

Working Together

making the most of a child's school years:
An SEN Partnership Manual supporting
parents and schools in partnership in North Somerset

A guide to provide information for parents and teachers of children with special educational needs and disabilities, to help them work more effectively in partnership for the benefit of children in the educational setting.

In producing this resource, our aim is to provide, and to promote with schools and parents, a positive way of sharing information and experience about children with SEN. It is primarily written to parents, for parents, by parents and we hope that it will be used by parents with the support of school staff.

Written and compiled by Maggie Potter, with sincere thanks for their support and contributions to parents and SPSC's team, and to Local Authority staff and those from the voluntary sector, who have contributed so generously to this document.

This document is offered in good faith as a guide to support effective partnership between parents and carers and schools or Early Years settings in North Somerset. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information, Supportive Parents cannot guarantee this or take responsibility for how the information is used. We would be grateful for factual updates and any suggestions for material to be included in future issues. Throughout this book we have used the term "parent" to refer to anyone having parental responsibility for a child.

For a regularly updated version of this document please go to our website at: www.supportiveparents.org.uk

This work is the copyright of Supportive Parents 2007. Permission is granted for reproduction of sections of text, provided that Supportive Parents is always acknowledged as the originator of the work.

For further details, contact Supportive Parents at 3rd Floor, Royal Oak House, Royal Oak Avenue, Bristol, BS1 4GB or telephone us, on 0117 9897724

Contents

Introduction: Partnership with parents increases pupil achievement.....	p. 4
Chapter 1: History and background of Supportive Parents and the development of Parent Partnership.....	p. 7
Chapter 2: On Parent Partnership and Supportive Parents - who we are, what we do and how we do it!.....	p. 10
Self-referral form for use by parents.....	p. 18
Chapter 3: Special Educational Needs and getting extra help - The graduated approach, Individual Education Plans and how SEN is funded in schools.....	p. 20
• Ten top tips for SENCOs: from Supportive Parents' support group.....	p. 27
Chapter 4: Statutory Assessment and the Statementing process.	p. 30
Chapter 5: Starting out in Primary and transferring to Secondary School - the Admissions process and who can help.....	p. 40
Early Years Induction for Children with Special Needs by Joanne, Manager at Springboard Opportunity Centre.....	p. 44
• A parent's experience of the Early Years transfer process	
• A parent's experience of transfer to Secondary school	
Chapter 6: What parents can do to help their child to be successfully included at school.....	p. 52
• A parent's experience of working in partnership with her son's primary school	
• A parent's experience of partnership-working at Secondary level	

Practical steps: providing information, keeping informed and involved, organising your child, managing homework!

Chapter 7: Attending meetingsp.64

- Guidance for professionals involved in meetings
- The role of the Parent Partnership Service
- Guidance for parents at meetings

Chapter 8: Reviews, Annual Reviews & Transition planning: p.75

Future options by David and Florence.....p.81

Resources to support children to give their views:

- Octopus: Child's review contribution form.....p.87
- Young person's questionnaire.....p.88
- Parent's contribution to review/education planning....p.92

Chapter 9: When things go wrong.....p.93

- Bullying
- Exclusions
- Complaints; who can help - negotiation and disagreement resolution
- SEND - The SEN and Disability Tribunal

Chapter 10: Parent to parent: Finding someone to talk with who shares your experience.....p.111

- The value of parent support groups in primary school
- The value of parent support groups in secondary school

Chapter 11: Parent participation - getting more involved...p.122

Appendix 1: SEN Jargon Buster.....p.131

Appendix 2: Up to date list of Local Authority SEN policies:p.141

Appendix 3: Voluntary organisations, sources of information and Support Groups for Parents and Carers in North Somerset... p.145

Introduction: Partnership with parents increases pupil achievement.

“Parental involvement has...a significant positive effect on children’s achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation”¹

Supportive Parents exists to inform and support parents and carers of children with special educational needs (SEN) so that they are able to be fully involved in their children’s education. Our children will inevitably experience barriers to accessing their education; in becoming successfully included in their educational settings and accessing all aspects of the curriculum. We firmly believe that all parents have an essential role to play in enabling their child’s learning.

“Parents are a child's first and enduring teachers. They play a crucial role in helping their children learn. Children achieve more when schools and parents work together. Parents can help more effectively if they know what the school is trying to achieve and how they can help.”²

For our children’s sake it is essential that parents and school staff find a way of successfully working together, although none of us can imagine that it will be a simple task for this to happen. We all struggle with too few resources and too many demands that require our attention. Jargon and unfamiliar or changing systems make things difficult in their own ways, and good intentions can falter in the face of previous experience, emotional challenge or overwhelming demands.

However, our starting point must be that together we are potentially greater than the sum of our parts. We are each committed to the development and progress of the children in our care, and we are potentially each other’s most valuable allies. Who will strive harder for a child than its parent? No professional generally offers more time or commitment to individual children than their school’s various members of staff.

¹ Desforges, C. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A review of the literature. London: Department for Education and Skills. Research Report RR433. Available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research.

² DCSF: The Standards Site: Parental involvement, <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/>

We must work together to build a pathway to achieving effective communication, transparent systems and shared goals, most particularly for and on behalf of those children in our care who are already experiencing barriers to accessing their educational opportunities.

We also firmly believe that if you get it right for our children, you will get it right for all children.

“Success in the education of children depends, at least in some part, on the involvement of their parents. If a child sees that their parents are enthusiastic about education, they are far more likely to view their schooling in a positive light, and be more receptive to learning.

To this end, parents should be seen as vital partners in a child's education, as not only can they help in making sure homework is in on time and in giving a child vital coaching and advice out of school hours, but they also determine the child's home environment, where children spend much of their waking hours. Engaging and working with parents is one of the most vital parts of providing children with an excellent education.”³

In producing this resource, our aim is to provide, and to promote with schools and parents, a positive way of sharing information and experience about children with SEN. It is primarily written to parents, for parents, by parents and we hope that it will be used by parents with the support of school staff.

It includes parent friendly information about how the SEN system works, and what can be done to make it work more effectively (Chapter 2 onwards). The material is presented in a loose leaf format to allow for easy photocopying, updating and additions.

We offer information about the SEN framework to provide a shared starting point for discussions between school staff and parents. We provide some realistic suggestions, using examples from professionals and parents, about roles and responsibilities. We encourage and support parents to achieve a satisfying working relationship with their child's school. We include a range of sources and resources to support this process of effective

³ DfES: The Standards Site: Partnership with parents,
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/pwp/>

partnership-working. Most of all, we hope that this resource will offer some encouragement and inspiration to the most important people in our children's lives, and will act as a reminder to us all, that when that child remains at the centre of our thoughts and plans it will naturally put us side by side.

Finally our sincere thanks go to all those who provided inspiration and advice, support and material contributions to this document, but most of all to our children, who make it all worthwhile.

Chapter 1: History and background of Supportive Parents and the development of Parent Partnership.

Supportive Parents (originally known as Supportive Parents for Special Children and still known as SPSC) grew out of a University of London Institute of Education research project carried out in the Southmead Health District of the former County of Avon (this Health District covered parts of Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset) in 1987. The co-operative project, sponsored by central government, was aimed at helping the statutory authorities review and develop their services for children with special educational needs with particular regard to the implementation of the 1981 Education Act. This act initiated the statutory assessment process for children with identified special educational needs. The local professionals and officers invited to take part in the project felt that it was essential to involve local parents of children with special educational needs in the planning and execution of the research.

When the project ended, those families and professionals involved continued to work together to develop the support for parents identified as urgently required, as an outcome of the research. A voluntary organisation was established, providing information and support to parents of children with SEN, and a course for parents was developed to enable them to understand the educational issues around meeting special educational needs and how they might best contribute their parental perspective. Supportive Parents was inaugurated as a charity in 1989, and continues today as a charity and Company Limited by Guarantee, with members including parents and professionals, managed by a committee of trustees. There is no requirement to be a member to use our service, but it is possible to become one, or to join our committee if you have a particular interest in the work we do. Our trustees are always eager to welcome members with additional skills who can offer us a little time, some commitment, enthusiasm and support.

Following reports from the London Institute of Education project in Avon, and from other projects around the country, central government recognised the importance of providing support for the parents of children with special educational needs by

delegating earmarked funding (standards funding) to local authorities for this purpose. In the Avon area this funding was used to support the work of Supportive Parents.

From April 1996 we were funded by the four unitary authorities that used to be Avon and met the requirement of the Department for Education and Employment that parents should have access to a Named Person service. The Code of Practice 2001 now requires local authorities to provide a Parent Partnership Service (PPS) for parents and carers of children with SEN, and Supportive Parents is funded by the three unitary authorities of Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire to provide this statutory service. Through this free, independent and confidential service, we offer information and support to parents, encourage partnership between parents and professionals and give statistical (but otherwise anonymous) feedback about services to education providers.

Any parent who has concerns about their child's education can contact our service (pre-school to 19 years). The local authority automatically sends information about Supportive Parents to all parents of children who are at the beginning of the statutory assessment process.

Professionals who have concerns about any aspect of meeting a child's special educational needs often contact us for specific information or for "signposting" to other sources of information and help. Schools should provide information about the local Parent Partnership Service to parents when special educational issues are first discussed with them.

Supportive Parents' information about our service, together with support group details, is sent out in September, January and April to all nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, units and special schools in the areas where we work. Our mailing list also includes interested professionals in education, social services and health, children's hospital departments, voluntary organisations and information services such as libraries. We have a website that contains useful information that is updated regularly and can be accessed at www.supportiveparents.org.uk. In future we hope to send our school mailings by e-mail.

Summary: Chapter 1 - history and background of Supportive Parents

Supportive Parents is a charity and a voluntary organisation. It is managed by trustees, who are parents of, or professionals who work with, children with special educational needs (SEN).

All members of staff are parents of children with SEN.

It has been working to inform and support parents of children with SEN since 1989.

All local authorities must provide a Parent Partnership Service (PPS).

Supportive Parents provides the PPS service in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Anyone can use our service; they don't need to be a member but we welcome parents and professionals who want to join. Call us to find out more.

All schools and local authorities can inform parents about our service, how we can be contacted and what we can do to help.

For more information about Supportive Parents; who we are, what we do and how we do it, look in chapter two.

Chapter 2: Parent Partnership and Supportive Parents - who we are, what we do and how we do it!

Supportive Parents' staff team consists of a development coordinator, who is also the overall manager of the service, local coordinators for each local authority area, an additional participation and development worker, helpline staff and the office administrator. Parent volunteers also help in local support groups in each authority and at our office base.

Ways to access our service

1. Information and Support Line on 0117 9897725

Our Information and Support Line is staffed by a team of trained and experienced Independent Parental Supporters (IPs), who are all parents of children with special educational needs. You can speak directly to a member of our helpline staff on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 10.00 a.m. - 2.00 p.m., during term time. An answer-phone is available at all other times and we do suggest that you leave a message on it with your contact details, to enable us to call you back. We will then do our best to contact you during the next helpline session. Remember that we are also happy to accept calls from any professional or family member wishing to discuss general concerns, or any parent or carer who has concerns about an individual child's additional needs or any aspect of their education. Following contact with our service, further information may be posted out to back up that given on the helpline. Extended individual support is also available to parents via our Helpline.

2. Face to face

When specifically requested by parents, we put them in direct contact with an IPS wherever possible. An appointment can be arranged for any parent to visit our office (which is fully accessible), to meet an IPS and discuss any concerns they may have. If appropriate, home visits may be arranged. Help to prepare for meetings with schools or the local authority is available and we may also be able to provide support at the meeting if parents need this.

3. Support groups

These are held in different localities (in Portishead and Worle on alternate months, in North Somerset) on a monthly basis and are run by the local co-ordinator, with parental supporters in attendance. Interested professionals are also welcome to attend.

The aim of these meetings is to provide information and to meet parents' need for mutual support, as well as developing the local network of parents and professionals. Speakers are sometimes arranged. We also give talks at meetings of other parent support groups.

4. Courses

Supportive Parents provides a rolling programme of courses for parents to enable them to consider and explore both their own and others' experiences and to give them basic knowledge of relevant legislation, local policies and resources. If participants then wish to go on to support other parents, further training offers a grounding in listening and other relevant skills. Full information is provided in our prospectus, available on request by contacting our helpline.

5. Newsletter and website

We produce three newsletters a year, for members and interested professionals to give information on national and local developments, on the group's activities, and on meetings of interest. We also have a website, regularly updated each term, which carries a range of local information and national links, aiming to improve access to information and guidance on SEN issues for all parents and carers.

Find out more at www.supportiveparents.org.uk

6. The parent's voice

We provide a range of opportunities for the parent's voice to be 'heard' by the local authority, so that issues, concerns and successes can be highlighted and influence planning and strategic thinking.

What we can offer

For parents

1. Listen to parents' concerns

Very often, discussing a dilemma with an IPS is enough to enable an enquirer to organise their thoughts regarding a complex and worrying situation, and come up with some plans and priorities for the future.

2. Help parents find appropriate information

Interpreting rules and regulations, SEN systems and processes, and the role of various statutory services can be a huge challenge for the individual. Our base has national and local information available on educational policy and procedures, lists of locally based personnel and their roles and responsibilities. We have information for parents on educational issues and disability-specific special educational needs as well as about local and national support groups. Our library is also used to update and inform IPSs and parent supporters.

3. Help parents to prepare for meetings or decide what questions to ask when they are in touch with professionals

We can help parents to understand who does what and who can make decisions, how children's needs are assessed and how provision is allocated, using the SEN Code of Practice and local policy and practice guidance. It could include

- identifying the purpose or possible value of a meeting
- considering what parent and professionals want to address and achieve during the meeting, and
- deciding what outcomes parents are looking for.

4. Support parents during meetings

If needed, an IPS may be available to attend meetings to support the parent, so that they feel confident to raise issues or offer information. This might also include taking rough notes so that the parent has a personal record of what was discussed and of any agreed plans or outcomes.

5. Help parents to think about, draft or write their contribution about their child's needs

This could be for Individual Education Plans, Interim or Annual Review of Statement, Transition Review for a child with a Statement, or a parental contribution for a statutory assessment. It could also be in response to an exclusion, or any issue relating to behaviour, anxiety or distress.

6. Meet parents informally

Local support groups provide the opportunity to meet other parents and professionals in an informal group to discuss issues of common concern. More formal meetings on specific topics are also arranged. For further details about our monthly support group meetings look on our website (see www.supportiveparents.org.uk). You can also contact us via our Information & Support Line (0117 9897725) or ask at your child's school.

7. Signposting to other services

Inevitably, families who contact us may also be experiencing social and health problems, but the focus of our work is education. However, we also signpost parents to the appropriate service for social and health care issues when additional expertise is needed.

For teachers

1. A listening ear for parents

Our Information and Support Line offers parents with complex issues and concerns an informed and sympathetic response. We are able to provide the extra time and attention that is often so difficult to fit into a busy school day. Parents do need to contact us directly. We do not accept referrals. A self-referral form is provided at the end of this chapter, which parents can use with the support of school or CYPS staff.

2. Information

We hold a wide range of information on specific special educational needs and can often “signpost” enquirers to other relevant sources of information. We have a website that is updated regularly, including support group meeting dates. (Access this via www.supportiveparents.org.uk).

Presently we send out our meetings posters each term to schools via local authority mailings. In future we also hope to send our school mailings by direct e-mail.

The material provides an easy way to give parents information and to help them feel included in meeting the special educational needs of their child

3. Discussion and/or training sessions

These can be provided on aspects of working in partnership with parents of children with special educational needs. We are also happy to arrange meetings with professionals to inform them about our work.

4. School-based support group

Help can be provided in setting up a support group for parents of children with special educational needs.

For Local Authorities

1. Feedback to Local Authorities

Within Supportive Parents we have a system for monitoring the types of difficulties encountered by parents that enables feedback on services to the local authority, without any risk of identifying individual parents or pupils.

We hope that discussion with schools about the use of this material will allow us to identify and disseminate good practice.

2. Voluntary Representatives (Vol. Reps) meetings

Supportive Parents convenes three meetings a year, between parent members, parents representatives of Voluntary Organisations (Vol. Reps.) and the local authority. We aim to have as wide a range of parent representation as possible to address concerns and raise questions. The local authority is able to use these meetings to consult with a group of informed parents and members of voluntary organisations about strategic issues and developments. See chapter 11 for more information about Vol Reps.

3. Courses for professionals, governors, etc.

Supportive Parents staff and parent volunteers can provide input to training on parent-professional partnership at a variety of levels.

4. The parent perspective

We are able to contribute the parent perspective to consultations at local and regional level. We provide and support some parental involvement for consultation work, working parties and/or task groups as appropriate, and time permitting.

