

Topic of Importance – Educational Experience

Over the past 18 24 months since the concept of Topics of Importance (ToI) were introduced as a means of demonstrating a “You Said – We Did” approach to working with Peterborough City Council (PCC) Family Voice Peterborough (FVP) have produced two that focus specifically on Education:

1. Lockdown and Accessing Education
2. Education and Communication

Both of which have resulted in some change:

1. More regular communications with SEND parents via the LA
2. The Introduction of Section M which facilitated EHCp provision during lock down
3. Ensuring settings know that parents had to be involved in the “risk assessment” system as to whether children/ young people should be in school during lock down

Small changes as above have been made and since FVP have noticed that talk on social media has changed slightly over the past few months, but it is worth noting general information and communication are still areas that are mentioned in any talk that occurs.

In the summer term FVP were contacted on Twitter by a national campaigning group to ask about the SENI 2 data that had been released by the DfE which showed the high number of refusals to assess at over 50% in Peterborough which was also the highest in the country. FVP were also aware through attendance at meetings and listening to parents that many of these decisions were being overturned at mediation.

What are parents telling us?

1. It is taking too long to get an EHCp.
2. The application process is confusing and time consuming.
3. Some parents are still feeling that they are viewed as a problem and the LA has no time for them.
4. More support is needed to manage the application process for an EHCp.
5. When services are received things are better.
6. Some parents have improved relationships with some setting and LA/ Health professionals.

Where we get our evidence from

Parental Requests for Sign Posting

Want to know the right route. Son was referred to community paediatrics (possibly Early Help) but case closed as he is now five. They have self referred for SLT support but believe they need to be referred for OT. EHCP request to assess put in about three weeks ago. They filled in forms for SEND Partnership about three days ago, aware of Local Offer. I asked if they had spoken with GP about OT referral (I know this can be done through school, but son is not in school at the moment). Explained decision to assess for EHCP should be made within 6 weeks.	Lack of clarity re best path to take to get support. Needing to know how to get referrals. Will diagnoses from India be recognised here? EHCP process.
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If yes, they can ask for assessments such as OT to be done as part of this process. If no, can appeal against decision. Gave SENDIASS contact information.	
Struggling in mainstream school but mum is really worried if he will be accepted at Marshfields. However his current levels suggest that he is within the school's cohort. Mum is having an EHCp review on 6th July and asked me to call her back after the date to discuss further what help she might require.	Issues with school in terms of supporting the child and following his EHCp, everything has always been a fight.
Child may have ASD. He is starting school in September. Query from parent was "how do I apply for an EHCp"	How to apply for an EHCp

Social Media Polls

Who completed your child's EHCP?	School	10
	Nursery	5
	Other	5
Did you appeal your child's EHCP needs assessment outcome?	Yes	6
	No	0
Would guidance and criteria for EHCP applications be helpful?	Yes	10
	No	0

How have FVP responded

FVP raised concerns with the LA and looked to gather further views from Parents in the form of a survey

Education Survey

A survey was drafted by a parent rep, which looked in more depth at the experience of parent carers accessing educational support from EHCp needs assessment onwards.¹ The survey looked at the EHC needs assessment process, what challenges parent carers feel they have faced accessing educational support for their SEND child(ren) and their general views overall of education.

Survey Excerpt

32 people took the survey, with the majority of respondents having more than one child/ young person with SEND and their needs being broader than those reported in the COVID survey. Also in this survey a respondent reported having a young person is non binary, which is not something people have reported in any previous surveys.

¹ <https://www.familyvoice.org/sites/default/files/August%202021%20Surveys.pdf#overlay-context=Participation>

Many respondents also reported familial ill health/ disability which appear to show an increase in parent carers being in a “sandwich care” situation where they care for not only a child/ young person but also a parent or partner. High levels of caring impact on family dynamics, individual mental wellbeing and also household finances; often from being unable to work due to caring responsibilities.

