachers are not becoming competent and confident teachers of children of SEN where as TAs seem to developing more expertise in this area.
Educational psychologist

4.6.4 Support

School staff and, less often other professionals, mentioned other aspects of support, including booster lessons and the fact that support was provided both for specific domains and for one-to-one needs. Negative remarks were almost invariably about a lack of available support and the problem of challenging children in classes where additional support was not provided.

- 'Works well'

  Additional support when it is identified as being needed
  Inclusion manager

  Individual reading and spelling tuition
  Instructor in a mainstream school

  For dyslexic or specific learning difficulty students structured individual tuition.
  Dyslexia specialist

Specialist small group work and individual sessions where appropriate
Speech and language therapist

- ‘Does not work well’

Lack of support due to funding (I'm sick of being told it's in the budget) and additional high level needs aren't able to be met
Learning support coordinator in a mainstream school

Incorrect or little provision for individual pupils.
Specialist teacher

Children who need additional support not receiving it because their behaviour is not extreme enough
Teacher in a mainstream school

Many learners do not receive the support that they are entitled to and desperately need
Specialist teacher

4.6.5 Teachers and teaching methods

School staff (6% of responses) and other professionals (5%) commented positively on differentiated, specialised and individualised teaching provided by caring, dedicated SEN aware teachers. In response to ‘What does not work well in the SEN system?’ 7% of responses by both school staff and other professionals mentioned such concerns as lack of differentiation, inflexibility of teachers to adapt the curriculum, a lack of support to help them do so, little time to liaise with support staff or SENCOs and a lack of training.

- ‘Works well’

Individual qualified teachers dedication
Retired assistant SENCO

Individual teachers and TAs often do a brilliant job, well beyond what could reasonably be expected
Training Principal/Specialist Teacher

Teachers who have the compassion and time to understand and address needs of the pupil
SENCO, mainstream school

Specialist teachers
Support teacher in a special school

- 'Does not work well'

Inflexible curriculum
Inclusion coordinator

Having to push lower ability pupils through 'academic' hoops instead of catering for pupil's own abilities
Specialist teacher

New Teachers with very little training in SEN. Teachers in Secondary and upper Primary Levels with no understanding of child development or how to teach reading.
Specialist teacher

Not enough training for classroom/subject teachers to enable them to work appropriately with SEN students
Specialist teacher, mainstream school

Not having the confidence to seek help/a second opinion about a child who may be causing the teacher some concern
Head of learning skills in an independent school

Methods used to assess achievement disadvantages the SpLD learner.
Course manager

4.6.6 Placement

School staff and other professionals both mentioned the role that correct placement plays in the system. School staff and the other professionals (6% and 11% of their respective responses) stated that inclusion in mainstream schools, units, and special schools were important parts of the SEN system. However, inclusion into mainstream schools was also a

concern, particularly when it involved schools with large classes or with a strong focus on performance tables. Lack of places in special schools or units was also mentioned. Parents rarely mentioned placement in their responses.

- 'Works well':

  Some pupils very well catered for in mainstream setting.
  Faculty head, mainstream school

  Children can be matched to a particular school environment which suits their individual needs
  Principal of a special school

  Inclusion Resource Bases in mainstream schools, Special schools and high level of funding for Inclusion
  Inclusion manager in a mainstream school

  Schools that operate a true response to providing for need, which does not mean identical provision for all
  Retired teacher

  Supporting a wider range of needs in mainstream and esp progress of pupils in enhanced resource schools with specialist provision
  Head of SEN and disabilities

  Conflict between Standards agenda and Inclusion agenda for class teachers
  Specialist teacher for SpLD

- 'Does not work well':

  Children with severe special needs being placed in mainstream school with teachers and staff who are not specialists in that area.
  SENCO, mainstream school

  Inappropriate placements - some SEN children are damaged by being in mainstream.
  Faculty head, mainstream school

  Lack of Special School places and Special school places being reduced.
  Assistant head of a mainstream school

Excluded pupils left without adequate education for too long
Parent partnership area coordinator

Classes are too big, and its pretty difficult for teachers to cope with even typically developing children, let alone extra demands of those with SEN
Speech and language therapist

4.6.7 Local authorities and other agencies

7% of school staff responses and 10% of other professionals' responses saw the involvement of the LAs and other organisations and professionals as part of what worked well. The majority of responses were about the access to these bodies and the advice and support received from them. 13% of school staff responses and 11% of other professionals' responses commented about the quality and working practices of the services provided.

- 'Works well':

Advice and support of external professionals, such as OT, EP, behavioural support, SAL etc
Inclusion manager

Access to peripatetic experts such as Deaf/ vision / OTs SALTs/ Specialist literacy teachers / autism experts.
Reintegration room manager

I think the service provided by the Learning Support Advisory Teacher is good - thorough assessment and comprehensive advice given to teaching staff
SEN tutor

Educational psychology support here is excellent - though it is a lottery I realise!
Leader of inclusion and welfare in a mainstream school

Parent Partnership service.
Assistant head, mainstream school

In those LA's where there is a willingness to think innovatively about individual need and allocate budget share to low incidence and highly demanding special needs
Consultant in deaf/blind and multi-sensory impairment

- ‘Does not work well’:

Conflicting and confusing advice from behaviour support team. LEA
Headteacher, mainstream school

Lack of experts provided by LEA. These have been axed to economise, a dreadful step in 1990s
Reintegration room manager

Children require a range of facilities - LA in-house policy restricts this
Principal of a special school

Deliberate manipulation of the system by LA officers
Head of an educational advisory service

Finite resources of speech and language therapy service (Children in our school see a therapist once a year only!)
SENCO, mainstream school

Educational Psychologists, the service is dreadful, unfocused and not enough to make much of a difference to secondary school outcomes
SENCO, mainstream school

LEA's continual use of out-of-date therapy reports.
Occupational therapist

4.6.8 The SEN system itself

Some school staff commented that the processes in the SEN system were effective (2%) and that children with SEN were given a good education as a result (5%). 8% of school staff and 11% of the other professionals’ responses suggested that the system was complex, overly long, dependent on unnecessary amounts of evidence, difficult to initiate and focused on children who had already ‘failed’ rather than preventing failure. There were also concerns about paperwork and bureaucracy (6% school staff responses and 3% of other professionals’).