What we don't do.

1. Accept referrals

Supportive Parents do not accept referrals from other individuals, professionals or voluntary organisations. This means we will only contact parents if they make a direct request to our helpline, by leaving an answer-phone message, or if they complete a self-referral form. Statutory services are able to obtain these forms from Supportive Parents' Local Co-ordinators. We believe that self-referral is more acceptable and empowering for parents (this includes not taking referrals from other family members - again we need parents to contact us directly). However, we will provide general information to professionals, other helpline services, parent support groups and concerned relatives who may want more information about SEN and/or about our service.

2. Identify individual service users

Our Confidentiality Policy requires that we do not identify or discuss parents and their children with professionals or other concerned individuals. Only in exceptional circumstances, at the direct request of parents, will Supportive Parents initiate contact with education staff on behalf of parents. Experience has taught us that with full information, good preparation, support and with any access requirements met, all parents can contribute effectively to discussions and plans for their children's education. Our IPSs have the time, which busy professionals often lack, to support self-advocacy. We believe that this approach best enables parents to deal effectively with the various issues that may arise at different points of their child's education.

3. Hold professional reports

We do not accept or hold reports or paperwork from professionals. Although parents may choose to share these, they are for them to retain.

4. Provide expert opinions or legal advice

We cannot provide expert opinions on professional reports or assessments or legal advice, but can and do refer parents to organisations who can.

5. Represent parents at SEND Tribunal

We provide information and support to parents who are going to a Tribunal but we do not represent them. This support might include help with paperwork to prepare their case.

6. Work directly with children

We do not work directly with children but we do emphasise the importance of taking the child's views into account and can offer suggestions to parents and teachers as to how these can be ascertained.

We hope this information is helpful, clarifies the service we offer to parents and addresses some issues that arise in partnership with professionals.

APPLICATION FORM FOR REFERRAL
TO
PARENT PARTNERSHIP SERVICE

Supportive Parents is a parent-led voluntary organisation that provides information and confidential support to parents/carers of children with any kind of special educational need.

We seek to empower parents and carers to enable them to play a more active and informed role in their child's education.

In order to remain a confidential service we do not accept referrals from third parties, but if you would like to request a call from our helpline staff, please complete the attached form.

If you wish to be contacted outside helpline hours (10.00 - 2.00, Mon/Wed/Fri during term time) you will need to indicate when you are available. We hope there will be no delay in getting back to you, but this will depend on availability.

.....

I would like Supportive Parents to contact me.

(Please use block capitals)

Name:

Contact telephone number
and best time:

Address:

Signed:

Date:

Return to: Supportive Parents, 3rd Floor, Royal Oak House, Royal Oak Avenue, Bristol BS1 4GB

Summary: Chapter 2 - Parent Partnership and Supportive Parents - who we are, what we do and how we do it!

If you have questions or concerns about the extra help your child needs to learn, we may be able to help.

Supportive Parents is a parent-led voluntary organisation. We provide the Parent Partnership Service in Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. This is a statutory service, providing free, confidential and independent information and support for parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs.

Supportive Parents has a telephone enquiry service, available on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 10am and 2pm during term time. Leave a message on our answerphone at other times and we will get back to you as soon as possible (call us on 0117 9897725).

We listen to parent's concerns, help them to find appropriate information, prepare for meetings, decide what questions to ask and offer support to read or write letters or reports. We offer courses for parents on SEN.

We also hold support group meetings every month in different venues, when parents can meet together. Sometimes we arrange speakers. Occasionally we can also offer face-to-face meetings, by appointment.

We also produce a newsletter three times a year. For more information, contact us on 0117 9897725, or look on our website at www.supportiveparents.org.uk.

Chapter 3: Special Educational Needs and getting extra help – the graduated approach, Individual Education Plans and how SEN is funded in schools.

The DCSF's agenda for Personalised Learning⁴ (DfES publication) identifies that 'every child should be given the chance to be the best that they can be'. The aim of this initiative is to raise standards by focusing teaching and learning on the aptitudes and interests of pupils and removing any barriers to learning. This is not a new initiative, but more an attempt to capture and disseminate best practice and it carries within it the goals of improved SEN provision and practice identified in the government's SEN Strategy "Removing Barriers to Achievement"⁵ published in 2004. These include early intervention, making the educational environment more accessible, having higher expectations for our children and improved partnership working.

For many families government policies are mostly academic. One in every five children will be identified as having additional learning needs during their school life, but each family's experience will be as unique as their child is individual. Some children are identified at birth with severe and complex needs. For some of us our child's differences or difficulties become apparent during the early pre-school years. For others it can be a sudden shock following an accident or illness, or an unexpected school report. We are vulnerable to the way that information is given to us and the extent to which support may be made available at that time and subsequently. Some of us may have personal experience or a family history that can support understanding, but for most it is as foreign and unanticipated as it is unwelcome. The SEN Code of Practice, 2001⁶ requires professionals to 'recognise the personal and emotional investment of parents and be aware of their feelings'. There is also a requirement that parents should be fully informed and invited to participate from the outset, be fully involved in the school-based response for their child and understand any

⁴ <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/downloads/personalisedlearning.pdf>

⁵ http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/5970/removing%20barriers.pdf

⁶ http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/3724/SENCodeOfPractice.pdf

intervention or programme of action and how to respond as a parent. Schools should also provide information about the local Parent Partnership Service.

The graduated approach: This means that early years settings or schools should offer a step-by-step response to helping children with special educational needs (SEN).

The term 'special educational needs' has a legal definition and means a child has learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age.

All schools must have an SEN policy. The policy informs families about how the school makes arrangements and provision to meet the needs of children who experience difficulties in accessing their educational opportunities. Parents should expect to be provided with a copy on request. Equally, many local authorities publish SEN good practice guidance. Look on your Council's website for further details. Supportive Parents' website also provides routes to local and national sources of information, or you can contact our Information and Support Line to ask for further details (0117 9897725).

All educational settings will also have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (or SENCO) and they take a key role in coordinating the provision made for individual children with identified SEN. If the school has concerns about your child they must inform you. If you have concerns, and you have not been reassured by a discussion with your child's class teacher or tutor, you can ask for a meeting with the SENCO.

"If concerns are expressed, don't leave it too long. Follow through and reassure yourself that they are being addressed and/or resolved"⁷

- First, consider talking over your concerns with someone you can trust; a member of the family or a close friend. Remember, you can also call Supportive Parent's Information and Support Line.

⁷ All italicized comments throughout, have been provided by parents of children with SEN, specifically for this document. We would particularly like to thank parents from a Bristol parent support group for their support and valued comments, contributing to development of this chapter.

- If your child is old enough, or perhaps they will have initiated your concerns by sharing their worries with you, you should think about how you can help them to feel part of the process while you pursue help on their behalf.
- Think about what was your starting point for these concerns; when did you first realise your child was struggling? How long has it been going on? If you aren't sure, and it isn't a crisis, it may be worth keeping a record for a few weeks to help to crystallise your thinking.
- What evidence can you use to illustrate your concerns? It might be a piece of work your child brought home or struggled to complete, homework-related issues or an accumulation of comments or concerns expressed by other family members, peers or professionals.
- Are there any reports from other professionals you can offer to provide the SENCO with further information?
- Ensure that you make it clear to the SENCO that you need an opportunity to discuss a private matter of concern - don't expect to catch them in the playground - make a proper appointment. (Equally, don't let yourself be drawn into a potentially emotive conversation in the playground. It could result in embarrassment for you both or, at worst, a breach of your confidentiality.)
- Do take a few notes for yourself, to remind you of the main points you want to discuss. It's so easy to get sidetracked or to forget points of importance in the heat of the moment.
- It's always worth keeping records. Date and file your papers and reports in order, and keep copies of letters sent or received. Keep a notebook by the telephone to note down when you called, who you spoke to, what you discussed and what was agreed. Ideally, write after a meeting with any professional, to thank them for their time, record briefly the purpose of the meeting, remind

them what was discussed and record your understanding of any agreements reached or promises given to take action.

“The quiet compliant child with special needs can be overlooked. Schools need to be particularly alert to the needs of these children.”

As parents, we can expect that our concerns will be listened to and that the SENCO will take the lead in coordinating, advising and supporting staff and any other professionals involved in assessing or planning for the child. The SENCO will work with the class teacher to collect and draw together information about the child’s progress, which will include anything we are able to provide. They will also ensure that good records are kept so that progress can be measured.

“It does seem to be the case that problems identified early are easier and faster for schools to deal with and get specialist advice about. It just seems to take longer and to be so much more difficult to get the right help when things have gone wrong before problems are recognised.”

School Action: Initial discussion with the SENCO will hopefully provide a clear understanding of the next steps that school and home can take, together and separately, to address the concerns raised. This is called School Action.

Extra help can be provided through a number of different routes and schools can generally be expected to have access to a range of expert skills in-house. Assessments can be carried out and different ways of presenting information to children or enabling recording of work can be offered. Sometimes equipment to enable tasks to be achieved or some extra adult support or small group-work can be provided to tackle a particular difficulty.

“Schools seem keen to take kids out in small groups rather than provide alternative means of recording. I’d like to see more use of computers, Dictaphones and mind-mapping.”

This stage should also include the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for your child. This will record short-term

targets and strategies which are additional to or different from those in place for the rest of your child's group or class.

"Ideally I'd like to see teachers basing their work with my child on the IEP and referring to it regularly - real not theoretical targets and provision."

IEPs: These are short-term, achievable, easily monitored, planning documents that should be reviewed at least twice a year (preferably more often for younger children). They will show a small number of (usually 3-4) achievable targets and identify the type, frequency and style of provision that will be offered to enable your child to meet those targets. They should also identify anything you can do at home to support the work being done at school and give a date for the next review, when you will be offered the chance of a meeting to consider your child's progress, record outcomes and discuss new targets for the next IEP. Parents should generally expect their child to achieve the identified targets on the IEP, and should expect targets to change from plan to plan so that progress can be monitored. Remember too, that IEPs can include behavioural, social or emotional targets. They are not only for academic objectives.

"IEPs are only useful when they are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and target-focused). I am looking for a way of knowing exactly what extra help and support he's being offered and how that is helping him to achieve. If I can't tell that, if the targets don't change and I can't figure out what is going on, then I'm going to be worrying and chasing the school."

Funding to meet additional needs at this stage of the Code of Practice is already available in schools through the delegated SEN budget. This is an extra source of funding, in addition to the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) that funds the standard teaching for all children, and which is expected to meet needs across a wide range of abilities. In North Somerset the delegated budget is arrived at against a formula that is based on pupil attainment during the previous three years, and should provide for additional staffing and resources, to directly benefit those pupils working

below the 10th centile⁸. It could provide for extra teaching and Learning Support staff, and specialist equipment. The school is able to make the decisions on how this money will be spent.

School Action will continue until it is no longer needed or it becomes clear that your child is not achieving their targets despite all that the school is able to offer. If it becomes clear that further specialist help, advice or support will need to be sought by the school from another service (for example a health provision such as the Speech and Language Service, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or Occupational Therapy, or an Educational Psychologist or Specialist Teacher) the SENCO will seek your agreement to make appropriate referrals. With your permission, concerns can also be raised and advice sought at the termly Consultation and Planning Meetings (CPM) offered to schools in North Somerset. These are multi-agency meetings that take place up to three times a year at each school, providing a direct link with specialist services.

School Action Plus is the next stage of the Code of Practice, and offers a route for external specialist services to contribute to the planning process for a child's additional provision and resourcing.

External expert advice will support the SENCO in developing a new IEP that is based on this additional information and include revised targets and strategies and any extra support or provision that can be offered. Advice from and involvement of parents, who often become expert in their child's condition and treatment, will also continue to inform the care and provision schools offer children. This will be especially important if the child has additional health needs, and could also contribute to a health care plan if needs are severe or complex.

Schools in North Somerset can apply for audit funding for children with this level of need, often on an annual basis (although some allocations are for two or three years). This is top-up funding, available only for those children with the most severe and complex difficulties in mainstream education, including children with Statements of SEN, to supplement the AWPU and delegated SEN budget. It can be applied for against

⁸ The term 'centile' refers to the number of children in 100 of the same age who would have achieved the same or a lower score.

only one of a range of possible categories, as identified in the Code of Practice, each with several levels, which includes

- Cognition and learning
- Emotional, behavioural and social development
- Communication and interaction
- Sensory
- Physical
- Medical

This is an entirely school-based application process and should not require additional parental advice. It is based on individual children's needs and is applied for against a set of criteria based on the above categories (excepting medical needs, which are considered on an individual basis). Schools can still use this funding flexibly.

School Action Plus will continue until this level of support is no longer needed, unless it becomes apparent that a child continues to have unidentified or unmet long-term needs, despite specialist advice and careful planning.

At this stage a multi-disciplinary meeting may advise that the local authority be requested to undertake a Statutory Assessment. Parents also have the right to request this on behalf of their child, if they feel that their needs are not being identified or successfully met at School Action Plus.

It is always a good idea to discuss this course of action with your child's school or educational setting before taking this step, if only to satisfy yourself about what is already in place for your child and how you feel it compares with the sort of support and adjustments you already make at home and in your community to enable your child to enjoy their life, stay healthy, keep safe and achieve. You could also talk to the other professionals who provide extra input and advice to the school for your child, and you can find out more about the process of requesting a Statutory Assessment by contacting Supportive Parents.

Summary: Chapter 3 - SEN and getting extra help

If a child has special educational needs (SEN) they find it much harder to learn than other children of the same age. The government publishes an SEN Code of Practice that tells schools and Local Authorities how they should meet the needs of children with SEN. (To order a free copy contact DCSF Publications on 0845 6022260; see p29 for further details)

Parents should keep letters or reports from school in date order and in a special place, and make notes of anything they are worried about.

If parents have any concerns or worries about their child, they should arrange to talk to the class teacher first. They should expect to be listened to and taken seriously.

All children with SEN should have an individual education plan or equivalent planned programme and their parents should share in the planning.

All schools have funding from the Local Authority to help children with SEN.

If the school is finding it hard to help your child, they can ask for advice and support from the Local Authority. Schools or parents can request a statutory assessment if a child's needs are severe and complex.

Ten top tips for SENCOs

These suggestions were provided by parents who attend a Supportive Parents' Support Group. They are based on the group's positive experiences of working with SENCOs. This successful experience of working in partnership gave parents confidence that their children's needs were being met. They felt most valued and reassured when SENCOs showed:-

1. Understanding - Parents of children with SEN often feel concerned, vulnerable and defensive when discussing their children's difficulties. If SENCOs are aware of this it reduces the risk of parents becoming overanxious, demanding and overprotective.
2. Listening Skills - Listening to parents, taking their concerns, views, knowledge and experience into account and taking their suggestions on board, especially about their child's personal, social and emotional behaviour.
3. Positive partnership skills - Bringing an approachable, 'can do' attitude to the role, so that the child's progress is seen as a joint responsibility. Planning and monitoring is shared with parents, evidences of progress are explained and successes as well as difficulties recorded.
4. Commitment to training - Recognition of the importance to parents of staff learning/training about specific conditions and showing a willingness to call on parental expertise.
5. Reliability - Doing what they say they will do, in terms of contact and timescales. Following through on what is agreed at meetings and not making commitments that aren't kept.

6. Commitment to home/school communication - Recognition of the importance to parents of regular, useful home school contact, especially when the child has any communication difficulties. Being prepared to give time in addition to parent's evenings and advising parents how they can help their child to learn at home.

7. Readiness to offer information and support - Recognition of the importance to parents of explanation for a complex SEN system. Respecting their wider support and information needs and signposting them on or referring them to relevant agencies.

8. Commitment to needs - a focus on children's needs rather than available resources, unless asked directly by parents. Parents should not be made to feel that their child is in competition for scarce resources.

9. Multi-disciplinary working skills - Recognition of the benefits to a child of good multi-disciplinary working. Knowing what additional support is available, how to access it and following professional recommendations.

10. Commitment to children's views - Interest in finding out a child's view of what is difficult or challenging for them, either directly from the child or from what parents know of their child.

Chapter 4: Statutory Assessment and the Statementing process.

If your child's difficulties are very complex and long-term, you may well have already had the possibility of a "Statement" mentioned to you. This legal document, identifying a child's complex needs and stating the objectives, provision, resources and placement that will be offered to meet those difficulties, was only ever anticipated to be needed for a tiny number (around 2%) of children over the age of two, with the most severe difficulties or disabilities. These would be children who required a multi-professional statutory assessment of need to be carried out by the local authority.