Educational Experience

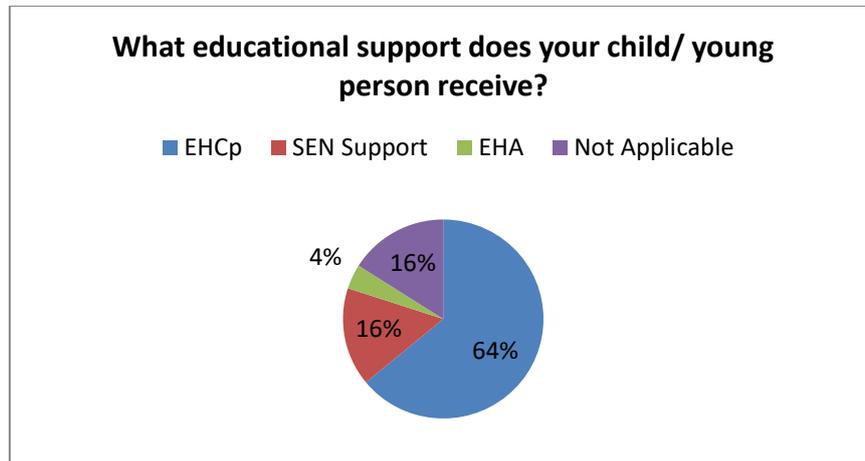


Fig. 10 Educational Support

1. VI support
2. School wont put in for it
3. Support officer and senco in school
4. They received lots of one on one .colour cells .extra time tutorial. Not as such under a set plan but inplace all there time at school. Now at university eldest daughter has full dyslexia support. Equipment. Readers extra time phone tutorials.
5. There is non for deaf children unless they have other difficulties I was informed
6. None as was diagnosed whilst homeschooled
7. speech and language

The majority of respondents at 64% stated that their child/ young person (CYP) has an EHCp and some expanded on their responses to either state what kind of support is being received or that they have had no support.

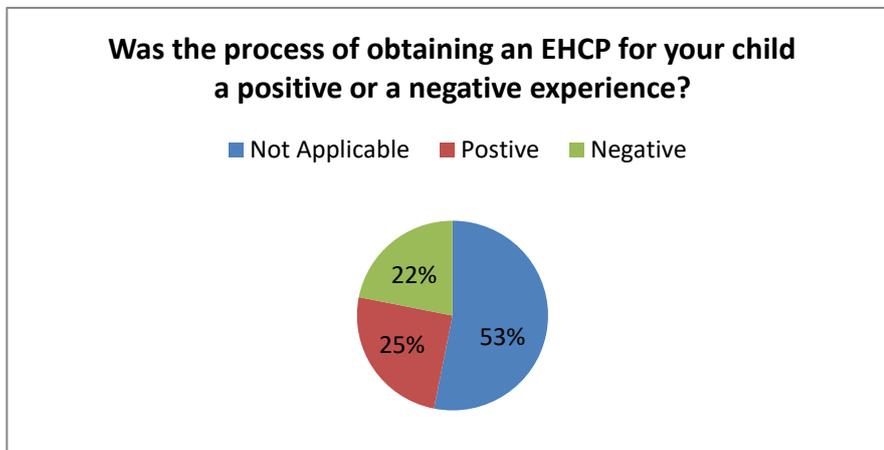


Fig. 11 EHCp experience

The responses from parents when asked to state whether their experience of obtaining an EHCP was positive, negative or not applicable (fig.11) was a little unusual in that although the majority of respondents stated they had an EHCP for their CYP as seen in fig.10 this question resulted in 53% choosing not applicable. What is different from other surveys though here is that slightly more respondents stated that had a positive experience.

As well as the closed questions relating to the EHCP process, parent carers were also enabled to provide further information relating to their experiences positive, negative and neutral such as below:

What are your thoughts on the EHCP process and implementation if applicable?

Comment	Positive	Negative	Mixed
It's deemed impossible to get an EHCP but I applied as a parent and was successful first time. Its very long and not completed in a timely manner but successful for us	x		
Lots of paperwork and very time consuming for parents with busy lifestyle		x	
Far too complicated for parents, lack of support and information. Process far too slow.		x	
More difficult than should have been and implementation has been a struggle and lack of timely annual review (we had no update for 2 years)		x	
Waited from 2017 to receive second plan in 2020 in December not good enough		x	
Time consuming; difficult to navigate and answer forms without mental & academic support.		x	
It's too hard there are too many games played by LA to put parents off hoping to stop people pursuing the help they need. In my sons case the hired a solicitor to fight us after the school themselves said they could meet child's need they bullied the school to change their cohort to take him and did not look at our evidence they just think they know best		x	
Awful		x	
Very slow at changing details on plan		x	
Quite a worrying experience		x	
My son still needs extra support at school. He should not be denied this just because he is not hugely behind academically. He struggles at school, with the work but especially the social aspects and pressures. He would have done so much better at school and coped much better if extra support had been given.		x	
The process is fine implementing the EHCP is like there's no point having one in place No two children are the same and the parameters of the plan do not cover some children as they are deemed not severe enough for a full plan. There needs to be a much more flexible approach and more funding			x
it takes too long for then to allow it		x	