- ‘Works well’

I think that it does help a lot of children as long as they can fit in with the system
Private tutor

Systems in place to improve the skills of those working on a day to day basis with children with special needs
Senior educational psychologist

The system can work well when everyone involved with it wants to make it work for the child and their family, and not as a bureaucratic battlefield.
Consultant child psychologist

There is a structure for all those involved with the child, including parents. When used properly and in schools that place a great deal of emphasis on SEN, with a effective SENCO and good ways of working with parents, pupils with SEN do well.
Learning support advisory teacher

The system when properly understood and worked with offers extra support, resources and expertise to pupils
Pastoral manager to include outreach

- 'Does not work well'

It all takes too long - a week is a very long time in the life of a child.
Teacher in a mainstream school

It is combative and to be frank at times I have observed outright bullying of parents who are trying to do their best for their child.
Consultant clinical psychologist

Lack of openness and transparency
Assistant team manager

Having to produce unending amounts of evidence from 'professionals' that a child needs support. I believe I am a professional. But my views are never enough.
SENCO in a mainstream school

Children often have to 'fail' before they qualify for support - instead of schools being able to put in adequate additional support at an early stage when concerns are first identified
SENCO, mainstream school

Discontinuation of the statementing process - some schools think that if children don't have statement they don't have special needs. These children would have had a statement in the past.
Specialist dyslexia teacher

An emphasis on "systems" and "accomodations" rather than individuals. An example being the needs of a severely dyslexic child; whilst accomodations are definately required in the classroom and helpful to the child, direct instruction to teach the child to read and write is also essential. No amount of "accomodations" would achieve this.
SENCO, mainstream school

Continuity of paperwork especially between school and college results in needless reassessments especially for exam arrangements
Additional learning support tutor

Far too much paperwork to do, although can't think of a way to improve this
SEN teacher in a mainstream school

4.6.9 Funding, resources and provision

The terms ‘funding’, ‘resources’ and ‘provision’ were used interchangeably by the respondents. If a response mentioned ‘provision’, in terms of support, the response was coded with other support responses. However, if the meaning was unclear, they were coded with ‘funding’.
3% of school staff and 4% of other professional comments mentioned positive aspects of funding. Responses commented on funding for specialist teaching and for supporting learners, as well as the funds attached to statements. 15% of school staff and 12% of other professionals’ responses mentioned concerns about funding.

- ‘Works well’:
  Additional money is made available to meet needs
  Manager VI support team

Adequate funding for support staff
Deputy head in a mainstream school

The ability to get a fair and equitable share of available funding to schools to target support for vulnerable pupils with the most complex needs and as early as possible.
SEN Strategy and Professional Services Group Manager / PEP

Dedicated funding ringfenced for a child
SENCO, mainstream school

Funding linked to the statement
Teacher of the deaf

- 'Does not work well':

Delegated funding to schools, it doesn't always reach the SEN children!
one-to-one support provider

Money devolved to school for SEN isn't always spent on SEN
Parent partnership officer

It takes too long to get funding into schools/settings when an 'unexpected need' emerges (e.g. a child moving into the areas unexpectedly)
Team leader

Having to apply constantly for funding and not having all SEN money ring-fenced so that it can 'disappear' into school coffers in some cases
Education and SEN Consultant

Lack of funding to LAs to do the job properly, funding in schools not ringfenced
Team Manager

Funding for preventative early intervention- everyone in authority pays lip service to this but it is never recognised with resources
SENCO, mainstream school

4.7 Parental views on the process of statutory assessment

Questions to parents:

- If your child has a statement or if you've tried to get a statement for your child:
- What did you find helpful about the process?
- What did you find unhelpful about the process?

Key findings

- 19% of the respondents stated that they did not find the statutory assessment process helpful.
- Parents reported that support from individuals and organisations was extremely important and sometimes the only thing that helped them through difficult times.
- Not all parents received the help they wanted. Lack of support, poor attitude and working practices of some schools, individuals and organisations was strongly remarked upon and added greatly to the unhappiness and stress of parents
- Parent Partnership services were generally considered extremely helpful and supportive although some parents felt that they were not impartial enough and worked too closely with local authorities
- Respondents saw the procedure of statutory assessment as complex and bureaucratic to the extent that other parents might not be able to go through it successfully owing to lack of time, money or education.
- Some parents found the process a positive one since it had clear timescales, included parents and gave opportunity for meetings to discuss the children.
- Many parents felt that having the children assessed and diagnosed was beneficial, since it led to others taking the children's needs seriously and provided a complete picture of needs.

4.7.1 Support and information

Over a third (37%) of parents' responses to the question stated that they greatly appreciated the help and support they received from a variety of bodies including Parent Partnership Services, charities, school staff, other parents and Local Authority staff.

- Helpful

  Parent Partnership are wonderful. There was nothing else helpful.

  Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties

We were given advice and information packs from the parent partnership on what to expect and how to approach the process
Parent of a teenager with ASD

Teachers risking alienating their education authority by supporting my child's needs
Parent of a young secondary school aged child with ASD

We were supported by a voluntary sector agency to get a statement when my son was just three. This has followed us from one part of the country to another. Without this early support it is now clear that a statement would not have been provided in time for our son to receive additional support by the time he started school.
Parent of a young primary aged child with a specific learning difficulty and speech, language and communication needs.

I found the support organisations like IPSEA and ACE helpful
Parent of a teenage with ASD

The Educational Psychologist took time to visit at home and talk through the process
Parent of a preschool child with ASD and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The fact that I had a very approachable case officer who I felt I could always contact and check progress with
Parent of a young primary aged child with ASD

The SEN casework team are helpful and generally have a desire to help.
Parent of a teenager with Tourette's Syndrome

- Unhelpful

When asked what they found unhelpful, 44% of parent responses commented on poor support, advice or poor working practices from schools, Local Authorities or just no support at all.

Nobody at anytime explains the statement process to you
Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties

The nobody cares attitude & the feeling you are a bother to them
Parent of a primary aged child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, speech, language and communication needs and ASD

The lack of availability of specialist (non biased) advice for parents (Parent Partnership services are run by the Local Authority! they claim they are not biased, but they are too closely involved with the LAs). A new, neutral, agency should be established for this purpose.
Parent of a secondary school aged child with a range of difficulties including severe ADHD and a specific learning difficulty

The school did nothing to help, not even a leaflet to explain the way it works
Parent of a young primary school child with a suspected complex medical condition

Diagnosis and assessment from professionals outside the school was disregarded and dismissed by the SENCO
Parent of a primary school child with a specific learning difficulty

Local authority approach - you have to fight and fight for every hour of support and all the while your child is missing out on vital early education and support
Parent of a primary age child with ASD

The fact that my county chooses to employ barristers to stand against parents
Parent of a young teenager with moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

The EP's who should be independent are often clearly writing their wording to appease the LEA and to express points that fit in with the provision that the LEA's choice of school can provide for your child.
Parent of a young teenager with ASD

4.7.2 Complexity and bureaucracy

46% of parental responses also found the complexity of the cost, bureaucratic nature, time delays and the process of the system was unhelpful. Some parents felt that others, with less time, money or skills would be prevented from appropriate involvement in statutory assessment.

The length of time - when your child is very stressed in the situation he is in and without appropriate support, the time involved is very lengthy
Parent of a teenager with ASD and speech, language and communication needs.

The time span - early intervention is crucial for autism but it takes the parent up to 12 months to get medical evidence and then another 6 months to get a statement.
Parent of a pre-school child with moderate learning difficulties and ASD

Costly - Very high emotional cost for parents having to focus on and detail everything your child finds harder than a 'normal' child or simply cannot do at all in order to fill in paperwork
Parent of a primary school child with ASD

Persistence and time needed, when we were already distressed and struggling
Parent of a young teenager with ASD

Had to fight every step of the way for it from the age of 4 and still fighting now
Parent of a young teenager with Down's Syndrome and behavioural, social and emotional needs amongst other difficulties.

I felt it was discriminatory - normal children do not have to go through this level of scrutiny to be able to have an appropriate education
Parent of a young adult at college with severe learning difficulties and a physical disability

It was complicated and so seemed unjust to me as I strongly suspect a lot of families would be excluded
Parent of a primary aged child with a specific learning difficulty and speech, language and communication difficulties.