"Parents should be aware that their child doesn't need a clear (specific) diagnosis to start this process." ⁹

It can often seem to parents that a statutory assessment is the only route left to them, in their efforts to seek a remedy or solution to all the problems their child is experiencing in accessing their educational opportunities and/or environment; particularly if their child is working significantly below the level of their peer group or progressively falling further behind. Parents can find it hard to achieve a clear understanding of what support is in place and who is involved. However, before taking action to initiate a statutory assessment, it is advisable to consider in detail whether the school has done everything possible to meet your child's needs.

- It is always worth looking back over your child's records, to make sure that you have all the information about their in-class support and current attainment levels. If you haven't got this information, you need ask the school for it.

"Keep copies of all paperwork. Keep a diary and make a note of who you talk to, the date, what you talked about.....everything!"

- Draw together all the reports and plans you have received in the last year. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are

⁹ We would like to thank parents from the NAS Out of School club in North Somerset, who supported and contributed to this chapter. Their comments are contributed in italics.

particularly important as potential sources of information, and as a means of monitoring progress. The local authority will not usually consider a statutory assessment until they have evidence that the school is doing all it can to identify and meet a child's needs. Except in the most exceptional cases, this will involve the school using external specialists to advise and support the work they are doing. You should be able to see this specialist advice reflected in your child's IEP. See if you have reports from them you can refer to as well, and track their recommendations against your child's in-class support or provision. "Also include along with the educational documents any medical or social care reports providing information about your child's level of need."

- Have you used every chance to discuss your concerns and share your experience of your child's learning needs with your child's class teacher or the SENCO?
- If you feel that you have done all you can to support your child and the school and you still have significant concerns, then if at all possible you should inform the school that you want consideration to be given to requesting a statutory assessment. (Equally, if a child's school or setting wants to take this step, they must consult with the parents first.)
- You have the right to make a direct request for a statutory assessment to the local authority. Supportive Parents can offer support and information about taking forward this course of action. "If your letter to the local authority is important I would always advise that you deliver it by hand or send it registered mail!"

Statutory assessment is a legal process, defined in education law and guided by the SEN Code of Practice. For further information about the process telephone the Department for Children, Schools and Families' publications helpline on 0845 6022260 and order a free copy of the booklet "Special Educational Needs (SEN) a guide for Parents and Carers" (quote ref: DCSF.00639-2008RKT-EN). This booklet can also be downloaded from the government's website:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank.index.cfm?id=3755>

Copies of the SEN Code of Practice (ref: 581/2001) and the SEN

Toolkit (ref: 558/2001) can also be ordered, but beware of flooding yourself with technical information at this stage. It is important not to let the process overwhelm your unique awareness of your individual child's needs.

"Don't forget that you are expert on your child and that the information you provide is essential to the process."

When the local authority receives a request for a statutory assessment they will consider all the information they have been sent. If the school has made the request, they will write to the parent and ask you whether you agree. They will ask you to let them know within 29 days, to give you time to make further enquiries and collect together any supporting information or evidence to send them, to help them to decide if this is the right next step. They will tell you who your point of contact will be at the Local Authority (Named SEN Officer) and how long the whole process takes (26 weeks in total). Within six weeks of receiving a request an advisory panel (in North Somerset this is called the Statutory and Complex Issues Panel, or SCIP) should make a decision whether to proceed with the statutory assessment.

"Telephone your child's Named SEN Officer at any time to ask questions or follow the progress of the statutory assessment."

If the local authority thinks your child can be supported successfully at School Action or School Action Plus, the Named SEN Case Officer must write to tell you and your child's school that the local authority will not carry out a statutory assessment. They should state the reasons and may also offer some advice about the help that is needed or the external support that is appropriate. They will offer you a chance to meet with them, to talk through your concerns. The letter will remind you that you can seek information and support from the Parent Partnership Service (Supportive Parents), and will also offer information about the Disagreement Resolution Service¹⁰ and inform you of your right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs and

¹⁰ All Local Authorities must offer access to a local, trained, independent mediation service that will be skilled in helping to sort out disagreements and will have knowledge of SEN and disability issues. For further details contact **Wessex Mediation**, 5 Weymouth Road, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1QR. Tel: 01823 336465 or info@mediationsomerset.co.uk

Disability Tribunal¹¹ (SEND). At each stage of the decision-making process during Statutory Assessment, you will be offered the chance to appeal if you do not agree with the local authority's decision, and you will have two months after receiving the notifying letter to make your appeal.

"Don't be afraid to disagree! You have a right to your opinion and to appeal if you feel the Authority is not taking all the evidence into account. Find the information and support you need, so that you don't feel vulnerable."

Remember, if your child does not need a statutory assessment, that does not mean they cannot get extra help at school (at School Action or School Action Plus).

If the local authority agrees to make a statutory assessment they will confirm this with you in writing. They will also notify your child's educational setting and they will ask a number of professionals for their views. They must ask:

- Your child's educational setting or school
- An Educational Psychologist
- A Doctor
- Social Care Services (if they know your child)
- You, as parent or carer
- Your child's views should also be sought in an appropriate way. This could be with the help of the school. If you have any concerns about this, contact your Named SEN Case Officer to talk it over.
- There may be others they also think could provide useful advice.

It is a good idea to keep a careful record of dates, so you can track the progress of your child's assessment. Keep a note of all the professionals involved (you should be invited to tell the local authority if there is anyone you would particularly like them to contact) and keep all paperwork in a separate place, in date order.

"Make sure you keep in touch with the Named SEN Officer, to check they have received information and to confirm they have contacted or heard back from other professionals. Sometimes, as

¹¹ SEND helpline: Tel. 0870 241 2555 Discrimination helpline: tel. 0870 606 5750
www.sendist.gov.uk/FormsGuidance/forParents.htm

a parent, you can speed up delivery of late reports very effectively!”

You will be asked in writing to provide your contribution within six weeks of the start of the assessment. It should take ten weeks in total for the local authority to collect and take account of all the advice sought. It is possible for you to ask for an extension of this time, but bear in mind that to do so will lengthen the time the process takes overall.

Your views are essential, because you know your child better than anyone else. Most professionals can only provide a ‘snapshot’ of your child - their involvement will inevitably be time-limited and specific to their area of expertise. You can offer an overview of every aspect of your child - you can take these different threads and knit them into a three-dimensional, holistic picture. Remember that the local authority officer who writes the Statement is unlikely to have an opportunity to meet your child. They will be collating paperwork and reports, but you can provide the sort of detail that can enable them to get a truly individual picture.

“I once had it suggested to me that sending an actual photo of my child would be helpful. It really brought it home to me that he somehow needed to be made ‘real’ to them, in a way that reports alone can’t be expected to achieve.”

Initially, being asked to write a parental contribution can feel like such a daunting task. Parents often ask where to start, how much to write, and don’t feel confident that they can contribute to a document that is about educational provision. However, there are guidelines available from most local authorities or disability-specific organisations (and in Section 8 of the SEN Toolkit), and your child’s school and the Parent Partnership Service can help too. We are happy to talk through your plan for writing this report, share some ideas of how to tackle it and help you to keep your focus on the aims and goals of your advice to the local authority.

Brief guidelines for writing a parental contribution during the statutory assessment process:

- It can be as short or long as you wish: “bullet points are fine”.
- It is worth giving a little background in the form of a history of your child’s development, including what may first have alerted you to their difficulties and what help or interventions were offered at that early stage. Mention any family-related information and major events that you feel could be relevant to your child’s present difficulties.
- Provide current information about your child; their health (physical and emotional) and any ongoing treatment or involvement of professionals, your child’s relationships with family, peers and other adults (in formal and informal settings), their communication and self-help skills and difficulties, their behaviour at home and how they play and learn, and any issues or concerns related to school. Think about what you do at home to help them to be happy and achieve, and any special steps you take to help them do something new, cope with change or complete a task. You may not have a ‘diagnosis’ for your child, but remember that this should not influence the outcome of the assessment, the aim being to arrive at a clear identification of needs and appropriate provision.
- Give your opinion of what you see as your child’s special needs; what are they good at? Where and when do they struggle? What has been done to help? What difference did it make? When do they thrive? What do they enjoy? Who is involved and how do they help, and is there anyone else you would like to see involved?
- Try to pinpoint your major concerns, and include any worries your child may have expressed to you. Keep a pad of paper out and jot down bullet points as you think of them. Take a day or two to do this and then put some time aside to draw your thoughts together. “Speak to your child’s SENCO about specific guidelines in relation to your child’s needs eg: autism, and write your contribution in line with these.”
- You could help your child to directly contribute to the process by telling the local authority what they like best at

school, what they find difficult and how they would like to be helped (see the end of chapter 7 for forms you could use to help you and your child to do this).

- You can also include reports you have received from other professionals or independent practitioners. "I listed all the relevant organisations I had sought advice from and I felt that this added weight to my contribution."

Within two weeks of receiving the reports, the local authority will decide whether or not to issue a Statement of Special Educational Needs. They must notify you in writing. If they decide not to, you will have an opportunity to appeal to SEND. They may issue a Note in Lieu, which describes your child's needs and advises how these should be met, but does not have the legal status of a statement. Remember that refusing to issue a statement does not mean your child does not have significant support needs. You can ask for a meeting with the Named SEN Officer to discuss the decision and to find out more about how the extra help and support your child needs can be accessed. If the local authority does decide to issue a statement, they will provide a draft document called a Proposed Statement of SEN and ask you to look at it, and agree or comment on it and state a preference for the school or setting your child should attend, within fifteen days.

"Do your homework in good time, to find out about schools that are available in your Authority. You will need to provide evidence to support your opinion as to whether a particular school can or can't meet your child's needs."

The Proposed Statement will be accompanied by all the reports that were collected during the statutory assessment process, so this can seem an overwhelming prospect at first glance. Supportive Parents is there to support you through this process, and we would suggest spending a few minutes reading through the Statement itself and then putting it all to one side for a few hours before tackling it in detail, when you have had some time to prepare for and concentrate on the task. If you need to, you can ask for an extension to this time period, but you should bear in mind that to do so will lengthen the time the process takes overall.

You will often find that you are familiar with most if not all of the reports; so on second glance the task will hopefully feel less overwhelming! Set yourself up with a couple of highlighter pens and choose one for picking out your child's needs, differences and areas of difficulty. Use the other colour to highlight any recommendations made, including resources, strategies and provision. Read through the reports, employing your colours and then do a comparison with the statement. Do all the 'needs' you have identified appear in part two of the statement? Do all the recommendations appear in part three? Now, look at each 'need' - is it matched by appropriate provision?

Finally, do you recognise your child as described in the document? If you ask for changes, additions or deletions to the statement, it is essential to provide evidence - directly out of the supplied reports if at all possible.

You can ask your Named SEN Officer for a meeting to discuss the wording and any changes you have requested. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the language used (although it shouldn't be) so do not be afraid to ask!

At this stage part four must not be filled in. This is the section naming the placement. You will be offered the chance to express a preference for a specific school or setting, and the local authority must approach that setting (even if it is the school your child already attends) to ensure they are able to meet the needs and supply the provision identified in the statement. They must agree with your preference, so long as the school is suitable, the education of the other children at the school will not be compromised and it is an 'efficient use of resources'¹². If you cannot agree on the wording, or the placement, the local authority has the right to decide to issue the Final Statement. You would then have the right to appeal to SEND and you could also consider contacting the Disagreement Resolution Service. This stage should be completed within eight weeks of the Proposed Statement being issued.

"Remember that it is possible to apply to the Disagreement Resolution Service even though you may have lodged an appeal

¹² Schedule 27, Education Act 1996

with SEND, it may allow you reach a faster solution to your disagreement and will not damage your appeal.”

Parts five and six of the Statement give details of non-educational needs and provision. These are outside the local authority’s statutory duty and so it is important that needs or the provision you would regard as essential in terms of accessing your child’s education are not expressed solely in these sections.

The whole process should take twenty-six weeks in total, unless it falls during the summer holiday or additional advice is required. Once a statement is in place, your child’s setting will issue a revised IEP so that it will be clear to you and to all staff how the recommendations of the document will be taken forward. Each year the statement must be reviewed (the Annual Review) to ensure that it is still appropriate to your child’s needs.

At every stage of the statutory assessment and ‘statementing’ process, you should expect to feel welcome and supported, so that you can be fully involved, informed and enabled to contribute to your child’s education and successful inclusion into their school community.

Summary: Chapter 4 - Statutory assessments and the statementing process

Statutory assessment was only ever meant for those children with the most severe and complex needs (about two in every hundred children).

Schools and/or parents can make a request to the local authority to undertake a statutory assessment. Evidence must be provided to support the application. Supportive Parents can help.

It is a legal process and takes 26 weeks to complete. Parents need to keep careful records.

Parents can talk to a Named SEN Officer at the local authority during the process.

Parents must be invited to contribute to the process. Schools and Supportive Parents can help.

The child's school, a doctor, an Educational Psychologist and Social Care will also be asked to write reports. Parents can ask for others to be contacted.

If at any time during the process the local authority decides not to proceed, parents can appeal against this decision. The local authority must tell parents how to apply to the SEN and Disability Tribunal (SEND). Supportive Parents can help at every stage of the process.

Chapter 5: Starting out in Primary and transferring to Secondary School - the Admissions process and who can help.

Choosing a school for your child with special needs is always going to be an additional source of concern for parents.

Unless children with special needs or disabilities already have statements of SEN their application for a place:-

- Must be treated in exactly the same way as for any other child, on the basis of an individual school's published admission criteria.
- Cannot be refused on the grounds that their needs cannot be met.
- Cannot be refused on the grounds that they do not have a statement or are in the process of being statutorily assessed.

Parents of a child with a Statement will always be invited to express a preference for a school and this must be complied with by the local authority unless the school is unable to meet the child's needs, the placement wouldn't be an efficient use of resources or the education of other children would be compromised¹³.

Parents can request a meeting with the named SEN case officer before the final statement is issued to discuss concerns such as a suitable placement for their child, and the local authority has a duty to ensure that the school can meet the child's needs, as they are identified in the statement.

If a child has a statement of SEN, a school is required to admit that child if the school is named in the statement. The governing body cannot refuse admission even if this would mean exceeding their admission number.

If a child has a statement, parents can only appeal against a placement decision to the SEN and Disability Tribunal (SEND) after the 'Final Statement' is issued.

¹³ Schedule 27, Education Act 1996

Whether a child has a statement or not, most parents will want to choose their child's school, so it is important to start thinking about this process in good time.

When applying for a school place for a child with SEN without a statement, remember that they are entitled to full-time education, but you have no greater guarantee to a place at the school of your choice than has any other parent. You only have a right to express a preference¹⁴, although that preference must be met (within the published criteria) as far as is possible.

Find out the date when you will need to make an application for admission (you could ask your child's setting, or contact the local authority admissions team) and start giving your choice some thought at least six months in advance (that means about 18 months before your child is due to start at the school!). The local authority must publish a guide with information about local schools, giving catchment areas and admission criteria. Read them with care and ensure you stick to the timetable!

Make a list of what really matters for you and your child. It may be location, or whether your child's friends are going too, what extra activities and clubs are on offer, or the reputation of the school, it's experience in meeting the needs of children with similar difficulties to your child's, the size or the layout. Are you concerned about how your child will cope with mixed-ability (or mixed-year) classes, setting or streaming? Will break or lunch-time arrangements be a major consideration? Unless you express a preference for a Special School, the local authority must ensure your child is educated in a mainstream school, unless it is not compatible with the educational needs of other children¹⁵.

Start collecting information about the schools you have short-listed. You should ask for a copy of the school's prospectus and SEN policy (sometimes these documents are available via the school's website). You can also ask for other documents, like their anti-bullying policy, behaviour policy, home-school agreement, race equality policy and Ofsted report. Use these to make a list of what you should ask about or look out for.

¹⁴ Section 86 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998

¹⁵ Section 316, Education Act 1996

Don't forget that other parents can be an invaluable source of information about how schools actually function, although you will find that individual experiences can be affected or influenced by personal attitudes or expectations, and can vary enormously. Supportive Parents runs monthly support groups, where you will be able to meet other parents, or our helpline can tell you if there are parent groups locally that will offer you the chance to meet other parents with children who have a similar difficult or impairment to your own.

Visit the schools you are considering - take your list of questions and make notes too! Most primary schools will offer an individual appointment, most secondary schools hold open days and evenings but you may still feel that you need an individual appointment to discuss your child's difficulties if they have SEN. Visiting a school when the children are there gives a really valuable indication of the school's 'feel'. Is it a warm atmosphere? Are the staff interested and do they listen to you or do they seem more intent on establishing boundaries? Do you see a mixed ability evidenced in wall displays? Listen to the noise levels and how the staff talks to individual children and groups. If your child has severe and complex needs you may well find that you can ask your child's current key worker or Teaching Assistant for company and support when visiting prospective new schools.