They try and stuff your child into whatever they have locally. They don't even consider suitable out of locality options. The whole process drained me -couldn't fight it anymore.		x	
I think the system is taken far too long, and kids are being put bk which takes a big impact on them.		x	
I do believe it's far too long to wait these kids are having to wait too long for extra support		x	

Table 1: Experience of EHCp process

Do you have any positive feedback or experiences to share about the support you have had from your child/ young persons setting to date?

1. *Teacher of the deaf but none of the suggestions were put into place and no other support available*
2. *Paperwork and assessment excellent*
3. *When My child could not spell correctly word s, they give him support and lady came and help him.*
4. *School have been very supportive of Tommy needs last 2years but feel that more could of been done regarding ehcp*
5. *Absolutely amazing, speech therapy 4 times a week, one to one emotional support, story board to help with behavioural difficulties, one to one support in the class room, sensory items in place,(Velcro under his table, sensory circuits) support during the entire pandemic, the entire school has gone above and beyond to support not just child with additional needs but entire family.*
6. *Teacher very accommodating to sons needs*
7. *Yes great teacher Mr Spalding and few others who my son likes*
8. *His TA is very helpful and communicative. Nothing else positive to say.*
9. *My sons school does keep me upto date and do help him*
10. *Had early help support and had a autism course on line but no real help at home or where to find help outside of school*
11. *Extremely supportive*
12. *My sons school support worker for his year has been a great help over the years. I unfortunately had many clashes with the schools senco, was promised help that never happened, was even told that the school may not be the best place for my son to be, this was all because I was making things difficult for the senco in a desperate attempt to get school to actually give the additional support promised. Things have settled down thankfully but was very hard for my son in the first few years.*
13. *The school have been amazing with my eldest child in the short time he has been there and supported getting a referral*
14. *Yes, good setting communication between school and home had gotten a lot better*
15. *Other than the schools finance problems Elton church of England school went above and beyond to do what they could to assist children with extra reading and writing. One to one help and after hours help. With out extra charge. Kept us as patents involved every step of the way. Nene Park provided counciling and extra lessons to*

assist with homework writing and spelling. Extra exam support colour cells and extra lessons. Stamford provided very much the same as none all referring to dyslexia associated paper. And providing loan laptop near exam times auto readers extra time and course work extra study sessions one on one tutorial help.

16. They have always been a supportive school

17. Discussed all options and placement before starting, he went to marshfields hub a yr early because the mainstream he was at couldn't meet his needs his doing very well were he is now

18. The only support I have received is from Senco at ravensthorpe primary and the support officer/Senco at Jack Hunt during the past 2 years only.

19. My son settled amazingly when he got a school place. Loves to go and always asking for school.

57.58% of respondents reported having had at least a partial experience in relation to the support their CYP had received for their educational needs. This again slightly negates the view that all aspects of SEND education are bad. There are parent carers who do feel their CYP has good support.

The last two questions above from the survey demonstrate how mixed experiences are, but underlying themes of information, communication and support run across all areas.

Where FVP have shared this talking point

1. FVP Website
2. FVP Social Media Channels
3. FVP E-News
4. Peterborough City Council Decision Makers

Next Steps and Areas for Consideration

1. For PCC to consider developing easy to digest guidance for EHC Needs Assessment Requests – this to mirror guidance for PfA coproduced after a previous ToI
2. For continuation of key messages to all SEND parents via letters from the PCC, as started during periods of lockdown
3. For PCC to share more widely their statistics relating to EHCp's from requests to assess to plans issued

Timescales

1. For PCC to respond within one month of issue of this ToI
2. For this ToI to be published on the Local Offer within one month of the next SEND Partnership on 28th September 2021