Time Consuming and bureaucratic.
Parent of a young primary school aged child with ASD and a visual impairment

4.7.3 Positive process

However, 10% of parents' responses said that the process itself was helpful, with its clear timescales, the way in which parents were included and the opportunity it gave for meetings to discuss the children.

Having the opportunity to have my say and to be heard

Parent of a primary aged child with a range of difficulties including moderate learning difficulties and a physical disability.

The ability to provide my own 'statement' of experiences to contribute to the assessment
Parent of a pre-school child with special needs including behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and ASD

Clear, well defined timetable
Parent of a young secondary school aged child with ASD

Meetings with all relevant parties to agree action
Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.

It took a while to get the statements but I would say it was in our case quite straightforward.
Parent of two children with Fragile X

Being able to meet before the draft statement was prepared
Parent of a teenager with a range of difficulties including moderate learning difficulties and a hearing impairment

4.7.4 Assessments and reports

12% of parent responses noted the usefulness of the assessments and reports. The positive comments were about aspects such as gaining a diagnosis and the way in which this clearly identified and confirmed the child's difficulties and needs.

My child and I were taken seriously, after years of negativity.
Parent of a home educated child with Asperger's Syndrome

Having reports from different professionals at the same time gave a rounded picture of my daughter's needs
Parent of a young secondary school child with moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.

My child has had a statement since starting school and it was great in that it brought all the professionals together. This provides a holistic view of the child's needs- academically, socially, healthwise and particularly speech and language therapist input.
Parent of a primary aged child with ASD

Insightful as to what we as parents needed to know about our daughter's needs.
Parent of a young primary school aged child with speech, language and communication needs and a visual impairment.

Getting proper assessments done by people with expert knowledge about my child's disability (ie Sense as my child is deaf/blind)
Parent of a primary aged child with a range of special needs including multi-sensory impairments, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and severe learning difficulties.

Those who were unhappy about the assessments and reports cited reasons such as inaccuracies in the reports, assessments being made by professionals who barely met the child and reports dwelling on the child's weaknesses without mentioning strengths at all.

Dragging my child to so many different doctors and other health professionals to get evidence. They would discuss my child's problems in front of him which I knew was detrimental to his confidence.
Parent of primary school child with specific learning difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties.

Some unnecessary repeat assessments eg a community paediatrician had to assess my sons medical needs for the local authority yet my son had several consultants who could have provided this information
Parent of a secondary school child with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, Speech, language and communication needs, ASD, severe learning difficulties and a physical disability

How can an assessment that may take, if you are lucky, half an hour, let that person make a decision on your child's future by the report that they write and may never see that child again.

Parent of a primary age child with a severe learning difficulty, ASD and speech language and communication needs.

4.8 Views on statements

Questions to parents:

- If your child has a statement:
  What is helpful about your child's statement?
  What is unhelpful about your child's statement?

Questions to school staff and other professionals:

- If you work with one or more children with a statement:
  What is helpful about the statement?
  What is unhelpful about the statement?

Key findings

- Parents saw the statement as a document that would provide statutory access to provision, but felt that schools and LAs did not always implement statements in full. Some parents felt that there was little they could do about this.
- Statements were appreciated by parents because they contained information about the children's needs and allowed them to be understood by everyone. School staff and other professionals liked the fact that the statements contained information about the best ways to teach and support the children.
- Statements were not always felt to be an accurate representation of what the children needed, for example, in relation to the hours of therapy included.
- Statement wording was often vague and 'woolly' with provision and support not quantified, or else was so prescriptive that schools and staff felt forced to carry out actions which they considered were not in the best interests of the children.
- Statements were sometimes considered to use complex jargon that was not easy for the lay person or school staff to understand.

As mentioned before, 70% of the parents responding to the questionnaire had children with statements of special educational needs. Statements were a highly emotive subject for many. However it should be remembered that those completing the questionnaire were an unrepresentative, self-selecting group of parents desirous of explaining the difficulties they experienced. As with the other questions, if a respondent felt very strongly about one of the questions, they could write similar answers in all three of the available response slots for the question, thereby increasing the percentage of responses within a category.

4.8.1 Access to provision

The parents, school staff, and other professionals were all asked what they believed to be helpful about statements. The parents' principal reaction to the question (43% of responses) was about the access to provision that a statement provided, whether it be in order to supply funding for specific programmes, support for the child in class, access to funds or the guarantee that the money was ring-fenced.

> *Money for 1:1 hours of support is ring fenced for our son (exceptional need).*
> Parent of young primary aged child with ASD and a visual impairment

> *Gets him into the school he is at*
> Parent of a child with speech, language and communication needs and ASD

> *The fact that it offers him (and the school) adequate support (now): 37.5 hours of 1:1 funding per week - it took 4 years to get that though.*
> Parent of a primary aged child with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and a specific learning difficulty.

> *Provides funding for the school to give her one to one support*
> Parent of a young primary aged child with complex needs including speech, language and communication needs and hearing and visual impairments

> *Being able to ask for additional support such as laptops and anger management training - and getting it.*
> Parent of a young secondary school aged child with ASD

> *It provides for a discretionary payment to meet our child's ABA provision*
> Parent of a primary school aged child with ASD

When school staff and other professionals were asked what they considered to be helpful about statements they had similar views to the parents above, (27% and 18% of responses respectively).

> *It provides resources to meet their needs; without it, the children would get no help at my school.*
> Advanced skills teacher, mainstream school

A Statement is a magic key for parents when looking at Secondary schools, without it they cannot opt for a special school placement
Headteacher, mainstream school

The support is outlined AND RING FENCED!
SENCO, mainstream school

Ensures detailed amount of time with an adult
Teacher in LA literacy team

Child gets designated support - treated as a priority - part of the enormous battle for funds has been won
Learning support tutor

4.8.2 Assessment

Whilst school staff and other professionals' comments focussed upon the information provided as a result of assessment (39% for both school staff and other professionals). Parents (20% of responses) shared this view: all three groups of respondents appreciated the fact that the information on the statement allowed them to have the children's needs clearly explained and identified. The school staff and other professionals particularly appreciated the strategies identified to help them support the child's learning and participation. Parents' responses commented on this area less frequently than other respondents, probably because they had already completed additional questions about the process of getting a statement.

Raises staff / schools awareness of need for support/provision
Head of student services, mainstream school

It goes into detail of specific areas of difficulities for each individual child.
Teaching assistant, mainstream school

The statement, if done properly can give school and parents a clear understanding of a child's needs, all codified in one place and parents feel that their child's needs have been acknowledged by professionals outside of the school.
Parent partnership officer

It gives a clear overview of the child's educational needs
Educational psychologist

It spells out what needs to be done to support the child
SENCO, mainstream school

Sometimes gives valuable recommendations
Assessment and Advisory teacher for SEN, mainstream school

Clear information about practical strategies to support the child
Literacy coordinator, mainstream school

Ways forward - methods and actions suggested by expert to help pupil
Specialist teacher

It describes my son so that anyone who can read it knows what he is like and what his needs are and how to help
Parent of a teenager with speech, language and communication difficulties and ASD

Everyone concerned knows what his additional needs are
Parent of a pre-school child with cerebral palsy with global developmental impairment

4.8.3 Working with children more effectively

The school staff and other professionals also mentioned other ways that the statement could help them work with children more effectively (26% and 31% respectively), included aspects such as the targets listed with their procedures for monitoring and review. They found a statement helpful when it clearly defined provision and support and was not open to misinterpretation.