Also, look around (and don't be afraid to ask!) to see if there are notices on display for parents, a regular newsletter or website. You may find that the school offers a parent group, which could give you a chance to meet parents who already have children attending the school.

You need to consider that if you do not get a place for your child at the school of your choice, and if you have not expressed a second or third preference for an alternative school, as allowed on the admissions form, you are effectively giving the local authority the right to offer a place at any maintained school in the authority. The Government has now made funding available to local authorities, to enable them to establish a Choice Advice Service. For further information in North Somerset, contact them on 01275 888778), aiming to offer support to families who struggle to make this decision when looking for a secondary placement. If you do not get the school place for which you

expressed a preference, you will also be offered reasons for the decision and the chance to appeal to an independent panel.

Equality of access and opportunity: Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, schools must not treat disabled children less favourably than other children, and must make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure they are not placed at a disadvantage.

This duty is anticipatory. That means schools must think ahead and plan provision, including removing or minimising barriers as far as possible. This also includes publishing accessibility plans and information welcoming disabled pupils by telling families what the school is doing to make it possible for them to attend.

Forward planning will ensure that this act is going to have a direct impact on your child's experience, by making it possible for the school to ensure that training and provision is in place in good time for your child's admission.

Early Years Foundation Stage - Transfer to school for children with additional needs by Joanne, Manager of Springboard Opportunity Centre

Starting school for any child is an important, challenging time, filled with anxieties as well as exciting opportunities. Parents need to feel confident that they have done all they can to choose the right school and to ensure the best possible start for their children. For families with a child with additional needs or disabilities this can be a daunting prospect.

A new school should not be a completely new beginning but a smooth transfer of education from one setting to another. Pre-schools, nurseries and schools all work to the same Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and should therefore have the same positive commitment to inclusion.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Team within North Somerset has highlighted transfer to school as a high priority. It is committed to working in partnership with parents to ensure all children with additional needs transfer to school as easily and effectively as possible.

Schools are encouraged to get to know the children before they start, applying for audit funding where necessary, appointing any extra staff, arranging training and ensuring the environment is appropriate and that any special equipment is in place. Information about the children's strengths and needs and any strategies that have been successful in the early years settings are shared. Children are given plenty of opportunity to become familiar with the new setting, routine and staff.

Help and support is available for all children, families, early years settings and schools to make the process as smooth as possible. Here are some of the ways we can help:

- Pre-school planning meetings - A series of meetings designed to bring parents, carers and relevant professionals together in the year prior to school entry. They should be held for all children at Early Years Action Plus on the Code of Practice. Meetings will usually be arranged by the health authority, Springboard or mainstream pre-school/nursery.

When	Who (All invites at request of and in consultation with parents)	Why
Oct/ Nov	Parents, carers, health professionals, EP, Early Years practitioner, Portage, Social Worker Springboard, SEN Officer	Share information about child's strengths and needs, review current provision and look at possibilities for school. Discuss process for securing relevant support
Jan/ Feb	As above and receiving school	Continue to share information and pass on to school relevant details necessary for planning, including Audit funding applications, training. School may plan visits to child at pre-school
Term 5 or 6	As above. Usually called by and held at school	Continue to share information. Plan visits to child, and for child and parent to school, training needs, staffing, external support e.g Speech & Language Team, Portage ¹⁶ bridge, classroom environment, equipment etc

- Link programme - To help children who have potential difficulties adapting and settling into the new environment of school and to promote partnership between parents/carers, pre-school and school. To be referred the children must be on Early Years Action Plus, be known to the Area INCCO Team and have current support plans in place in their pre-school setting.

When	What happens
Term 3	Children identified by pre-school/nursery, applications sent to a panel, children selected against criteria, funding allocated to allow pre-schools to collect evidence and attend reviews.
Term 5	Workshop. Parents, early years setting and school come together to plan transfer. Funding for settings and schools.
Term 6	Series of visits by school staff to early years settings. Visits by child and early years worker to school. Initial IEP set up. Funding for settings and schools.
Term 1	Once child has started school early years worker visits to support and advise. IEP reviewed together. Funding for pre-schools.

The programme can be adapted to meet the individual needs of each child and school.

¹⁶ See below, next page, for further details

- Portage bridge - The Portage Bridge is offered to those children who have been receiving Portage help and who are due to enter nursery class or the reception class of their local mainstream school the following September. Families and receiving schools have the option of taking up this form of support from the period of September to December-terms 1& 2. The purpose of the bridge is to support staff in the transfer of children from preschool to school, for those children identified as having complex additional needs. There is a clear structure in place with supporting paperwork. The Portage Bridge will combine with the Link Programme, thus ensuring a consistent approach to transfer from early years' setting to school.
- Learning Diaries/ observations/reports- All pre-schools and nurseries keep records of the children's progress and these are invaluable for school staff. Learning Diaries are the property of parents but schools always appreciate seeing them and often incorporate them into their own records with parent's permission.
- SEN Officer- There are 4 SEN Officers who each cover a locality in North Somerset, based at the Town Hall. The SEN Officer who covers the area you live in will be involved with preschool planning meetings. Where children's needs are complex, when a statement is necessary or audit funding appropriate they can be extremely helpful in giving advice and ensuring the process works smoothly. The officers can be involved as early as the first review and parents are welcome to contact them as necessary.

The key to successful transfer is good communication. Liaison between parents, children, pre-schools, schools and SEN as early as possible can help to lessen anxieties and inform decisions.

by Joanne Harris, Manager of Springboard Opportunity Group June 2009

A parent's experience of the Early Years transfer process

Our experience of starting school was a great success, enabling our son, who is autistic, to have the best possible start at mainstream school.

Looking back there didn't seem that much for us to do - partly helped by having our two older children already at school, one of whom also has special needs.

Very early on we decided on mainstream school as our son has good learning potential and we knew the local school well. He was well-supported (by an outreach support service provided by Springboard Opportunity Group staff) at the local playgroup and so it seemed 'right' that he went to the local school. Portage was a great support at this time. Springboard organised planning meetings and included school staff: SENCO, class teacher and Head Teacher, as well as the Educational Psychologist, Paediatrician, Health Visitor, Portage worker, family support worker, learning disability nurse and Springboard staff. School also visited him at Springboard.

We applied for school as any other parent would, but completed the part on disabilities on the application form. The school application form was obtained from the school office and the timetable for admission was clearly set out.

Alongside the planning for school a Statement of SEN was also being prepared - again, Springboard facilitated this and we had support during the process from Supportive Parents.

School, from the start, were positive, warm and welcoming. Our son had many after-school visits to his class during the last pre-school term. Some were planned - on other occasions he 'broke in' on the way to collect his siblings! The teacher and support staff were excellent at talking to him - no mean feat as his communication skills were poor.

All this extra contact made starting school a positive, successful experience. I should mention that Springboard and Portage were lifelines and managed the whole process for me.

Positives were:

- Pre-school planning meetings
- Statement
- Extra visits to school
- Home/school diary from day 1
- Excellent communication
- Portage Bridge into school (that advised on my son's communication requirements - PECS,¹⁷plus his other resource and environmental needs)
- Springboard
- Excellent Learning Support Assistants(LSAs)
- Social story about starting school and photos

What could have been better?

- Meeting the LSAs prior to him starting school
- More clarity re. the hours of support he'd be getting

Our son's transfer from Springboard/pre-school to mainstream school with support was a massive success, thanks to all the agencies involved. How different to the experience we had with his older brother with special needs, who hadn't attended Springboard. We are thankful the process is now so much clearer, professional and certainly puts the needs of the child first.

North Somerset parent

¹⁷ The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is used to develop communication, particularly in children with autistic spectrum disorders. For further information, contact pyramid@pecs.org.uk

A parent's experience of transfer to Secondary school:
Our experience of Secondary transfer definitely started in Year 5. Our son has a Statement, so the Secondary SENCO of the school we wanted him to go to was invited to his Year 5 review - I guess to help with the decision of whether he could be supported in mainstream, and to give her a chance to find out more so they'd be prepared. As an outcome of his Year 5 annual review, the school arranged for advice from an Advisory Teacher from Education Support Services during Year 6 and this contributed to the updating of his Statement and planning transfer arrangements.

Before applying for a Secondary place in October at the start of Year 6, a letter came from the SEN team explaining how the procedure is different for children with Statements. I called them and they were really helpful, told me how to fill it in and assured me they'd liaise directly with Admissions.

The Secondary SENCO sent a "deputy" to the Year 6 annual review and I know she got the paperwork after the meeting. As a result of that review, held in term 1, his Statement was reissued in February of Year 6, naming the Secondary school as the one he'd be going to from September. That meant he knew at the same time as all the other children in his class. Everyone worked really hard to update his Statement so that the wording would reflect his needs in a Secondary setting. We made a particular effort with our parental contribution to his Annual Review that year! It was valuable to be able to take our paperwork to Supportive Parents, who were willing to read it through and make some suggestions to help us to say all that we needed to say about his support requirements, particularly during the transfer process. They encouraged me to listen carefully during the meeting and to anticipate that the skills available from advisory staff attending the meeting would be used to enhance the school's planning.

I wanted him to start going to visit the new school after Christmas, but staff at the review meeting persuaded me that was much too early, and I have to say they were right! I was so anxious, but the careful plan they drew up after the meeting went a long way to reassuring me.

The Secondary School has a booklet to introduce the school to children, full of photos, information about subjects and general stuff - questions you'd naturally ask, a sample timetable and a map. That gave us something concrete to talk with him about and probably helped me as much as my son (probably more!). He was calm, because they were calm at school. I had to keep reminding myself that it was very special for us but routine for them. We tried to be positive and matter-of-fact about it and to talk about it when we were calm ourselves. He went on the usual day induction visit with his class, but his LSA had done a lot of preparation about what would happen, when, where and how. She'd also taken him on a preliminary visit first, so he was able to tell the other kids stuff on the day. That really helped his morale! He also went with his LSA to a couple of lessons at the Secondary School in a subject he enjoys, and that seemed to go well too.

During enrichment week in June the Secondary School was virtually empty. They let us (my son, his LSA and me) just wander around with a map and a camera. The first time the SENCO came too, but the second time we did it on our own - orienteering! It was fun and by the end I felt so confident (so did he). We used the sample timetable to "walk through" a typical day - finding his tutor room and subject classrooms.

Something that worried me was finding he wasn't in a class with any of his particular friends. I thought that would be a huge problem at the time, but in fact it wasn't. He's actually made completely different friends in Secondary, and I don't think that's unusual.

Two things really helped. He did get upset about leaving his familiar Junior School and they were brilliant. His LSA had spent time preparing him; including making a book of memories for him to keep and they also invited him to visit them if he ever needed to (and agreed it with the Secondary School). In the event he never did, but he just relaxed so much when they made the offer. The other thing that helped me was being given his new tutor's email address. I think I only used it twice in the first year, but I felt so much better just having it!

Maggie, parent

Summary: Chapter 5 - The admissions process

Unless children have a Statement of SEN, they must be treated in exactly the same way as all children, even if they have identified special educational needs (SEN).

Parents need to start looking at schools at least 18 months before their child is due to start. The local authority publishes a guide to local primary and secondary schools; you may need to ask for a copy.

Make a list of what is important to you and your child and then visit the schools you are interested in applying to. Most schools will have open days for interested parents.

If your child has support, why not ask someone who knows your child well to come to look at the new school with you? This is good practice.

Early years setting and all schools should plan together to manage children's successful transfer. This is especially important if the child has SEN.

Make a point of meeting with other parents to discuss what worked for them. Find out about support groups in your local area. Supportive Parents can help with this. We run our own support groups too.

Chapter 6: What parents can do to help their child to be successfully included at school.

Just as provision for pupils with SEN is a responsibility shared by all school staff and governors, all those with parental responsibility must feel empowered and supported if they are to share sensitive information and take decisions on behalf of children. As parents, we have duties and responsibilities, but we need knowledge of how systems work if we are to have realistic expectations of what provision could be offered to meet the needs of our children. One of the principal aims of the Parent Partnership Service is to provide an informed and confidential service to parents, offering information and support when parents request it, so that they can fulfil their responsibilities with confidence.

There are a whole range of activities and actions that you as a parent can undertake, to achieve and maintain the best possible working relationship with your child's school. Supportive Parents' Information & Support line would advise all parents to:-

- Keep good records, use evidence (eg: actual examples of work) to support any concerns, and take them to the class teacher in the first instance, if at all possible.
- If you need any specific help or adaptations in order to take part in meetings, notify the school well in advance. Supportive Parents may be able to provide an IPS to support you before and during the meeting (see chapter 6 for more information about attending meetings).
- Ask for an explanation for the meaning of unfamiliar words or information (also, see our jargon buster; appendix 1). Our Information & Support Line sometimes finds that help is being given to children by schools, but it is not clear from the information sent out to families.
- Try to get involved with the school in any way you can. Building relationships with the school before any problems

arise is a wonderful starting-point if you then need to cooperate to tackle difficulties.

- Focus on what is working. It's the best starting-point for finding solutions to things that aren't going so well.
- Ask about procedures and make appointments. Make sure you have good cause if you intend to first approach the SENCO, head teacher or governors, rather than the class teacher.
- Always aim for clarity and assertiveness rather than confrontation. Give the system time to work. Don't try to sort everything out at once.
- If you are seeking solutions, ask open-ended questions (that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no"). Don't offer solutions yourself ("I think you should....."); ask questions ("How will you....."). Listen to what staff can tell you.
- Parents have a right to ask for sight of their child's school records (excepting some medical notes and anything that might breach the confidentiality of other children). Put your request to the Chair of Governors and expect it to take up to 15 days. Copies can also be requested; there may be a charge for photocopying.

A parent's experience of working in partnership with her son's primary school:

When my son started school I was unaware he had any problems. On the second day his teacher expressed some concerns and after the first week she asked if I would mind if the School Paediatrician saw him. At this point I didn't know why. I did think it was over the top as he was only just four years old and hadn't been in this sort of environment before. However I said yes, convinced there wasn't a problem. Over the next few weeks

my son continued to have difficulty settling into school. I was asked if I could spend some time at school with him. I did this for two days a week for the rest of that school year. Since this time I have continued to help the school by acting as a parent volunteer in the reception class supporting children's reading. I feel that my continuing involvement in the life of the school has allowed me to build a stronger relationship with the staff.

As the school thought my son would benefit from one to one support they applied for Audit Funding so they could employ an L.S.A. to help him everyday. This made a huge difference, as he was then able to go to school on a full time basis instead of part time, which he had done for the first term. A Home/School diary was set up and this gave us as parents and the school a way of communicating on a daily basis.

Meanwhile my son was seen by the School's Paediatrician, Educational Psychologist and by a Speech and Language Therapist. On some of the occasions when a professional came to do an assessment on my son they would come and talk to me afterwards to enquire about his behaviour at home. They then did a further specialist assessment and my son was diagnosed with A.S.D. (Autistic Spectrum Disorder). There were multi - agency meetings at school for everyone involved with him. This included his L.S.A., his teacher and the SENCO as well as us (his parents). At those meetings we were informed about the help our son was getting as well as being given the opportunity to express any concerns we had.

We were also given information about Supportive Parents and it made a big difference to us. Until this point we had felt confused and very much 'on the outside looking in'. For the first year we had a multi-agency review meeting that took place every 3 months. With the help of Supportive Parents we were able to become more directly involved with our child's education. They offered us a clearer understanding of what we could reasonably expect the school to offer and this empowered us to get the help and support he needed.

Attending support groups also made a big difference. There were many speakers who came to these meetings and told us so much about autism and SEN and some talked about the work they did, giving us a real insight into how the system works. It was also a

chance to meet other parents. That helped us to feel we weren't on our own.

When my son was in year 1 we were referred to Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). It was thought it would be a good idea for him to do a (Dinosaur) course to help him to understand how to behave in a wide range of situations, whilst I went on the Webster-Stratton parenting course. This course gave me strategies to deal with difficult behaviours. Both courses were run in the same place on the same day. It meant taking my son out of school once a week, so I approached the school and the SENCO and they agreed it was a good idea. For the first three weeks his L.S.A. went with him. This helped him settle in and they were also able to talk about how the course went after she stopped going. After the first week the SENCO wasn't so sure it had been a good idea, as it initially led to more bad behaviour, but we persevered and were very happy with the end results.

By the time he got to year 2 everything was great and my son had a brilliant year at school. All the strategies put into place in year 1 continued to work very well. This was greatly help by the fact that the two teachers he had in year 2 were trained in autism. For a while I thought this was the best school in the world. Unfortunately Year 3 was a different story. There was a change in senior management and there was no strategy meeting or anything put into place to help him with this key stage transfer. Things went downhill fast. Some of this was expected as there were a lot of changes; he had a male teacher for the first time, and going from key stage 1 to key stage 2 meant no longer having afternoon breaks. His class teacher and I would have a meeting every week to see if we could solve this problem. Nothing seemed to work. I requested that the SENCO get help from the Education Support team (ESS) and was told there wasn't a problem with my son, which confused me as I was being called in on a daily basis, being told how difficult he was finding school and that he was constantly leaving class.