All inputs are quantified, and so targets can be measures against
Parent of a young primary aged child with severe learning difficulties, a physical disability and a hearing impairment

It make[s] objectives clear to both parents and school
Parent of a young secondary school aged child with ASD

Outlines clear areas for development
Head, special school

It gives clear objectives that are reviewed annually
Deputy SENCO, mainstream school

Clear guidance and regular monitoring of expected outcomes
SENCO mainstream school

Measurable targets
Faculty head mainstream school

Provides a robust mechanism (annual review) for monitoring the child's progress
Parent partnership officer

The Review process ensures everyone gets together at least once a year even in schools where IEP meetings don't happen regularly
Sensory support teacher

Stating clearly the number of hours of support / therapy per week that the child is entitled to (very unusual I have to say, and tends to be the result of lengthy fights between parents and the LEA!)
ABA tutor

When it identifies the additional staffing required, the skills, knowledge qualities and qualification of the staff, as well as the number of hours those staff, including teaching, intervenor, rehab officer, SALT etc
Consultant in deaf/blind and multi-sensory impairment

Number of LSA hours support clearly identified and stated.
Specialist teacher, mainstream school

4.8.4 The statement as a legal document

The parents (11% of their responses to the question) appreciated the fact that a statement is a legal document, a way to safeguard their child's entitlement and a tool to ensure that

appropriate action was taken. This was also mentioned by the school staff and other professionals (4% and 7% respectively).

It entitles her to a lot more help through her life. It is absolutely nessessary to get her through her life.
Parent of a schoolchild with ASD

Ensures that the support my child needs is documented and actioned upon.
Parent of a young primary aged child with a specific learning difficulty and speech, language and communication difficulties.

It is legally enforceable
Parent of 3 children, all with special needs and severe learning difficulties

That it is an acknowledged legal paper so I do not have to fight for every little bit of support my child requires. it is written down and legally binding on school /local authority to provide the resources
Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, social and emotional needs, specific learning difficulty and ASD.

The statement is a legally binding document and helps parents to feel more secure about the support offered to their child.
Parent Partnership Officer

Since the statement is a legal document it can be used by advisory teachers to back up their advice to schools and ensure the appropriate provision is made.
Specialist advisory teacher.

Local authority have a clear and statutory duty- not just responsibility of parent and school
Integrated services strategy manager

4.8.5 Content of statement

All three groups of respondents were also asked what they felt to be unhelpful about statements. Parents expressed unhappiness about aspects of provision (14% of their responses), including items missing from statements, the amount of therapy written into the statement and perceived inadequacies of available support. Some parents also stated that

on statements that did not specify and quantify provision; this could result in provision not being implemented and hard to 'enforce'.

Provision in general is not specified except in vague and unenforceable language
Parent of a secondary school aged pupil with ASD and moderate learning difficulties

Doesn't include important things I requested due to cost
Parent of a young primary aged child with severe learning difficulties and speech, language and communication needs.

It doesn't cover After School Club hours or any other wrap-around childcare so have none
Parent of a primary school aged child with moderate learning difficulties, speech language and communication difficulties and a physical disability

Refusal to put speech therapy in statutory provision so not delivered
Parent of a teenager with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, profound and multiple learning difficulties and a physical disability.

It does not cover the O/T and speech therapy he requires
Parent of young teenager with a specific learning difficulty

It does not specify specialist equipment that he needs e.g. computer aids, special chair, cutlery etc.
Parent of a teenager with moderate learning difficulties, multi-sensory impairments and ASD

Lack of specificity in the provision leads to the fact that we are completely dependent on who is in the (secondary) school's Inclusion Team to cater for our son's needs; turnover or new prioritisations in needs may result in different approaches, thus stability and continuity is not guaranteed.
Parent of two children with specific learning difficulties

4.8.6 Implementation

14% of parents' comments expressed concern that provision listed in the statement was not necessarily implemented by either the school or the local authority, mentioning, for example,

a lack of funds or the lack of trained staff. Sometimes parents were concerned about the way in which provision was implemented, for example in relation to schools' interpretation of the statement's requirements.

It not being followed by the LEA
(Parent of a teenager with ASD, behaviour difficulties and specific learning difficulties, excluded from secondary school)

Too much responsibility placed on class room assistants to provide medical care, and therepies
(Parent of a school aged child with problems including speech, language and communication difficulties and physical disabilities)

The statement is fine - it was the school's failure to implement the advice on it that was the problem.
Parent of a young, primary aged child with ASD, currently excluded from school

That the words are not being translated into a level of support that enables him to have his entitlement to a full time education
Parent of a primary aged child with a range of complex behavioural, emotional and social needs.

The teaching assistant was meant to be one to one but ended up being one to five
Parent of a primary age home educated child with ASD, specific learning difficulties and multi-sensory impairments

Things not being delivered, eg SALT [speech and language therapy]
Parent of a primary school child with Down's Syndrome

The fact that the LEA seem to ignore what is on the statement despite having had 3 annual reviews
Parent of a secondary school aged pupil with a range of difficulties including speech, language and communication needs and multisensory impairments.

4.8.7 Statement writing

Many parental responses (18%) commented on the way in which the statement was written. Some parents said that the language was often vague and non-specific whilst others found it

to be complex and full of jargon. The use of template documents was also criticised. The school staff and other professionals had similar views about the contents of the statement, 51% of both school staff and other professionals responses were about the way the statement was either full of jargon and complex or vague and 'woolly'. Objectives were seen as unhelpful when they were too broad, vague or sometimes even unreachable; there were concerns about provision and support not being quantified or, in contrast, being so prescriptive that staff could not do what they felt was best for the child. All three groups mentioned concerns that statement writers did not always appear conversant with either the child or the type of special need and that template statements were used which often had little bearing on the child's needs.

- Wording

  The statement has a lot of educational jargon
  Parent of young primary school aged child with a range of special educational needs including moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, social and emotional needs and ASD

  Our particular statement is badly written and probably too detailed - but that's not really a problem s we have a good understanding with school
  Parent of a young primary aged child with Down's Syndrome

  The use of wording so that 30 hours one to one support becomes access to. This could be none, 1 hour or anything.
  Parent of a young secondary school aged pupil with moderate learning difficulties

  Vague 'regular...' remarks with no comment as to frequency. Haley's comet is 'regular', after all. Not frequent, though.
  Parent of two primary school aged children with ASD

  Vague language e.g. use of regular (once every year is regular)
  Parent of a young adult with moderate learning difficulties and a visual impairment (currently at college)

  Taken from a template, I had to insist they personalise it to reflect my son.
  Parent of a schoolchild with speech, language and communication difficulties and a severe learning difficulty

  The LEA consistently sending me updates with the wrong child's name at the top of it.

Parent of a primary school aged child with a range of difficulties including severe learning difficulties and a hearing impairment

- Targets and Objectives

Targets that say things like small group support with literacy - what does that mean?
Deputy SENCO, mainstream school

They often list an unrealistic number of individual learning objectives which just can't be delivered in a mainstream setting when a child is included in every lesson.
SENCO mainstream school

Progress can be made faster than Statement allows - targets are too easily achieved.
Faculty head, mainstream school

Targets can often be too vague with no clear impact measures
Deputy head, mainstream school

Objectives can be very broad and unSMART
Learning support teacher,

- Provision

Specified hours - in my experience these are not realistic - if you want a child to 'catch up' or progress reasonably well so that the child notices improvement. More spent early on would mean that children with literacy problems could progress sufficiently for their statement to be rescinded. Sometimes a huge list of interventions is recommended and only a few hours to cover the lot - not realistic - even if the specialist resources recommended were available (OT, Speech and language).
Learning support teacher, mainstream school

Sometimes the type of provision named is not appropriate to meet that child's needs
Curriculum support worker, outreach team.

Sometimes provision is not detailed, quantified or specified
SENCO, mainstream school

Can be prescriptive and not address all difficulties that the child presents with
SENCO, mainstream school

The provision suggested is not available eg. no room in a SEN unit
Headteacher, mainstream school

Statement Authors

Written by someone who has had minimal/no contact with child
Specialist teacher, mainstream school

Not always written by people with enough expertise in the field.
SENCO, mainstream school

Most statements are 'cut and paste' affairs written to fit LA criteria rather than to describe the child
SENCO, mainstream school

4.8.8 The statutory assessment process and afterwards

The school staff and other professionals also commented on the process of statutory assessment and what happens afterwards (30% and 25% of responses respectively). Many mentioned the length of time involved, as was the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy. The complexity and failure of the review system was the most frequently mentioned aspect of this area: respondents commented on how often the statements became out of date and how difficult they were to change. This was also mentioned by the parents in 15% of their responses.

- Time taken

It is very slow and difficult to obtain a statement
SEN support teacher, mainstream school

The length of the process from referral to statement
SENCO, children's centre

The statement process takes 6 months. That's a hell of a long time when you're an infant school child
SENCO, mainstream school

Mindless form filling and repetition of info for info's sake
Assistant Head, mainstream school

It produces too much paper work that does not necessarily benefit the pupil's progress
Specialist support teacher, mainstream school

- Review process

Annual Review forms - need to be condensed - the same information is asked repeatedly.
SENCO, mainstream school

It needs to be updated more often as the needs are not always appropriate to a child developing and making progress
SENCO

Time taken for amendments to be made so can be working with an outdated document because the student has made progress and it is not reflected quickly enough in the new document to boost the student's self-esteem
Deputy inclusion manager, mainstream school

Having to argue with the LA if there are any changes to it even though our son is never going to recover
Parent of a teenager with ASD, severe learning difficulties and epilepsy

It's not particularly a very "organic" document. It seems difficult to update or change aspects of it simply to reflect the progress of the child. Also as a parent you can be afraid of requesting changes in case you lose some of the provision that is in place to help look after your child.
Parent of a young primary aged child with special needs including moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and ASD.

LEA says it can't be updated - just added to, so everyone first sees 'bad' info on her from when she was 5
Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties and ASD

The wording which was written when he was 3 and now he is 13 and the LEA still wanted to use it!
Parent of a teenager with ASD

My child's statement was first written when she was approx. 4 years old and is written about her as a toddler. The LEA have refused to re-write it to show her as a 9 year old at a mainstream school. It is an outdated document.
Parent of a primary school child with Down's Syndrome

4.9 How to improve the SEN system

Question to parents, school staff and other professionals:

- How can we improve the SEN system?

Key findings

- The wide range of views resulted in very low response rates for most categories.
- Greater training and recognition for those working with students with SEN was desired.
- Respondents suggested that SENCOs should only be concerned with that role and should always be members of the schools' SMTs.
- Respondents wanted the SEN system to be made less bureaucratic, less complex, more open and transparent, easier to access and more flexible.
- Funding was felt to be inadequate and delegated funds were considered a mixed blessing - clear auditing and monitoring processes were requested. Parents wanted a greater say in how the money was spent; some requested an individual budget for their child to use as they considered appropriate.

Parents, school staff and other professionals were all asked "How can we improve the SEN system". The answers to these questions covered a huge array of issues with few of them producing larger numbers of responses. Answers ranged from issues to do with the system adopting a different type of focus, such as looking at the potential of the children rather than their failings (8% parental responses, 2% school staff and 4% other professionals) to the involvement of parents (12% parents' responses, 2% school staff and 6% of the other professionals responses). As discussed previously, the parents who completed the questionnaire are possibly those most likely to have experienced problems in the past, wishing to improve the system by highlighting what did not work for them.

4.9.1 Training and employment

Responses often mentioned the training and employment of school staff. It was suggested that not only should staff be trained in SEN but there should also be specialists within the schools for different needs and that all staff should be aware and understanding of SEN issues. Such remarks were made in 8% of the parents' responses, 18% of the school staff responses and 17% from the other professionals.

Encourage it as a career path - since my child has been going to his school the SENCO role has changed four times and is changing yet again for next terms!
Parent of a primary school child with dyslexia

All schools to have a full time SENCO who can deliver specialist teaching to SEN pupils and carry out other SENCO responsibilities
SENCO in a mainstream school

Be realistic about the demands of the SENCO job. It is huge if done properly.
SENCO in a mainstream school

All SENCOs should be on the SMT
Inclusion manager

Ensure that school SENCOs are committed to the needs of the child rather than more concerned about government targets and red tape of paperwork.
Parent of a primary aged child with a physical disability

TRAINING SUPPORT STAFF AND TEACHERS!!! Enforcing the training!
Parent of a secondary school age student with ASD

More training for teachers-they are becoming de-skilled as TAs are taking over the SEN support role
Learning support advisory teacher

Better training of Learning Support Staff and SENCo's - identification, assessment, provisional planning, management of SEN, selection of interventions, implementing plans, etc
EAL coordinator/learning support teacher

4.9.2 The SEN system and statutory assessment

Responses often mentioned statutory assessment. The remarks by the respondents (14% of parental comments, 12% of the school staff responses and 12% of the other professionals' responses) were about reducing the processes in the system, making it less complex and bureaucratic, more open and transparent, easier to access and more flexible.

> *Re-focus LEA's from funding priorities which then forces them to reduce assessments, statements etc to longer term aims of student achievement into adulthood and the skills they need to be successful adults*
> Principal of a special school

> *Reduce statements by allocating to pupils with profound needs only. Allow funding to be shared fairly by schools between all SEN pupils, not just those with statements.*
> SENCO, mainstream school

> *Scrap the need for children to go through the 'hoops' of school action/school action plus as a prerequisite to the drawing up of a statement.*
> Parent of a primary aged child with ASD

> *Teaching staff need to be more involved in the target setting process*
> Literacy coordinator

> *Reduce bureaucracy - a HT knows whether a child needs assessing and should be trusted to make that judgement*
> Support worker, parents' group

> *Simplify it by repealing and replacing the mass of legislation including the regulations*
> Head of SEN and disabilities

> *More statementing at Primary level -for all students who need it, not just those with educated and pushy parents*
> Head of student services, mainstream school

4.9.3 Funding

The issue of funding also prompted many responses. 9% of comments from parents 17% from school staff and 12% from other professionals mentioned this. The comments were largely about providing more funds and in some cases, ensuring that it was ringfenced.

> *A system where a "pot of money" is directly allocated to the child based on the child's needs is preferable*
> Parent of a primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties.