By now I dreaded going to the school to pick him up, as I didn't know what to expect. When the teacher went off long-term sick my son found this very difficult as there were quite a few supply teachers and all the strategies put into place had been taken

away. Then I was offered a ten-week course with 'Early Bird Plus' (an NAS programme) on condition the school sent the L.S.A. working with the child. I asked the school if this was possible and at first was told 'no'. However after a bit of persuading they agreed and this gave us both a chance to work together on helping my son to cope with school.

When Year 3 finished I was at my wits end. I was still being called in regularly and I was worried about how my son would cope with his next transition from year 3 to 4 as it would mean moving to a different part of the school with fewer of the physical resources he needs. I really didn't know which way to turn until someone suggested I talk to the vice chairman of the board of governors. After I explained my concerns he told me he would talk to the Chairman and the Head Teacher. I also phoned someone who had worked with my son in the past at Education Support and asked for help. This resulted in my son getting full support for the first 3 days of year 4 and a social story was put together to help him. Now it is about getting everything back on track.

With the continuing involvement of Supportive Parents we feel that the situation has moved on, so that the school is starting to identify and put into place reasonable adjustments for our son, and we are increasingly aware of and able to contribute to a process that is centred on our son. The E.S.S. team has come back into the school to set up some more strategies to help him cope with anger management. I really count myself very lucky to have had the support I have had from all of the professionals and I thank God everyday for my son's first teacher being trained to spot the differences in my child.

Liz, parent

A parent's experience of partnership-working at Secondary level:

Secondary was a whole different ball game for us. The good side of coming from a village Primary was only having one teacher to deal with. The bad side was knowing all the parents in the playground and absorbing all the 'looks' and gossip relating to whatever incident had occurred.

When he got to Secondary there were suddenly 1000 more children than he had encountered before and upwards of eight different teachers with different ideas and styles of managing per week -lessons in different rooms on different sides of the school and living life by the 'bell'. I couldn't deal with this number of permutations and thankfully a well-established SEN team came to the rescue. It was vital to build bridges with the support worker, as she was a lifeline to sorting out our son's problems. At this point he had a statement without a diagnosis and the school found it difficult to put more than basic strategies in place.

My son decided to forget everything that had happened during the day and the person who had been at school just happened to have the same name as him. School became a painful place and to this day I believe he feels it was the worst time of his life. I had to read his planner when he came home and all the exercise books used during the day to find out what had gone on. This not only helped from the subject knowledge side of things but you can glean a lot from comments made by the teacher marking the book! Parent's evenings are usually once a year with only 5 minutes time allotted with each teacher. This is not enough for any child with SEN so I needed to be on the ball. Teachers will ring you if there is a problem; I wanted to be aware of it before the phone rang.

With hindsight, I'd emphasise that it is important to seek a multi professional approach at primary as it is not easily or readily forthcoming at secondary. We had lots of input in primary from various sources. Unfortunately for us it was inconclusive. When things went wrong in yr 9 we were very lucky to have huge support and stay in the mainstream system.

In year 9 due to a series of events my son was given a diagnosis of Aspergers Syndrome. It then became clear to staff why he needed to sit on his own, near the door, with his own text book, was unable to cope with group activities, did not function in a PE rugby team and did not always correctly answer the question. I wrote down incidents, kept records and made notes of anything 'odd'. Sometimes this fits into a pattern. If you get on well with the contact at the school they become more than interested in

your child and their little ways. This in turn generates conversation and in our case made sense of some incidents.

Over the five-year period my son had various LSAs and I turned to the SENCO for advice. We forged a good relationship and respect was observed on both sides. I made sure I was available if the school rang with a problem - closing doors helps no one.

If I have any advice, it is to gain a rapport with the SENCO, an LSA/Support Worker or Tutor. So often in recent times I have seen students have problems in Secondary and be shepherded into 'alternative timetables'. Look carefully at what is expected of your child and what you expect of the school. Ask about Teacher Guidelines for your child. Be aware of new teachers arriving - what do they know about your child? Find out how much support time is allocated to your child and whether that is one to one support or shared (and if so with how many). Don't go in guns blazing, it never works and after all, teachers are human to!

Julie, parent

Practical steps: providing information, keeping informed and involved, organising your child, and managing homework!

For many parents the home-school diary is a valuable information-sharing tool. If your child's school does not offer this, perhaps you could negotiate use of another regularly updated document, like your child's reading record during primary or their planner at secondary school. Alternatively, put things in writing and keep copies. Remember, it's not realistic to expect this sort of record to be filled in regularly. It should be kept for those occasions when significant information needs to be shared. Keep it for occasions when it 'adds value' for staff and it will become valued by them as an important resource.

The school will have a range of policies, advice and information, usually available to parents on request. Look at the prospectus and the annual governor's report. The school may also have a website or newsletter. It's worth becoming familiar with these sources of information.

Make certain that you share any important or significant information with the school if you suspect it may have an impact on your child's functioning. Don't assume other professionals, especially if they are from outside agencies, have shared information with the school unless you have written confirmation.

If you are in contact with the school, follow up conversations with a note to confirm what you discussed, what was agreed and what you expect as a result of the contact. Keep a record of calls made and a copy of any letters sent. Make notes before you go to meetings, and send written contributions to reviews even if you are attending (send them well in advance if at all possible).

Consider using timetables and calendars at home, flexible routines can help the whole family to feel calm and more in control as life becomes more predictable.

"When he was little we always had a visual timetable on the front door and we checked it every morning. Now he's at Secondary, we've set up a sort of workstation at home and it's part of his routine to go to it when he comes home every night. He has an hour to chill out and then we empty his bag, sort out letters and homework, read his planner and put the books on 'his' shelf, ready to repack his bag in the morning. It's a nice chance to talk about what he did during the day at the same time, as the books 'trigger' his memory.

He does his homework after tea - children's TV has finished by then and he's got his second wind! In the morning we check his timetable (that's stuck above the shelf where his books are kept) and re-pack his bag - always at exactly the same time. The routine helps us both and keeps everything calm. We use timers too. That was his choice and it can be a bit irritating sometimes, but it does mean there aren't so many last-minute panics. I used to use a whiteboard for my older ones. His literacy isn't up to that yet, but I will probably do the same (for reminders and planning) when it works for him."

Homework can become a huge issue for children and their parents. The government publishes guidance on homework for

primary¹⁸ and secondary¹⁹ schools, and makes it clear that at Key Stage One (KS1) the purpose is to develop partnership with parents in exactly the same way as the home-school agreement. At Key Stage Two (Years 3-6) homework should aim to extend literacy and learning and start to establish independence for children through increased confidence and self-discipline.

Homework should be manageable and come with adequate guidance, and be appropriately differentiated for children with special needs. All schools should publish a homework policy. The guidance suggests that at KS1 children should be expected to spend about an hour a week on homework tasks, extending to about 30 minutes a day by Year 6.

At secondary level children should expect homework to support them to consolidate and extend their learning, and to take from 45 minutes in Year 7 up to a maximum of two and a half hours a day when studying for GCSEs. There is still a real expectation that parents will offer support, but it will increasingly become making sure children understand what they are being asked to do and that they have the best conditions possible for study.

"even in Year 7 I don't really have a hope of understanding the technical subjects, but getting him to explain them to me seems to help...."

Most schools now offer a homework club. That can provide valuable support and access to extra help and resources. Individual Education Plans can also include targets related to homework to ensure that the level of work is right for the child and effective strategies are in place to offer support at home and at school.

It is worth noting down the amount of support you have needed to provide; especially if you feel that the task set was significantly beyond your child's ability. Make a note of the time taken - especially if the task could not be completed. In general, you should be able to expect homework tasks to be varied, relevant, manageable and promptly marked and returned. It is always worth discussing any concerns with your child's class

¹⁸ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/homework/primary.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/homework/second.pdf>

teacher or tutor. The school may have tried and tested methods for encouraging and supporting struggling or reluctant pupils.

A parent's perspective on homework

"My son experiences a range of difficulties that seem to be common for many children.

- He often seems unsure of what he should be doing - a weekly homework timetable, with suggested set times for tasks, has helped a great deal (although sometimes he does get anxious if work is set on a different day to the one on the timetable, because he finds that confusing!).
- He does not always have enough time to record the homework which has been set, or to write information down accurately into his homework diary. It really helps if homework is written up on the whiteboard at the start of a lesson or provided through a photocopied sheet (I'm sure he isn't the only one who benefits from this!). Sometimes the Teaching Assistant makes sure he is getting it all down accurately (a Dictaphone can help with this too) and when he misses a lesson due to his special needs staff need to make allowances for missed homework and help him to catch up on work he has missed.
- Sometimes he doesn't understand the work, and then I have had to notify the school that he was unable to complete a task and explain what the problems were. I feel that it isn't helpful to allow him to become frustrated or take an unreasonable length of time to complete a piece of work. He also needs to be told by staff that it's OK not to complete a piece if he has spent a reasonable amount of time on it.
- I'm most concerned that the teaching staff all clearly understand his difficulties, so that any problems he has in completing his homework are not misinterpreted as deliberate, and result in punishment or sanctions. It has a huge impact on him when he feels he has been treated unfairly. I liaise with teachers regularly to check that my

son is completing homework tasks and classwork correctly and is handing in work at school.

- Sometimes he can really struggle to organise his time or pace himself - especially if it is long-term project. He needs work like this to be set out in small steps so that he doesn't become discouraged.
- Sometimes we have scribed for him and this has been accepted by staff when we have demonstrated that he's done as much of the work as he can himself. He has really benefited by being able to do some of his work on the computer, especially since starting Secondary School."

A North Somerset parent

"Getting the best out of homework" is a new addition to the help your children to learn series. The booklet is full of tips and information on how you can help your child with their homework. To find out more, go to:

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/7298/3064_HYCL_Homework_A_W.pdf

Summary: Chapter 6 - How to help your child to be successfully included in school

School staff and parents share the responsibility to ensure children are successfully included in the life of the school.

Make a point of ensuring school has the time they need and the information that will make it possible for them to plan to meet your child's additional needs.

Keep good records and use them to support any worries you share with school staff. Use a home-school diary or weekly planner to let school know anything important that has affected your child.

Ask for information and explanations if you don't know or are confused about what is being done for your child. Ask for a copy of school policies to find out more.

Get to know your child's school and become as involved with the school as possible. This will help if problems arise later on.

Support your child to be organised, using timetables and planning ahead. Always leave plenty of time to get ready for school, and to complete homework. Ask for help in good time if they are struggling

Find out about what extra support school can offer with homework and other activities.

Chapter 7: Attending meetings

Many calls to Supportive Parent's Information & Support Line are from parents who are due to attend a meeting at school or with the local authority. Meetings play a big part in the lives of parents of children with SEN, and it is important to parents that they go well. Parents who contact us want to feel well prepared, well informed and more confident when communicating with professionals about their child.

The Code of Practice says that professionals "should bear in mind the pressure that a parent may be under because of their child's needs".
(Code of Practice 2:6)

Attending meetings can add to this pressure if parents do not feel listened to, or welcomed as partners in their child's education. Good meetings can reassure parents by identifying their children's strengths and difficulties, planning what help is needed, and reviewing what progress has been made. Parents who feel that their views and their child's views have been taken into account are more likely to be confident that decisions are being made in the best interests of their child.

We know that sometimes parents leave meetings feeling confused, anxious and frustrated about what is being planned for their child. They feel that staff have not been positive about their child, have used hurtful language about their child, have not been respectful of their concerns and fears, and have not valued the suggestions they have made. Parents say that they feel outnumbered, at a disadvantage, suspicious that decisions have already been made, that discussions started before they arrived or will continue after they have left. Parents feel that it is often they who have to make contact or arrange meetings, and that there is no knowledgeable contact at school to explain complicated procedures.

The Revised Code of Practice and the Toolkit offer good practice guidance to improve parents' experience of meetings. Schools and local authorities should take this guidance into account.

Partnership with Parents: There is a new emphasis on partnership with parents in the Code. Parents “have unique strengths and knowledge and experience to contribute to the shared view of a child’s needs and the best way of supporting them. It is therefore essential that all professionals actively seek to work with parents and to value the contribution they make” (Code of Practice 2:2).

The Code also says that positive attitudes to parents, user-friendly information and procedures, and awareness of parents’ support needs, are important. Parents should be told of their child’s SEN and should be involved and understand the purpose of any plan of action. Assessment paperwork should be shared with parents and ideally copies made available to them.

Guidance for professionals involved in meetings

Access requirements enabling parents to prepare for and attend meetings: Local authorities should make sure that parents have access to signers, interpreters or translated information materials, to make sure that early identification of SEN takes place. Buildings where meetings are held must be fully accessible, advice should be made available in Braille or audio format, they should take account of parents’ literacy problems and there must be parity of esteem for the cultures of ethnic minorities.

- “To make communications effective professionals should:
- acknowledge and draw on parental knowledge and expertise in relation to their child
 - focus on the child’s strengths as well as areas of additional need
 - recognise the personal and emotional investment of parents and be aware of their feelings
 - ensure that parents understand procedures, are aware of how to access support in preparing their contributions, and are given documents to be discussed well before meetings
 - respect the validity of differing perspectives and seek constructive ways of reconciling different viewpoints

- respect the differing needs parents themselves may have, such as a disability, or communication and linguistic barriers”

Code of Practice 2:7

Parents should feel welcomed, introductions should be made and people’s roles in respect of the child explained. If this happens parents feel less overwhelmed in large meetings with professionals. They know it is in the best interest of their child that everyone knowledgeable about their difficulties should attend and big meetings are sometimes unavoidable. The school must inform parents if a professional has assessed their child in school. Local authorities and schools should make arrangements for children, wherever possible, to take part in all decisions about their education. It is accepted that this may not be easy, but gathering their views should be attempted, taken into account and recorded.

Schools should be flexible in their approach to meetings. They should be open and responsive to parents’ concerns and take account of information that parents give about their child. Confidentiality should be respected. Parents and professionals should value each others’ contribution. Parents feel that professionals should be honest about difficulties and have evidence of the child’s work to show the parent. They should show a positive interest in the pupil and take some responsibility and care when commenting - “what I’ve tried has not worked very well, so I think we should.....” is better than “s/he is as bad as ever so we’ll have to.....”. Professionals should be aware of the danger of making a parent feel inferior, outnumbered or at a disadvantage at meetings.

Time and place of meeting: The Code stresses that professionals should recognise “the need for flexibility in the timing and structure of meetings”. Good notice of meetings should be given to working parents. Professionals should be aware that parents have other childcare deadlines e.g. collecting siblings from school. They should also recognise that parents of children with SEN can experience problems in arranging childcare.

Meetings should be held in the kind of place that allows for a private, confidential discussion of a child's difficulties. When a child's behaviour is disruptive parents can feel at a great disadvantage - they often have to build up courage to approach the school or attend a meeting when summoned by the school. A meeting place that allows parents to feel more comfortable, e.g. sitting around a table helps. The Code stresses that parents may want to bring along a partner, friend, relative or Independent Parental Supporter to a meeting and such requests should be encouraged by schools and local authorities.

The role of the Parent Partnership Service

Parents with disabilities, communication or other needs should receive support to find out about or make contact with the Parent Partnership Service²⁰. The Code and Toolkit stress the importance of equality of access. Information about parent partnership services should be widely published in a range of appropriate languages and a variety of mediums.

Parents may find meetings stressful because of their anxieties about their child or because they do not know how the system works. They may also have literacy or learning difficulties or disabilities, or have had less than positive experiences of the education system themselves. Schools and local authorities must advise all parents of children identified with SEN that they can access advice and information through the Parent Partnership Service. Independent Parental Supporters should offer; "practical support and accurate neutral information on the rights of parents and the roles and responsibilities and options available".²¹ Practical help for meetings might include help with paperwork and parental contributions, responding to proposed statements, attending meetings, taking notes to remind parents of what was discussed and agreed at meetings. Parents can directly contact the Independent Parental Support Service by phoning Supportive Parents' Information & Support Line (0117 9897725). For further information about our service, see chapter one.

²⁰ SEN and Disability Act 2001

²¹ SEN Toolkit, Section 2 page 8: DCSF Publications ref: 0558/2001

Guidance for parents at meetings

The Code says that parents have a responsibility to work with schools and professionals to support their children's education by communicating regularly with the school, alerting them to concerns and keeping to what is agreed in the home-school agreement²².