> *Give parents an individual budget*
> Parent of a young secondary school aged student with moderate learning difficulties and global developmental delay

> *Addition funding to employ our own Physio, Speech and Language therapist*
> Head, special school

> *Funding for pupils at SA and SA+ needs to be addressed - so many schools claim the money to support these children is not adequate to meet their needs*
> Private specialist literacy teacher

> *Increased delegation of funds to meet SEN to schools but with a clear process for auditing how these additional resources are used*
> Principal educational psychologist

> *Joined up budgets are still evolving especially between Children's Services and the NHS. For more complex children there needs to be more learning across local authorities and health regions.*
> Consultant child psychologist

> *Money provided to support children's needs should focus on teaching and making a difference, not just paying for a "minder" to keep them out of the classteacher's hair while she gets on with teaching the rest of the class. Support Assistants do a very valuable job, but they are crying out for more guidance from specialist services. We put the least qualified in charge of the education of the most needy and challenging. This is bonkers.*

Educational psychologist

Funding directed to areas where there are high levels of SEN needs; not just schools fabricating figures, but real SEN needs
SENCO, mainstream school

4.10 Additional views on the SEN system

This section presents responses to the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire.

Question to parents, school staff and other professionals:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SEN system?

Key findings

Parents

- Some parents had had to fight at length for provision for their children. For many this meant a huge financial and emotional cost.
- For many children, having a statement was no guarantee of their needs being met.
- The focus of the school system was academic, on targets and exams, whilst placing little emphasis on the social needs of children. This meant many pupils left school with no qualifications and low self esteem.

School staff and the other professionals

- Responses from school staff and the other professionals fell into three categories which were very different from those of the parents:
  early intervention
  statutory assessment
  inclusion
- Early intervention and more support during Early Years was seen as a necessity. It was felt that a system which could react quicker, putting support in place as soon as it was needed would be highly beneficial, prevent or reduce the need for greater help later on and save money on resourcing.
- Statements were not available to all those who needed them. Parents had to fight through the complexity of the system in order to get provision, with only the articulate and better off succeeding.
- Lack of consistency across LAs added to the unjustness of the system.

- Barriers to inclusion were considered to be a lack of funds available to cover all needs and the clash of the standards agenda versus the inclusion agenda.

At the end of the questionnaires, parents, school staff and the other professionals were all asked “Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SEN system?” Although not every respondent chose to complete this question, those that did tended to write a great deal generating a huge number of comments in each response. The 455 parent responses to this question, once analysed, generated a total of 1047 comments.

The figures *reporting responses to this question only* are therefore calculated as a percentage of the total number of comments. Parents made very different comments to those of the school staff and other professionals and are therefore reported separately.

4.10.1 Parents

Whilst the earlier questions were seen as an opportunity to write a line or two, this question gave parents almost unlimited space in which many chose to express the reasons which had attracted them to completing the questionnaire in the first place. Very few were entirely positive but as discussed above, those who are satisfied with something which appears to work, find little to comment on. Perceived failure of a system however, promotes the desire to relate one’s experiences. Such experiences were recounted in these responses which fell into five main categories.

4.10.2 Fighting for provision

The largest number of comments (41%) detailed the characteristics of the parents’ fight to obtain provision for their children. This included comments about the financial cost involved, the time it took to get a statement or provision, the traumatic effects upon the children and their families, and the lack of communication experienced.

> *The school and the LEA did not recognise the severity of the learning difficulties. My wife and I had to find over £1000 to go through the process up to tribunal*
> Parent of a teenager with speech, language and communication difficulties

> *The situation regarding the Statementing process highlights the unfairness of the situation, with LEAs using the SENDIST process as a means to dissuade all but the very committed parents into accepting a compromise settlement. Our own costs of*

referring my daughter's case amounted to over £20,000 before the case was aborted 5 days before the tribunal was due to be held.
Parent of a young secondary school aged pupil with a range of difficulties including multisensory impairments and epilepsy

We first requested a statement for our child when he was 2 and a half it took over 18 months before the process was complete. The LEA were actively obstructive and extremely unhelpful throughout the entire process. In the past year our responsible officer has left we were not informed of this nor were we given the name and contact details of his replacement. We constantly battle with our LEA to get our childs needs met. I have no trust in them and do not believe they have my childs best interests at heart."
Parent of a young primary aged child with moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social needs and speech, language and communication difficulties.

4.10.3 A statement is no guarantee

23% of the parents' comments related to the fact that for these parents, their child having a statement was no guarantee of the child's needs being met. The reasons given included the lack of expertise, resources or funds in the school, the refusal of a school to admit a student with SEN, general comments about the 'SEN system being a failure' and the fact that the parents considered there to be a lack of accountability in the system, with Ofsted inadequate to check on provision.

I have been told by all professionals that my son needs one-to-one help, but the school have told me that even if I got a statement then there is no money to provide this help. Having an educational psychologist who can only see two referrals a term is just ridiculous - this service should be based on need. Having to put my child into a mainstream school without properly trained staff and resources is a strain that neither he or us need. I support inclusion but it is being done on a shoestring and these children are being left out of the system.
Parent of a young primary aged child with ASD

I am sad to say that I now have no faith in the system, I feel it is nothing more than an accountancy exercise and that special needs children are seen as nothing more than case numbers and not complete human beings.

Parent of a student with difficulties including speech, language and communication difficulties and a hearing impairment

4.10.4 General negative comments

18% of the comments were general negative remarks about the LAs, the school or the SEN system. Delays stemming from the LA procedures, along with their refusal to provide statements, was mentioned frequently as was the lack of finance in the system and the parents view that the LA's considered finance to be the priority rather than the children's needs. Problems in the school were also mentioned, particularly delays caused by schools and schools unwilling to support statutory assessment.

LEAs merely protect budgets and look for any loop-hole to prevent appropriate help being given. I have been astounded that in the so called developed world we can provide such a Dickensian system for Vulnerable children.
Parent of a young teenager with speech, language and communication needs and ASD

The SEN system appears from a parents perspective to be used as a tool for managing the local education departments budget rather than as a tool to ensure children with special needs receive high quality education relevant to their lives
Parent of a young primary aged child with Downs' Syndrome

4.10.5 Failure in the system

12% of the parents' comments were about the impact of inefficiencies in the system including concerns about children leaving school with no qualifications and the fact that they were unable to cope in school. It was also felt that the system focussed on tests and exams but neglected the social needs of the children. In addition to this, some parents stated that the views and wishes of the children were not taken into account.

My daughter simply struggles with the size/ noise of a mainstream classroom. Although I totally endorse the need for her to spend time in a mainstream environment, she would benefit from more learning in a quiet area/unit as a result of her impaired attention/listening skills
Parent of a young primary school child with ASD

I have found that due to financial restraints the official system does not want to recognise learning difficulties until a huge gap has opened up between the child and the rest of the class. Earlier intervention would save a lot of time and heartache.
Parent of a primary school child with a specific learning difficulty

4.10.6 Positive comments

Not all the comments from the parents were negative: 4% were positive. These were usually about the schools their children attended but there were also complimentary remarks about organisations such as parent partnership services. Some comments also praised the SEN system in general, particularly when comparing it to that of other countries.

I have found the help my daughter gets from the specialist unit is fantastic and the support we get is first class, but within the normal classroom I feel my daughter is left out of activities and not enough people understand children's special needs.
Parent of a young primary school child with a range of difficulties, including ASD

Our child has thrived and continues to learn at an unexpected rate despite what I perceive as the SEN system! She has been lucky to have had a class teacher and teaching assistant both of whom have their own special needs children and have therefore many years of personal experience. We are facing a move to a new school and I can only hope that we will find such a good learning environment for her again.
Parent of a young primary school child with behavioural, emotional and social needs and speech, language and communication difficulties.

4.10.7 School Staff and Other Professionals

The school staff and other professionals were also asked if there was anything else they would like to state about the SEN system. Again a large number of comments were generated and the figures are calculated as a proportion of the total number of comments rather than responses.

4.10.8 Early intervention

Comments from the school staff and other professionals were in three main categories, the first but smallest group relating to early years and the need to make the most of this time in

order to set early intervention in place. This was mentioned in 6% of comments from school staff and 4% from the other professionals

> *Here a child is lucky if they see a SALT in a group once a week and more often it is once a month for half an hour. NOT GOOD ENOUGH! These children may be non verbal but with a potential to talk if given intensive early intervention at preschool level. The current SEN system is actively denying these children a voice which contributes to their inappropriate behaviour caused by their frustration. The SEN system is exacerbating their special needs with its lack of vision.*
> Private ABA tutor

> *I really believe that by identifying characteristics of special needs (especially SpLD) before age 7/8 and addressing these characteristics early with one to one support would alleviate some of the strain on the system further up the age groups.*
> Additional needs coordinator mainstream school

4.10.9 Statutory assessment

Statutory assessment was referred to in 21% of school staff comments and 23% from the other professionals. Issues raised in this category included the need for parents to fight their way through the system and the fact that they should have some support. In addition, owing to the complex, bureaucratic and at time, combative nature of the system, it was suggested that only parents who were educated, articulate and in some cases, better off were able to navigate and fight their way through the system successfully.

> *Most of my answers deal with what I hear from parents and pupils about their experiences. Their common complaint is that they have to fight for everything. They battle with bureaucracy who don't understand the nature of SEN in education….*
> Independent practitioner

> *As far as parents are concerned we are often "piggy in the middle" in their battle to get their children's needs met. We spend hours listening to their woes and mop up their tears as we are their first port of call. As caring professionals we do this willingly but hate to have to tell them that it could take years to get a statement as they are often turned down.*
> Inclusion manager in a mainstream school

I am not surprised that parents have no confidence in the SEN process, as it is deliberately bureaucratic and difficult so that children who need Statements are snarled up in the system and denied help.
Head, mainstream school

4.10.10 Inclusion

The largest group of comments from the school staff and other professionals (57% and 43% respectively) mentioned inclusion. It was reported that some of the barriers to inclusion were as a result of the lack of funds available and that delegated funds to mainstream schools were not enough to cover all the needs of the pupils. It was also felt that in order for inclusion to be successful all the staff involved with children with SEN should have more SEN training. It was also the view of some respondents that the 'standards agenda' clashes with the 'inclusion agenda' and the needs of pupils with SEN.

It's incredibly frustrating and depressing to see children progress through a large primary school being managed as best we can, but without the proper support that they need, year after year, because of lack of funding and a slow, paperwork laden system.
Teacher, mainstream school

Inclusion is a commendable and desirable philosophy but it cannot work unless a) staff are well prepared for the needs of the individual's they will be meeting in their classrooms.
SEN governor in a mainstream. school

Despite the introduction of Excellence and Enjoyment and a push towards the Creative Curriculum, the development of these will always be hindered whilst primary schools are measured and judged primarily (almost solely) on the outcomes in the SATs testing. This often results in teachers teaching to the test and narrowing the curriculum to ensure good outcomes in the areas to be assessed, leaving many key skills to be untaught. These key skills are often vital for SEN children to develop into confident, independent adults.
SENCO, mainstream school

Schools report a tension between inclusive practices and the pressure to reach targets. There are indications that some schools discourage children who are having

particularly difficulties from staying at the school - advice such as " perhaps he/she needs a fresh start"/"if you feel your child is not doing well here perhaps you should go elsewhere" is reported to our parent partnership service, even though the vast majority of our schools are fully inclusive.
Service head – Early Years

4.11 Report on e-mails sent to the Lamb Inquiry

In this section we provide brief additional information about the email messages that were sent to the Inquiry. This was not an organised information gathering exercise; rather, these were spontaneous contributions from a variety of parents and others.

E-mail messages were mostly from parents (85), with small numbers from teachers (4), Parent Partnership Services (PPS: 3), academics (5), Local Authority (1), Community Service Volunteers (CSV: 2), other organisations (3) and unknown identities (4).
Some **academics** merely requested information.

A number of more extended papers were received from a number of individuals and organisations. These covered a range of topics and are acknowledged directly in the final report of the Inquiry.

Teachers' e-mails expressed a range of views, all but one submission being critical of various aspects of the SEN system. The one positive submission was from a special school and consisted of a large number of pages providing examples of that school's good practice e.g. detailed information and guidance for staff re particular types of SEN, case notes about individual pupils.

The negative comments covered:

- conflicts between the standards agenda and inclusion
- failures of OFSTED to adequately inspect mainstream schools' SEN provision
- funding and statementing functions should be separated as funding (which is inadequate) takes priority over pupils' needs
- criticisms of the 'whole statementing process'
- criticisms of the wording of statements
- unrealistic expectations of some parents
- disputes and delays that 'characterise the process'

- tribunals as an ordeal for parents
- anti-parent attitudes in health and education services
- lack of cooperation between agencies.

E-mail submissions from **Parent Partnership Services** included comments on how beneficial their role was felt to be. A number sent in copies of the small scale survey results gathered from parents in their areas.

In local authority A (24 responses) the weakest aspects of schools' practice was poor communication about what provision for children's needs and failure to act on decisions reached in meetings. The experience of parents of children with statements of SEN or at School Action Plus was more or less evenly divided between positive and negative.
In local authority B (18 responses) 60% reported positive experiences. The weaknesses were seen as:

- work not being adapted for their child
- out of school social contact was lacking
- not being informed in advance of who would be at meetings and why.

Parents felt generally satisfied with:

- their clear understanding of what the school could provide
- the experience and qualifications of staff
- having information about meetings in good time.

One PPS staff member felt that LA compliance should be more enforced.

Parents' e-mails raised points which, for the most part, had been raised in the responses to the open-ended question in the web survey. Additional points were:

- transition was often difficult and not adequately handled
- educational psychologists should be independent of LAs
- funding should be a 'package' for the child, provided directly from the DCSF
- disfigured children are over-looked by SEN provision
- a parent happy that the statement meets their child's need;
- Home Education is resorted to because school provision is inadequate, but LAs sometimes raise child protection / abuse issues when parents suggest / opt for Home Education.