The Code also says that parents should be supported to:

- Recognise and fulfill their responsibilities as parents and play an active and valued role in their children's education
 - Have knowledge of their child's entitlement within the SEN framework
 - Make their views known about how their child is educated
 - Have access to information, advice and support during assessment and any related decision-making processes about SEN provision.
- (Code of Practice 2:2)

If you are attending a meeting at school or with the local authority and have access requirements, make contact beforehand to discuss what is required. If you have an access issue, or an issue of who should be funding access arrangements and you cannot get satisfaction from your school or local authority, you can contact the Discrimination Helpline on 0870 6065750. Times of meetings should suit both school and parents. If you feel not enough time has been allowed to discuss your concerns ask if the meeting can be rearranged. As parents we can help to make meetings more productive by making appointments with education staff, rather than risking rushed conversations in classroom, corridor or playground, when teachers have other responsibilities.

What kind of meeting? Find out what the meeting is about - Parents may have to attend many different kinds of meetings in different settings. Some will be small informal meetings with a teacher, at the request of parents, to discuss concerns e.g. behaviour or bullying. Parents may be attending parents' evenings with a range of teaching staff. There are meetings to discuss Individual Education Plans or Pastoral Support Plans. The meeting may be part of an assessment with another professional

²² SEN Code of Practice page18, s.2:11

e.g. an Educational Psychologist or Speech and Language Therapist. It may be a school admission meeting, secondary school transfer, or curriculum option meeting. The school may have asked a parent to a meeting to discuss disciplinary matters such as behaviour or attendance.

More formal meetings, which parents have to attend, might include admissions appeals meetings, Discipline Committee appeals for fixed term or permanent exclusions, meetings with governors, Annual Reviews, and Transition Reviews or meetings with the local authority to discuss statutory assessment or statementing.

Questions you can ask before the meeting: Find out beforehand where the meeting is to be held, how long it will last, who has been invited, who will be attending, what their role is and how they have been involved with your child. If you feel that someone who has expertise or knowledge of your child has not been invited, ask if they can come. Try to get copies of professionals' reports before the meeting. If this is not possible, ask for time at the start of the meeting to read reports. The Code advises copies of reports should be circulated at least two weeks before an Annual Review meeting.

Give the school or local authority an opportunity to read your contribution before the meeting too. Remember that other professionals involved with your child will read your contribution. Try to find out if someone will be taking notes or minutes during the meeting - ask for a copy at the start of the meeting.

Knowing what a meeting is for is a help in knowing what information to give. Get prepared and informed! When you know what the meeting is about, try to get answers to any questions you have. It will give you extra confidence during the meeting if you feel well prepared. SEN procedures are complicated; Supportive Parents holds user-friendly information, and the paperwork used by schools and local authorities at meetings. This can be sent out to parents if requested, and might include:

1. Information about Individual Education Plan meetings, Annual Reviews, Transition Reviews, meetings to discuss

statutory assessment and statementing from the Code of Practice and the Toolkit. For your own free copy phone 0845 6022260, quoting ref: 0581/2001 for the SEN Code of Practice and 0558/2001 for the SEN Toolkit.

2. Information on any national or local policies, guidelines or procedures that will affect your meeting, for example Behaviour Support Plan.
3. Information leaflets from national or local organisations e.g. Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) leaflet on Fixed Term or Permanent Exclusion²³.
4. Blank copies of paperwork that may be used or completed in the meeting.
5. Information on what contribution parents and pupils can make to the meeting, including guidelines on what to write.

Paperwork: Parents should take copies of relevant reports to the meeting e.g. take your child's statement to an Annual Review. Trying to keep paperwork dated and filed can be a full time job, but it is always the one report you want that disappears!

If you cannot find paperwork, contact the school, your SEN Case Officer, or the professional who wrote it, to ask for copies. If the last thing you want is more written information, our Information & Support Line can provide practical help e.g. setting out concerns or exploring what parents want to achieve from the meeting. This can be done over the phone, by office appointment, or home visits can be made if necessary.

Ask if there is an agenda, so that you can have sight of it before the start of the meeting. You may find it helpful to write your own agenda, and mark paperwork with highlighter pens to help you to find information quickly.

Seeking the child's views: The Code makes clear that professionals should take into account the views of parents about their child's needs. As well as parental views "The wishes of the child concerned in the light of their age and understanding

²³ contact ACE's exclusion advice line on 0808 800 0327 or go to <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/>

should be sought". As a parent you may wish to put down what you know of your child's views either from what they have said to you, or from what you know of them from their behaviour. Have your children's views been asked for? Supportive Parents have forms that children can complete, or parents can support their children to fill in (see section at the end of chapter 7). If teachers have recorded your child's views in school ask for a copy with the school report.

Take every opportunity to give your views. If you feel you would benefit from guidance about what to write, don't hesitate to ask for help - there may be a form. The Code accepts the need for support. "Head teachers [with Annual Review paperwork] should help parents...to express their views. Schools may offer direct help or suggest parents contact Parent Partnership Service or Local Education Authority named officer".

Jargon at meetings: Educational terms have changed since parents were at school. If you don't understand what is written in reports, or what is being discussed at meetings, ask - teachers are used to answering all kinds of questions.

The Code and the Toolkit recognise that parents can feel disadvantaged by jargon. "Reports should be written in straightforward language avoiding the use of jargon so they can be clearly understood by parents and other professionals" and "when diagnostic or technical terms are necessary, or helpful their meaning should be explained in terms that parents and non professionals will readily understand". Individual Educational Plans and statements should be accessible and understandable to all concerned.

If you don't feel able to ask a professional, the Code has an explanation of some terms (see p201), or phone Supportive Parents. We also include a useful 'jargon buster' as appendix 1 at the end of this SEN Partnership Manual.

Notes or minutes of meetings: Make sure when you leave the meeting that you know who is going to do what, when and who is making the decision. In some cases it may not be the people at the meeting e.g. at Annual Review it is the SEN Panel who make

the final decision about your child. Have targets been set and a date agreed for the next meeting?

If you do not receive a copy of notes of the minutes, ask for them. You could ask to receive notes from the meeting before they are sent out to other professionals attending. If you do not agree with notes or the content of the report you could ask for changes, or ask to have your views noted separately.

If parents have literacy difficulties they may want to ask a friend or Independent Parental Supporter to take notes or go through what was discussed and agreed at the meeting. Schools and local authorities should be sensitive to parents' access needs in meetings. In exceptional circumstances and with the full agreement of all participants, it may be acceptable to use a tape recorder.

What happens if meetings go wrong? All parents want the best possible provision to meet their child's needs, and want teachers to be interested in their child, recognising their strengths as well as their difficulties. Parents get defensive and upset if staff use what parents see as critical, negative, language about their child in reports or discussions. If this happens try not to get into a confrontation. You may have to work with teaching staff for some years and confrontations will not help your child. Ask to leave the meeting if you feel tearful or angry. Discussions about resources or difficulties in obtaining experienced staff can be further frustration to parents. If you are unhappy with a decision find out who has made it (not necessarily the people at the meeting) or how you can get it changed. What you want to get out of a meeting may not be possible, because the right people are not there.

If this is your experience of a meeting ask if an Independent Parental Supporter can accompany you to the next one or phone Supportive Parents for a "listening ear". Try not to make phone calls or write letters in anger; give yourself an opportunity to think things over.

Sometimes meetings do not help to sort out parental concerns. Parents cannot always agree with the local authority or the local school about their children's needs or the help that needs to be

given. What can you do to take things further? The Code of Practice says that all local authorities must provide disagreement resolution services, and parents must be informed about this service and how they can access it. Supportive Parents have the contact details of the local Disagreement Resolution Service and can discuss this with you as an option. In some circumstances parents may be able to appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SEND). Contact Supportive Parents to see if this is right applies in your case, or if you want to obtain further information about SEND.

If you want to make a complaint following a meeting with the school or local authority, formal complaint procedures exist. Contact Supportive Parents for details, but do be prepared to give schools and local authorities a chance to put things right first.

If there has been a problem, try to give feedback to the Governing body of your school. Schools have a responsibility to review their policies to make sure they encourage active partnership with parents. Local authorities are expected to actively seek feedback from service users to inform and influence decisions on SEN policies, procedures and practices in order to improve communication and minimise potential for misunderstandings and disagreements.

If you don't feel able to discuss concerns with your school, contact Supportive Parents to discuss a way forward. We also hold regular meetings with the local authority when it may be possible to raise general problems experienced by a number of parents without affecting your right to confidentiality. This may result in changes to policy or practice and better experiences for other parents.

Summary: Chapter 7 - Attending meetings

All meetings need to be carefully planned for, easy to access and purposeful. An agenda should be provided, and parents can ask to add to it.

Parents will need information and support so that they are confident to take part in meetings. Schools must be welcoming and accommodating.

Parents need to find out what the meeting is about, who is coming to the meeting, and plan what questions to ask and what information to bring along.

Parents should make sure all their child's paperwork is sorted out so that they can bring along any relevant reports to the meeting.

Supportive Parents can help with preparation and planning for the meeting. We may also be able to attend in support of parents.

Children should be invited to meetings as appropriate, and supported to contribute.

Meetings should be free of jargon and notes should be taken and provided to all who attend. Notes should include agreed actions and how to measure if the help has been effective.

If meetings go wrong, parents need to know where to go for more help and information.

Chapter 8: Reviews, Annual Reviews and Transition planning

Parents of children with additional needs will need and benefit from regular opportunities to meet with school staff that work with their child. This provides them with feedback about their child's progress and supports the development of a good working relationship between staff and families. It also offers a chance for issues or concerns to be flagged up at an early stage, and information to be shared. Parents can call Supportive Parents to discuss the level and type of contact they should expect from their child's school or with the local authority.

Reviews should be a regular element of the planning cycle for all children. All parents are offered a 'parent's evening'; an opportunity to meet with their child's school staff annually and receive a report to demonstrate their child's progress. For a child with identified additional needs, there is guidance in the SEN Code of Practice which advises that this process should be more frequent. Children at School Action and School Action Plus will have individual plans in place, in the form of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or related document. This must be reviewed at least twice a year (more frequently in the case of a younger child). Parents should be invited to contribute to or comment on the identified targets and short-term strategies identified in the document. Supportive Parents can offer support with these meetings. The school should always be able to tell parents how they are meeting a child's needs.

It is important that the school is able to take a flexible approach and each school will work with children in individual ways, according to the schools' strengths and resources. However, parents will always need to be reassured that their child's needs forms the basis for sound planning and that there is appropriate differentiation and careful monitoring in place, so that adjustments can be made according to the success of any programme being carried out.

Annual reviews are required for any child with a Statement of SEN. They are a chance to ensure that the statement remains an active document that continues to be appropriate to the needs of the child. Parents will be able to find out how their child has

made progress against the objectives and targets in the Statement (or the recommendations of the previous year's review), and ensure that their child's needs are still effectively identified.

If there are any difficulties or concerns, this is a chance to talk them through as a team; parents and professionals together. Sometimes it is not possible to come up with all the answers, but agreeing on a difficulty may allow a new route towards a resolution to be discovered and agreed on. It is often the chance to bring a range of professionals from different agencies together to share their expertise with family and school staff, and for services and provision to be coordinated.

Supportive parents can offer support and information about the review process. We can help parents to prepare for the meeting and to anticipate what to expect. We can assist with preparation of a parental contribution to the meeting, and can in certain circumstances offer an Independent Parental Supporter to attend too, to provide support and a boost to confidence, so that parents feel more able to actively participate in the discussion. We will always meet with parents before the meeting to prepare, so that we are clear about the major points parents wish to raise. IPSs do not advocate on behalf of parents. That means that we do not speak for parents, but will attend to support them, so that they feel confident to speak for themselves.

We are happy to act as "memory joggers", hoping to ensure that important points aren't missed, and can sometimes take rough notes, so that parents have a record of action points to take home with them. Any notes we take are regarded as the property of the parents, and handed over immediately the meeting comes to an end. We do advise parents to inform the school in good time if they have secured the support of an IPS at a review meeting, and we do ask that schools do not send out any follow-up paperwork to IPSs. It should remain the parents' right to decide if they wish us to have sight of paperwork.

Information for parents: Annual reviews are the responsibility of the local authority, and this will usually be delegated to the school to carry out. The school will be notified that your child's review is due, and will send out a letter of invitation to you and to other experts who they hope will be able to attend or to

supply written reports. You should be able to find out who has been invited, and you could ask for others to be invited to attend if you feel it would be valuable. You can also take this opportunity to tell the school if you are bringing along an IPS, friend or relative to offer you confidence and support.

The school will ask for your views, and may be able to supply a form for you to fill in. If not, Supportive Parents will have some guidance available to help you contribute to this important meeting. Make sure you take along a copy of your child's Statement, last year's review and any other attainment reports or IEPs. These will also act as valuable reminders, to help you review the previous year's progress, before you draw up some notes or bullet points for this meeting.

After refreshing your memory about the wording in the Statement, and your child's progress as identified by their IEPs and other reports, make some notes about how they are doing currently.

- Are they achieving their IEP or other identified targets?
- Does part two of the Statement still identify their needs correctly?
- Have they made progress towards the objectives identified at the start of part three of their Statement?
- Do you have SATS or yearly reports identifying how they are doing against the National Curriculum levels?
- What about their behaviour, social and emotional needs?

Make sure you note their successes as well as any areas where you have concerns, note too any improvements as well as difficulties encountered and record what did, as well as what didn't work. Consider how much additional help they needed at home to support their achievements in school. (Remember that all children need help and encouragement at home to do their best in school!)

Then make a note of any real problems or concerns you may be aware of, and any new targets you feel would help (but don't feel you always need to offer solutions; often, just identifying and sharing the problem clearly will put school or other

educational settings on the right road to work with you to find an answer). Behaviour and bullying can be big concerns for many parents; especially if your child has come to you with worries, or you are starting to find they are reluctant to cooperate with homework or even to attend school.

It is important that children are supported to understand planning and contribute to meetings about their education. Schools will often help with this, and may make a practice of inviting older children to reviews. You could discuss this with the SENCO to discover their usual practice. You may not wish your child to attend a meeting, especially if they are distressed about some aspects of their school life, or if you feel that some of the issues that need to be raised will not be appropriate to discuss in front of them. However, you may feel it is important that their comments are included as part of your own contribution.

Talk to them, and try to help them to express their successes as well as any hopes or concerns they may have. Younger children can use pictures and you could bring along any examples of their work that you feel illustrates points you are noting in your contribution. We have given some examples of ways children can be helped to contribute to the annual review, or any meeting concerning them, at the end of this chapter.

You should receive any reports for the meeting at least two weeks before it takes place. You can also send your own contribution to the Head Teacher in good time for them to send it out to those attending. If there are unfamiliar reports presented on the day, you can ask for time to read them through or suggest that you will be prepared to comment on them separately, in time for any comments to accompany the school's report to the local authority (this must be sent within ten working days of the date that the review is held). Professional don't routinely attend all reviews, so you should be prepared for only school staff to be present unless there is a particular reason, like a change of school or a specific issue or concern to be discussed.

The outcome of the meeting may be a recommendation for a change to the wording of the Statement, or that the statement is no longer needed. The Head Teacher must support these views with evidence, and should notify the local authority if there was

any disagreement with the recommendations by those who attended the review. You will get a copy of the recommendations sent as an outcome of the review and you should write separately to the local authority if you disagree with them and do not feel your views are represented by the information supplied by the school. Remember that you can contact Supportive Parents to discuss the wording of any response you wish to send.

The Local Authority will review the statement in light of the report and its recommendations. The LA may decide to maintain the statement, amend the statement, cease to maintain the statement or start a new statutory assessment. The LA must write to you, with a copy to the school, informing you of the decisions taken and the reasons. The LA should offer to meet with you if there are any significant outcomes or amendments that you wish to discuss. The LA must also inform you of your rights to appeal against their decision where appropriate.

You can ask Supportive Parents for help to consider the local authority's response to the annual review, and we can offer support, if you wish to meet with them to discuss the decisions they have made, or any actions they have proposed.

You cannot appeal if the local authority does not make any amendments, even if the review recommended changes to your child's Statement. You do have a right to ask for a reassessment of your child's special needs in these circumstances. This would constitute a statutory local authority reassessment and so would need to be supported with evidence that the statement no longer accurately describes your child and/or the provision required in the same way that would be required to trigger a statutory assessment. Contact Supportive Parents Information & Support Line to discuss your concerns if you think this course of action might be indicated by the outcome of your child's annual review.

The Transition process

In Year 9, in addition to reviewing the Statement of SEN, the review will also plan for the pupil's future, including ongoing education, health, social and housing services requirements. The Head Teacher must contact the Connexions Service, Social Care²⁴ (so that any planning for future care needs can be considered) and Health (so that a Health Care Plan can be started if required).