The broad headings used in the analysis of the responses to the web-based open-ended question have been applied to this e-mail data and the results are as follows:

1. *Characteristics of the fight to obtain provision*: (91 points: 40%)

general points (24) and specific issues in the 'fight' (67)

2. *Statement is no guarantee of needs being met:* (39 points: 17%)
   lack of expertise in school (incl. use of TAs) (22) and other specific points (17)
3. *Negative responses by LA and school and system*: (62 points: 27%)
   general points (6), lack of LA support / corruption / errors (16), PPS useless / not independent (4), other specific points (36)
4. *Positive opinion of the school etc*: (9 points: 4%)
   happy with particular school (5), positive about PPS (4)
5. *Effects on children*: (27 points: 12%)
   earlier diagnosis / provision would avoid delays / damage etc (11), other specific points (16)
6. *Evaluating the effectiveness of the SEN system* – data lacking (1 point: <1%)
   Few parents chose to write in to report positive experiences, which is not to say that some parents and others do not feel that the system is working more or less as intended and is meeting the needs of children with SEN. However, this set of messages cannot be set aside, as it reflects the very real and disturbing experiences of parents and others who are familiar with the system and have identified many of its inherent and / or 'in practice' weaknesses.

4.12 Conclusions from the survey and the emails

The surveys produced a high response rate from parents in particular and have provided a rich source of views on the workings of the SEN system. It is important to remember that the survey was not designed to access a random sample of the population. Rather, the surveys were open to the public and also the assistance of voluntary bodies and others produced samples that were not representative of the populations as a whole. On the other hand these respondents have provided a substantial response to the opportunity to express their views and those views are important in themselves.

The SEN system was widely seen as immensely complicated. The amount of bureaucracy and paperwork involved was considered a huge burden for parents, school staff and other professionals alike. The complexity was reported as being highly stressful, often at a time when parents were already struggling to come to terms with their children's special needs. The tenacity required to go through the statutory assessment was considered to be a constant battle by some parents. The fact that many poured in time and money in order to get statements was recognised as being unfair since many other parents did not have the education, time or money to do so and concern was felt for these children. It was felt that

the system could be greatly improved by reducing this unfairness and making the system easy to access for all parents.

Many parents were only able to navigate the system with the help of school staff, parent partnership services or charities. This support was invaluable and helped to counteract the negative attitudes which some parents encountered from some school staff and other organisations including the local authorities (LAs). Whilst the complexity of the system was seen as a weak point, the people working within it were, for many, the highlight. The highly skilled and knowledgeable people they encountered, whether it be the SENCO, the teachers or other professionals, gave the parents confidence in the system.

In order to have skill and expertise, training is important and it was frequently mentioned in the responses. The quality of teaching and appropriate teaching methods were seen as imperative yet, it was felt, many teachers were required to teach children with a wide range of special needs which they had little or no knowledge of. Training members of staff, particularly SENCOs, in a range of special needs and passing that information on to other teachers would help to ensure that children were taught using the most appropriate methods.

Support staff were viewed as being very important by all the recipients although some of the school staff and other professionals questioned the wisdom of having the pupils with the greatest needs being supported by the least qualified members of staff. They also worried about the quality of support staff interventions and their lack of training.

Respondents felt the training of LA staff would be beneficial for many reasons, but principally to raise the quality of statements. The use of template statements were deplored by many since it appeared that the statements were being written with little understanding of the individual children's needs, despite referring to the professional assessments. The terminology of statements was said to be often both complex and full of jargon but also vague and 'woolly': objectives were often so broad as to be unusable and provision not being quantified other than in terms of phrases such as 'regular access to'. This was seen as allowing the LA or the school to be dilatory in supplying the provision named in the statement.

Parents frequently mentioned the implementation of statements. Some had initially seen statements as legal documents which would result in schools and LAs being forced to implement the provision specified. However, for many the statement was not implemented

fully and was felt to be no guarantee of provision. Many parents felt powerless to do anything about it, though it was recognised by some that failure to implement statements was often due to a lack of funding.

The delegation of funding to schools was not always considered positively since there appeared to be little monitoring to ensure that it was being spent on the children it was intended for.

The surveys have revealed many concerns with the workings of the SEN system but also some indications of positive experiences. Overall, therefore, these responses provide a wealth of material that can contribute to our thinking about and development of the system for children and young people with SEN.

Appendix A – to follow

Appendix B The Questionnaires: Information on the number of respondents, percentages of questionnaires analysed, and number of codable comments analysed

Table 9a: Sample sizes for each question: Parents.

Question	N° Questionnaires Included in Sample for Analysis of Each Question	% of Returned Questionnaires Analysed	No. of codable comments analysed for each question
What sort of outcomes do you want for your child over the next year or more?	1941	100	N/A
Has the school discussed these outcomes with you?	485	25	871
What helps your child to learn and progress?	485	25	894
What gets in the way of your child's learning and progress?	485	25	881
What gives you confidence in the SEN system?	485	25	493
What reduces your confidence in the SEN system?	485	25	784
If your child has a statement or if you've tried to get a statement for your child: What did you find helpful about the process?	1000	51	871
If your child has a statement or if you've tried to get a statement for your child: What did you find unhelpful about the process?	1000	51	1133
If your child has a statement: What is helpful about your child's statement?	1500	77	1278
If your child has a statement: What is unhelpful about your child's statement?	1500	77	934
How can we improve the SEN system?	485	25	682
Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SEN system?	958	50	455

Note: The table shows the number of completed questionnaires and the number of questionnaires analysed for each question. Percentages are given to show the proportion of the completed 1941 questionnaires analysed.

Table 9b: Sample sizes for each question: Students

Question	% of Returned Questionnaires Analysed	No. of codable comments analysed for each question
Think of 3 things which help you to learn and do well at school	100	954
Which 3 things make it hard for you to learn or do well at school?	100	804
Which 3 things could we change to make it easier for you to learn and do well at school?	100	737
Do you get extra help with your learning at school? – How does it help you?	100	349

Note: 400 questionnaires returned

Table 9c Sample sizes for each question: School Staff.

Question	% of Returned Questionnaires Analysed	No. of codable comments analysed for each question
Do you discuss medium term outcomes (over the next year or more) with parents of pupils with SEN?	100	N/A
If 'yes', what sort of outcomes do parents say they want?	100	665
What helps children to learn and progress?	100	902
What gets in the way of children's learning and progress?	100	874
What gives parents confidence in the SEN system?	100	795
What reduces the confidence that parents have in the SEN system?	100	765
What works well in the SEN system?	100	591
What doesn't work well in the SEN system?	100	688
What can be changed to improve the SEN system?	100	659
If you work with one or more children with a statement: What is helpful about the statement?	100	635
If you work with one or more children with a statement: What is unhelpful about the statement?	100%	514
Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SEN system?	100	163

Note: 544 questionnaires returned

Table 9d Sample sizes for each question: Other Professionals working with Children, Schools and Families.

Question	% of Returned Questionnaires Analysed	No. of codable comments analysed for each question
Do you discuss medium term outcomes (over the next year or more) with parents of pupils with SEN?	100	N/A
If 'yes', what sort of outcomes do parents say they want?	100	745
What helps children to learn and progress?	100	899
What gets in the way of children's learning and progress?	100	882
What gives parents confidence in the SEN system?	100	808
What reduces the confidence that parents have in the SEN system?	100	825
What works well in the SEN system?	100	622
What doesn't work well in the SEN system?	100	693
What can be changed to improve the SEN system?	100	724
If you work with one or more children with a statement: What is helpful about the statement?	100	613
If you work with one or more children with a statement: What is unhelpful about the statement?	100	538
Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SEN system?	100	199

Note: 516 questionnaires returned