The aim is to develop an evolving, holistic plan that considers all factors needed to be taken into account to support and enable the young person to participate and achieve in adult life. The Connexions Adviser (sometimes referred to as a P.A. or personal adviser) must attend, and will take a key role in coordinating and overseeing delivery of the Transition Plan, which will also include planning for further education that might involve local or residential college applications.

The young person must be central to this stage of planning and their views should be sought and recorded. There are a number of person-centred approaches becoming available to support the involvement of young people and their families in this process, recommended by both the Learning and Skills Council and the DCSF, particularly for those with the most complex or high-level needs.

The school remains primarily responsible for calling the review while the young person remains at school, but the Connexions Adviser should also attend the Year 11 review as they have a separate and additional responsibility (to complete a 'section 139a assessment')²⁵ to ensure that the student's needs and requirements for provision on leaving school are identified.

Pupils without a Statement of SEN, but with significant additional needs can also require a multi-agency review at this stage in their lives. The Connexions Service has a continuing duty under s.139a (formerly s.140) to plan for these students as well, so that their needs and future provision requirements are assessed.

²⁴ s.5 of the Disabled Persons Act 1986, The Children Act 1989

²⁵ S.139a of the Education and Skills Act 2008 – formerly s.140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000

The Transition Plan is a particularly important document if students require the provision of a residential educational setting post-16. The document will need to be sent by the Connexions Service to the Learning and Skills Council, along with the pupil's Statement of SEN and most recent annual review.

Choosing a specialist college placement: This option is only a possibility where there is evidence that local provision is not suitable, and a successful application depends on meeting the college's entry criteria and funding being granted by the Learning & Skills Council or the Local Authority. Local colleges are increasingly reporting that they are able to meet the needs of young people with relatively complex difficulties, and funding applications are closely scrutinized. Current advice from the Connexions Service to parents would be that their first step should be to look into the range of provision available locally, arrange to visit, speak to staff, be prepared for their young person to attend tasters.

Future options by David and Florence - parents

Choosing the right residential college for our child with additional needs may be one of the most difficult exercises we undertake as parents. It goes hand-in-hand with all the other hurdles we will try to assist them over as our sons and daughters journey towards adulthood. Our hopes for their future; that they grow in confidence, independence and joy, struggle with our fears as they move on from our daily care and support.

This information is based on a presentation given at a Connexions Conference by David and Florence in 2006. It attempts to capture and share their experience of the process involved in finding the right college placement for their son Ben. We hope that it will help you to find your own route to a successful placement for your child.

Funding: We have always maintained that as parents we had enough to do without worrying about the funding. Funding is becoming more difficult to obtain. Start early and seek advice. Connexions West of England provides guidance for young people parents and carers "Choosing a specialist college": contact the Connexions Service in North Somerset on 01934 644443

What are you looking for in a residential experience?

Is it:

- To solve an imminent crisis, because you are no longer able to cope or worry about becoming incapacitated and unable to meet your child's future care needs?
- To provide for your child's educational needs during the next two or three years?
- Because you want to give your child an opportunity of living away from home, as a stepping stone to long term independence?

In reality it will be a combination of these and other factors. Try to think through and make a list of the main reasons, so that you can bear them in mind when considering various options.

Does your child have a specific diagnosis? E.g. Down's Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Sensory Impairment, no speech etc. Do you want a college that has a reputation for meeting the needs of young people with these differences and difficulties? If so, get hold of and study the Directory of The Association of National Specialist Colleges. [<http://www.natspec.org.uk>]

When should I start looking?

- It took us 5 years to find a college that we thought was suitable. So start early.
- It is imperative that you visit several or many colleges
- We looked at several colleges with "specialisms" in our region.... Basically we didn't like any of them; they were either too inflexible, were claiming a specialism without knowing enough about it, or we didn't like the size...
- Eventually, when we weren't getting anywhere, it was suggested that we looked for a college that did not particularly specialise in one area, but which we felt after discussion with the college, would be prepared and able to adapt what they offered to meet our son's needs.

What should I look for at a college?

- Get the latest Ofsted report before you visit [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports>]. If you can, get the previous one as well. What have they done between the two inspections? Are they improving?
- Get the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) reports for the last year or two [<http://www.csci.org.uk>] before you visit. Do these show improvement?
- Get the Ofsted and CSCI reports of other colleges and compare. "Good, adequate, improving etc" are all relative terms.

Remember that these reports only reflect national standards and cannot tell the whole story about how the school works and what it's like to be there.

During your visit

- Ask what progress has been made in the areas needing improvement.
- Check out the prospectus blurb. For example: "A new ICT suite, with Internet access, provides formal and leisure opportunities to develop skills" - When, after several requests, we were allowed to see it, we found it was locked up and they couldn't find the key!
- Look for flexibility when looking for a college. Can you visit, by arrangement, or do you have to go on their choice of "visiting days". "We have so many enquiries, we have to do it this way"!!
- When they say "Oh yes, we have opportunities for basketball, swimming, access to computers, etc." Ask them how often, on average, this happens.
- How many students are there? Is it 30 or 130? Does this matter to your child? What do they do to help new students settle in?
- Ask what plans they have which will be implemented in your child's time there.
- What is the accommodation like, and how much choice do students have?
- What weekend or evening activities are available for students?

- When they say they have a Speech & Language Therapist or Occupational Therapist etc. Is it a full time post? If not, ask how often they come in and for how long.
- Ask what the staff turn-over rate is, and how long the staff stay.
- What about pastoral care, child/adult protection issues, bullying and challenging behaviour? How do they promote relationships between students?
- What facilities are there? Obviously washing machines, but what about a Dishwasher? Obviously telephones, but what type and how is their use encouraged?
- On your visit, did you see the people that you were told you would see or were they "away"
- Distance: Is this a factor for you? Our young man is 85 miles away. You will also certainly be involved in the transport.
- Look for flexibility when your child is there. Do they say, "He can come home/go out for the day, once a half term, never". Is there weekly or fortnightly boarding? Can you visit? How does the college keep in touch with families?
- Has the college given you details about the full range of courses on offer? Can students try out different courses?
- Can the college provide any specialist equipment your son or daughter needs to access their environment or learning opportunities?
- What arrangements are there for reviews?
- What opportunities are there for students to voice issues that are important to them?
- What does the college's disability statement say? Ask for a copy.
- What is the college's complaints procedure? Ask for a copy.
- What have students who have left gone on to do next? How does the College support them into adulthood - do they link with the local Connexions Service or with the service in the student's home area?

What can we as parents do to help?

To encourage an atmosphere of working together in partnership:

- Avoid direct criticism, but rather give gentle encouragement. It is amazing how often "they" were just about to do something, when you ask "Have you thought of....?"
- Don't be in contact by telephone with the staff too often. Even if your child's difficulties are such that he cannot telephone you.
- Give the College support material. Prepare a profile of your child - not telling them how to do things, but telling them how you do things at home. Be honest. We had a family conference to prepare our 20 page document. Paint a truthful picture rather than an optimistic picture. Detail your child's strengths as well as weaknesses. Our son's college still referred to it at the end of the first year.
- In looking for a college and in other areas, a great help was getting a Person Centered Plan for Ben. This was initiated at our request using North Somerset's People First organization. (Tel: 01934 426086, or go to their website at www.listentoourviews.org) It was then not just us as parents, but also the considered views of professionals and supporters who were advocating this approach. It worked.

Summary: Chapter 8 - Reviews, Annual Reviews and Transition planning

Individual education plans (IEPs) should be reviewed twice a year. All Statements of SEN must be reviewed annually. This is an important opportunity to find out if children's needs have changed and if the help they are getting is effective in helping them to achieve.

Parents and children should be fully involved in, and supported to contribute to, reviews. Supportive Parents can help parents to plan and attend review meetings.

Supportive Parents has a range of forms that children and/or parents can use, to help their children to contribute to reviews.

In addition, in Year 9 the Connexions Service will become involved, to coordinate planning for all children's move into adult life. This is called the Transition Plan for all children with Statements of SEN, but should also include additional post-16 planning for all children with identified SEN.

When looking for post-16 provision, start in good time (Year 8 or 9) and visit colleges you think may offer suitable courses.

Investigate different possibilities, and seek out good sources of advice - other parents and professionals. Supportive Parents can help.

Child's review contribution

My target is home
school

People who can help me home
school

Things I enjoy doing at home
school

The nicest thing about me is

I don't enjoy

Name.....
Class.....
Date.....

I am able to do these things well

Things that worry me
(People, events, experiences)

I would like to be better at

I need to try harder at

© S

Young Person's Questionnaire

You can fill in this sheet yourself or you can have an adult help you.

Think about how you feel towards each question; answer as fully as you can.

Name:.....

Age:.....male/female(circle)

1. Do you like school? Y/N

What do you like about school?	What do you dislike about school?

2. How often do you attend school? (circle the answer you choose)

always/most of the time/sometimes/never

3. Describe how you get on with other people at school.

Other children/pupils	Teachers
Classroom assistants	Others: eg. Lunchtime staff

4. Have you ever been bullied? Y/N
Who did you tell? Did this help stop the bullying?
Y/N

Is there anything else you would like to say about bullying?

5. How do you feel you are doing at school?

6. What things do you find easy at school?

7. What do you find difficult at school?

8. Does the school help you with any difficulties you have? Y/N

9. Would you like the school to help you more than it does? Y/N

10. What would you like the school to do to help you?

--

11. What do you do in your spare time?

At home?	At school?

12. Do you have homework to do? Y/N

13. Do you get your homework finished? (circle your answer)

always/most of the time/sometimes/never

14. When you do your homework, where do you do your homework?

--

15. If you don't do your homework, what is the usual reason?

--

16. Is anybody available to help you if you need to catch up with school work or need help with your homework? Y/N

17. Do you worry about school? (circle your answer)

always/most of the time/sometimes/never

18. Is there anybody at school that you feel you can talk to about things that worry you? Y/N

19. Is this person.....

a school friend/ a teacher/ a class helper/ a lunchtime supporter?

20. List three things about yourself which you think are good...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

21. List three things about you that you think are not so good....

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

22. If there is anything else you would like to write about, you can do so here.

Thank you

Acknowledgement: Torbay PPS



Parent's contribution to review/education planning

Name of child: _____ date: _____

Good things to remember:

Likes:	Dislikes:
--------	-----------

This works well at home:

This never works:

Needs:

Other tips:

Signed: _____(parent)

Please circulate to all staff

Chapter 9: When things go wrong

- Bullying
- Exclusion
- Complaints; who can help - negotiation and dispute resolution
- SEND - The SEN and Disability Tribunal

Bullying

Head Teachers have a legal duty to have a policy which complies with The Human Rights Act 1998, to prevent all bullying in their school. The policy must set out strategies that identify, monitor and support actions to identify and intervene in all cases of bullying. The policy should fit with the school's behaviour policy and give a clear lead to all staff and pupils, so that a consistent whole-school ethos develops and influences all incoming members of the school community. Incidents that occur outside the school premises are not the school's direct responsibility, but avoiding or handling bullying in these circumstances should form an element of the school's policy and part of the ongoing conversation with all pupils.²⁶

Bullying is often one of the major concerns voiced by parents of children with additional needs and unfortunately children with SEN are more likely to be vulnerable to bullying. About a third of children experiencing bullying do not tell anyone, and parents are more likely to be told than school staff, so it is important that steps are taken to uncover cases of bullying and concerns voiced by parents are responded to by school staff actively and positively.

"I can remember being told years ago with my oldest (also disabled) son "oh, that doesn't happen here....". At least we weren't hearing that this time! However, instead of being told what they would do if something happened, we would have preferred to have been told what they did as a whole school action, to stop it happening in the first place."

²⁶ for further information see "Bullying: Don't suffer in silence" Published by the DCSF in 2000

The vast majority of cases improve when staff are alerted, but a small number of pupils do report that things get worse, so it is important that all reports of bullying are treated seriously. Policies should cover all forms of bullying, including racism, sexual threats and homophobia, and incidents related to disability. Policies should cover all types of bullying, including verbal abuse and isolation in addition to physical intimidation and assault.

There are a number of key strategies that schools can employ to tackle bullying. These can vary from cooperative attitudes and group study methods in the classroom, through social experiences like circle time, to more specific interventions like circles of friends or circles of support, peer mediation and social skills, assertiveness training, conflict resolution and stress management.

Guidance for parents: If parents express concerns about bullying they should always feel confident that their worries will be taken seriously by their child's school. Supportive Parents is always happy to take calls from parents who want to discuss what actions they can take to help their child's situation.

For help and information on bullying, go to North Somerset's website at <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/bullying> or you could take a look at Childline's internet site at: <http://www.childline.org.uk/bullying.asp>

Bullying can be indirect; leaving someone out, whispering or sending around notes about them or locking them out can sometimes feel as harmful and distressing as physical violence. It produces feelings of helplessness, depression and fear and can severely impact on children's self-esteem.

We would always suggest that if you think your child is being bullied:

- Find out what the school policy says it is doing to tackle bullying. Follow the advice to report incidents to staff.
- Start a bullying report with your child. This should say:
 1. What happened, including when and where.

2. Who did it?
3. Who else saw it?
4. How it affected your child at the time, and later on (for example, did it affect your child's willingness to go to school or their confidence, so that their school work suffered).
5. Who was told and what did they do about it?
6. What happened next? Did things improve or get worse?

- Always write to the school, to make sure there are no misunderstandings. Ask for a meeting to reassure yourself that your report is being taken seriously and acted on.
- You can contact Supportive Parents to discuss your concerns, the sort of response you should be able to anticipate from your child's school, and for help to write a letter or prepare for a meeting.
- If the person you wrote to refuses to meet with you, or if you are unhappy after the meeting, you can ask to meet with a more senior person; either the Head Teacher or the Chair of Governors. The school will also have a formal complaints procedure you can apply to. It is important to follow the procedure if you want to pursue a formal complaint, and it might help to ask for information and support from Supportive Parents to assist you through this process.
- Remember that it is not legal to keep your child off school. If the situation is so serious that you fear for your child's safety you should request an immediate meeting with your child's Head Teacher. You can contact the Education Welfare Service for advice; they have a role in mediating between schools and parents when a child's attendance is in question. The local authority also has a duty of care for your child so you could copy correspondence to the Director of Children's Services.

Contact Supportive Parents if it would help to talk. You can contact our Information & Support Line on 0117 9897725 during term time, between 10am and 2pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Sometimes it helps to be listened to and to be offered a

chance to express your concerns. We cannot offer legal advice, but we are able to signpost parents on to further sources of advice and information.

Exclusion

Only a Head Teacher, or someone acting in their place, can exclude a child. It must be for a serious breach of the school behaviour policy and also because for the pupil to remain at school would significantly harm their education or welfare or that of other pupils

- The exclusion should be for the shortest time possible, and the pupil's education remains the responsibility of the school while they are on roll. Work should be set and marked if the exclusion lasts for more than one day.
- Parenting contracts may be used to ensure that parents tackle problem behaviour before a child reaches the point of being excluded from school or after an exclusion if the school or local authority considers it is appropriate.
- A Head Teacher can exclude for up to 45 days total in one year, but may not exclude for an unspecified period. That would not be lawful.
- Pupils may be excluded at lunchtime if they are disruptive, but this will be treated as a fixed-term half-day exclusion and again, must not be for an unspecified period.
- Pupils cannot be excluded in anticipation that they will misbehave.
- The school must set work and ensure it is marked during any fixed period exclusion of more than one day. Planning for the pupil's continuing education, planning to tackle the pupil's problems and planning for the pupil's reintegration must support any exclusion. A reintegration interview is mandatory for any primary aged pupil and for any secondary aged pupil who has an exclusion of more than 6 days. The school must ensure full time education is

provided from the sixth day of any fixed period exclusion. The parent will be advised where this education will take place.

- If the pupil is permanently excluded the local authority must provide suitable full-time education after 5 days.
- Parents must take full responsibility for their children in the first five days after exclusion. There is a new offence of failing to ensure a child is not found in a public place without reasonable justification during these first five days. A Penalty Notice can be issued if a child is found in a public place, even if accompanied by parents.
- New measures now include greater powers for schools, to discipline pupils who behave badly on the way to or from school, act to confiscate inappropriate items, impose detentions, use reasonable force to prevent a crime or injury and, in the most serious cases, search for weapons.
- Pupils with statements should not be excluded except in the most exceptional circumstances, and schools should try every practicable means to avoid exclusion of pupils receiving support at School Action or School Action Plus. This includes seeking the advice and support of external support agencies and professionals.
- Schools have a duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 not to exclude disabled pupils for reasons relating to their disability. The definition of disability is not the same as the definition of Special Educational Needs. If they do exclude a disabled pupil they must be able to demonstrate that their actions were justified and that they made all reasonable adjustments possible to prevent the incident from occurring.

Exclusion from school is likely to cause the majority of parents extreme concern. They will usually feel immediately driven to respond or react to the situation, if only to be clear about the cause and circumstances surrounding the incident that led to this action by the Head Teacher. They are also likely to be dealing with a distressed, angry or aggrieved child, so it is particularly

important that schools follow the guidance of the DCSF and issue a letter within 24 hours. This letter should clearly state the reasons for the exclusion, the period of time the child will be excluded for and the parent's rights to appeal.

The Head Teacher should have fully investigated the incident, reviewed the evidence, including speaking to the pupils concerned, and made a decision in light of the school's published behaviour policy, DCSF guidance and related legislation. They must offer parents information of when and how they may contact the school governors (advice is also available from the Education Welfare Service and from Supportive Parents, who are the Parent Partnership Service for the local authority, if the pupil has SEN) and of their rights to appeal. There are also Voluntary Organisations that can offer information and support. The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) has a specialist exclusions advice line: 0808 8000327. The DCSF's advice and guidance can be viewed via www.dfes.teachernet.gov.uk/exclusion and for the Disability Rights Commission Helpline call: 08457 622633

Guidance for parents

Even if you do not wish to appeal against your child's exclusion, if they have SEN it is a good idea to request a meeting with the Head Teacher and the SENCO, and perhaps the Class Teacher if appropriate, to discuss the circumstances that led up to the exclusion and agree what can be done to avoid further incidents. Make sure you talk to your child immediately, and write down or tape what they tell you about what happened.

If you disagree with your child's exclusion: you should immediately write to the Chair or Clerk of Governors requesting a meeting to state your child's case. You have a right to do so if the exclusion is for more than 5 days. Even if it is for a shorter period it is good practice for them to agree to meet with you. The Governors will examine the evidence and are able to take the decision to reinstate pupils. You should also ask for a copy of the school's behaviour policy and any evidence or witness statements, including your child's school record if appropriate (you have the right to see your child's school record and to

request a copy, although the school may make a charge to cover the cost of photocopying).

- Check the date of any deadline to appeal. You cannot appeal if you miss this date.
- Check that what happened was a breach of the school's behaviour policy. This is important.
- Check through what everyone said in his or her statements. Were any of them in support of your child's story? If so, note their comments against your child's statement.
- Your child may wish to write to apologise, and you can include this as part of your representations to the Governors.
- Write to describe your child, including anything that explains their behaviour or why they are particularly at risk or have specific support needs.
- Consider whether exclusion was necessary in terms of the risk posed to your child or others if they had remained at school. You could suggest some alternative course of action, like making amends, seclusion within the school or even, in the case of a permanent exclusion, a negotiated transfer to another school - this is usually managed with the support of the Education Welfare Service.
- Consider whether the school has taken reasonable steps to put the help or support your child needs into place that may have avoided this incident.
- Consider whether any other extenuating circumstances were present, like bullying.

Before the meeting, write out or type your case and ask the Clerk to the Governors how many copies you will need to bring along. ACE advises parents to read it out during the meeting, before handing out copies to the Governors. Note down any questions you may want to ask and collect any supporting evidence or statements, including any apology your child has written. If you

want to submit additional evidence (eg statements from other witnesses), they should be submitted to the clerk before the meeting. Otherwise, the meeting can decide not to accept the evidence or may accept it but need to adjourn the meeting to allow people to read the evidence. You can take someone along to the meeting to support you (this could be an Independent Parental Supporter (IPS) from Supportive Parents, a relative or friend, or a legal adviser).

At the meeting there will be 3 - 5 governors, a clerk to take notes and a local authority representative (unless it is for a very short exclusion). The Head Teacher and witnesses may also be present. It is unusual for a child to attend these meetings and if they do come, you should decide whether you are prepared for them to be questioned before the meeting starts and make your decision clear to the governors. You can ask for your child to be present for just part of the meeting

Usually the meeting will start with the case against your child being outlined and then you will be able to put your case. You should be invited to ask any questions you have during the course of the meeting, and to sum up at the end. You can ask for your written case to be added to your child's school record.

The governors must decide whether the exclusion was justified, based on the evidence and if the procedures were followed correctly. They must consider the interests of your child, and those of the whole school community. They should decide whether to reinstate your child and any support needed for reintegration. They can ask you to sign a parenting contract, usually because they feel that you may need some support with your child's behaviour, but cannot make the child's reintegration dependent on this. A parenting contract is drawn up outside of the exclusion hearing in consultation with the parents. The governors must write to you with their decision and, in the case of permanent exclusion, give you details of your right to appeal to an independent panel.

The independent panel will consider if your child did what they are accused of, on the balance of probabilities. They will not reinstate just because procedures have not been followed, but could do so if justice was not done as a result. They may consider

whether the decision was fair in comparison with treatment of other pupils involved in the same incident. If they consider that reinstatement is not practical or sensible, but would otherwise have been offered, it should be stated in the decision letter. Regardless of the outcome, if the exclusion was for more than 5 days, consider contacting the local authority SEN Team to discuss any concerns, and how you can support your child in future to avoid further incidents.

Complaints: Who can help; negotiation and disagreement resolution.

Guidance for parents

As with most situations, if you have cause to complain, it is usually wise to follow the most straightforward course of action in the first instance. If you are unhappy about something, you should draw it to the attention of the person responsible as soon as you can. If this is unsuccessful you should find out who is responsible for that service or individual practitioner and refer your concerns to them.

For most complaints about your child's education or any other issues relating to their school attendance, consider first if you can talk informally to the class teacher about your concerns. If you are unsure how to proceed; perhaps you feel the situation is too serious for them to address, or if your complaint concerns the class teacher, you should consider bringing it to the attention of the Head of Year, SENCO or Head Teacher.

You can look in the school's prospectus, or on their website for more information about the school's formal complaints procedure. If you can't find a copy easily, contact the school office to ask for one to be sent to you.

You may find that the complaints procedure identifies a particular member of staff as a complaints coordinator. Complaints about the Head Teacher should be directed to the Chair of Governors, as should complaints about the school's policies or procedures.

- Even with the most informal complaints, it is worth writing down your concerns to avoid misunderstandings, and to consider asking for a meeting so that everyone involved can give the situation their full attention. Careful preparation is important - if you need help to think through the points you want to make at the meeting, and in drawing together your evidence, consider calling our Information and Support Line to discuss your issues.
- You may find that you will be given information that will reassure you, so be careful to go into the meeting prepared to consider both sides.
- Try to start the meeting with something positive. If possible, show that you understand how this situation may have arisen and ensure that you keep your concerns regarding your child central to the discussion at all times.
- Consider taking someone along to help you keep calm and note down the actions arising out of the meeting.
- Think about any suggestions you can offer to remedy the situation, but be prepared to listen to their suggestions too. They may feel they need to look into the situation further before they can come up with a response, so be prepared for a reasonable delay before the situation can be tackled directly.
- Try to end the meeting on a positive note, even if it's just to thank them for their time.
- Read the complaints procedure carefully if you need to take your complaint further. You will find that there are time limits expressed at different stages of the process and it is also important that you follow procedures or you may find that your complaint has not progressed through the system.
- With certain complaints you will be able to make them directly to the local authority (if, for example, it is a community or controlled school and the complaint is about a member of staff). If you feel your child's school has

broken the law or acted “unreasonably” (eg: not followed government guidance) you can write to complain to the Secretary of State.

- As with any complaint, it is essential that you provide any evidence you have available.

In addition to a complaints coordinator, there are various other individuals who may be able to offer support when there is a need for someone to come in from outside the setting to negotiate or mediate. The Education Welfare Service takes this role in certain circumstances, involving attendance and exclusions. The SEN team may be able to assist with concerns about your child’s additional needs or with access issues. Supportive Parents is a useful resource to provide direct support parents as they work to achieve effective agreements through partnership with their child’s school or educational setting.

Additionally, the local authority is required to provide an independent freely-available Disagreement Resolution Service that offers speedy access to mediation in an attempt to achieve informal resolution to disagreements between parents and schools or the local authority. The aim of this service is to improve communication and so rebuild trust between those in dispute, and to consider the range of alternatives and solutions, in order that differences may be resolved.

"The mediation meeting was good, as the mediator was a neutral person and the meeting was held in a neutral setting. This made us feel more at ease and able to put our case forward, but as these problems had been on going for some time and the mediator was unable to advise us, in the end we felt our only route was to go to a tribunal. However, until this point, we had not felt that our son’s problems were being understood by the SEN Manager and this meeting enabled us to start to build a long-term, workable solution for my son."

In order to access the service in this region, contact Wessex Mediation directly, by phoning 0845 0529487, or send an email to info@wessexmediation.co.uk. For a copy of their leaflet, contact Supportive Parents or to download details go to <http://www.sw-special.co.uk/documents/resolution/docs/wessexleaflet.pdf> .

After your initial consultation the mediation service will contact the other parties involved, with your agreement. If all parties agree to participate in the process, a mediator will be appointed. The mediator will meet with you to listen to your concerns and what you hope to achieve from the process. They will explain how it works and seek to set up a meeting with all parties in a local, neutral setting. Supportive Parents can offer support to parents during this process and it is acceptable for parents to bring along an IPS to the meeting. The aim of mediation is to offer all parties an equal opportunity to participate in the mediation process, with a chance to have their say and be listened to respectfully, so that a workable outcome is achieved.

Ideally, at the end of the mediation meeting a written agreement will be produced that all parties are prepared to sign up to. The agreement does not have the force of law, but would act as a substantial piece of evidence if the case were to come to tribunal at a later stage. The mediation service will usually try to follow up on agreements to ensure that they are achieving the hoped-for outcomes and will offer some support if the agreement is in danger of being misinterpreted or ignored.

SEND - The SEN and Disability Tribunal

This Tribunal is an independent body within the Tribunal Service, set up by an Act of Parliament to hear cases where parents are in disagreement with the decision made by a Local Authority about their child's Statutory Assessment or Statement of SEN, or concerning claims of disability discrimination.

There are very specific criteria against which claims can be made during certain stages of the SEN process, and there are also strict time limits that must be followed. However, this is a process that is set up to be accessible to parents of children with SEN. It is certainly very demanding to bring a case, but the process is relatively straightforward and good advice is available from the Tribunal Service's SEN helpline on 01325 392 555. There is also a range of useful free publications available, including a booklet and video to tell parents more about the process. For further details go to www.sendist.gov.uk

Disability discrimination claims can be about admission, exclusions or education and associated services. Some admissions and exclusions appeals go to local appeals panels (you will see in the decision letter where to direct your appeal) and others come to SEND. You will need to:

- Find out who is the responsible body you are appealing against.
- Show that your child is disabled (you may need to provide medical evidence).
- Show that your child has received less favourable treatment for a reason related to their disability.

Schools are expected to make 'reasonable adjustments' to anticipate the needs of disabled children. The only justifications they can use to have failed in these duties relate to costs and practicalities, health and safety issues and the effects on other children.

Supportive Parents can support parents through the tribunal process. We can discuss their concerns and give them information so that they are able to take active decisions on behalf of their child. If they decide to pursue an appeal we can help them to access expert knowledge, and to manage the paperwork. We cannot act to represent parents (that is, take over the case on their behalf), but we can advise on the process itself and signpost to further specialist sources of information, advice and support as necessary.

Guidance for parents:

- You will be notified by the local authority, in any letter giving its decisions about your child's SEN, that you have the right to appeal against the decision to SEND. If you are unsure, contact Supportive Parents or the Tribunal Service's SEN helpline immediately.
- It is important that you do not miss deadlines. There is a two-month time limit during which you can appeal after you are notified of an SEN-related decision by the Local Authority. You can claim within six months following alleged discrimination. We advise that you read all letters sent to you with care - always read them through a second

time and use a highlighter to pick out any significant dates or instructions. Mark the dates on your calendar.

- The “notice of appeal” form that you need to complete to start the process is in the booklet “How to Appeal an SEN Decision: A Guide for Parents”. Contact the SEN helpline to obtain a copy of this booklet or visit the website: www.sendist.gov.uk
- If you wish to appeal to the tribunal because you think your child has been discriminated against, you need to complete the “notice of appeal” form and also the form in the centre of the booklet “Disability discrimination in schools: How to make a claim”. For a copy of this booklet contact the Disability helpline on 0870 241 2555. Keep a copy of all forms and note the date they were posted.
- Information about what you can, or can’t, appeal against is clearly laid out in the appeals booklet. Contact Supportive Parents to discuss the grounds for your appeal if you aren’t sure about your entitlements.
- It is possible to combine an SEN and a disability discrimination hearing, by ticking a box on the claim form.
- Hearings normally take place about 4-5 months after your appeal has been accepted or 5-6 months if it includes August.
- You will need to provide as much information as possible with your notice of appeal and you should support all that you say with evidence. All your evidence will need to be sent along to the Tribunal and will be shared with the Local Authority. Make sure you keep careful records in date order. Consider sending important paperwork by recorded delivery and send copies, not original documents.
- You should supply information about your child’s views as part of your appeal. If you send tapes or videos, you will need to provide five copies to the Tribunal so that the Local Authority can be supplied with a copy.

- The Local Authority will have to respond to your appeal with their evidence within 30 working days of being notified of the appeal. They will also be expected to provide information about your child's views on the points of the appeal. The Local Authority will send a copy of their reply to you and to the Tribunal.
- The Tribunal may also ask you and the Local Authority to provide further information before the appeal hearing. This is known as the case management process.
- It is important to keep talking to the Local Authority during the period leading up to the appeal. They may be willing to negotiate, based on your evidence. Supportive Parents would suggest that a willingness to be reasonable supports your case to the Tribunal, if you are able to show that you have done your best to work in partnership with the Local Authority throughout the process.
- You may bring up to three witnesses (five in the case of a disability discrimination claim) to support your case at the appeal hearing. It is possible to apply to the President of the Tribunal for a witness summons, if a witness is unwilling to attend but you can show that they are important to your case and they can reasonably be expected to attend.
- At any point in the process you or the Local Authority can ask for a time extension, but you will have to give your reasons in writing and the Tribunal will decide whether to agree to your request.
- You can appoint someone to act as your representative, but only one set of paperwork will be sent out by the Tribunal, so you have to decide to whom it should go. We do suggest that you take particular care that the person you appoint will be committed to keeping you informed and act only in accordance with your views.
- Your case will be heard by a panel of three, the chair will be a lawyer and the others will be experts in SEN.

- SEN hearings are held in private. It is possible to apply for a disability discrimination hearing to be held in public.
- The hearing usually takes at least half a day and is held in a local neutral venue; usually at a Tribunal Service building. You and your witnesses will be able to claim reasonable travel expenses.
- You will be told the outcome of the hearing by post, generally within 10 working days. The decision is final and can only be reviewed for technical reasons or appealed in the Upper Tribunal on a point of law. You would have to ask permission to do this.
- A time limit will be given to the Local Authority if the Tribunal instructs them on an action which they must carry out following the decision. They are legally required to do so, and you can appeal to the Secretary of State if they do not act as instructed.
- Compensation will not be awarded as an outcome of this process, but actions should be identified to put things right.

It is important to remember that the aim of this procedure is to achieve the best possible outcome for your child. If you can arrive at an agreement with the Local Authority or responsible body during the process it is possible to apply to withdraw your case at any stage before the actual hearing.

Summary: Chapter 9 - When things go wrong

Bullying: Head Teachers have a legal duty to tackle bullying. In most cases things improve when it is reported.

All schools have an anti-bullying policy. Parents should find out what it says and follow it.

Keep a record and ask for a meeting if you are concerned. Involve the Education Welfare Service if it is affecting your child's ability to attend school. Remember that it is not legal to keep your child off school.

Exclusion: Only the Head Teacher can exclude and it must be for a serious breach of the school's rules. It must be fully investigated by the Head Teacher. Children with SEN should not be excluded unless the circumstances are exceptional and everything else has been tried.

Exclusion must be for a specified period and plans must be made for the pupil's education to continue. Even a short exclusion should be discussed with the SENCO.

Parents must immediately be notified in writing and must be told how they can appeal.

Contact the Education Welfare Service for advice on exclusions. Supportive Parents can help too.

Complaints: If you have a complaint, go first to the person who is responsible and ask for a meeting to discuss your concerns.

If this doesn't help, find out about the formal complaints procedure and follow it carefully.

Put your concerns in writing if possible and provide evidence. Supportive Parents can help with this.

Think about what would help to resolve the situation and try to keep an open mind.

Find out about the Disagreement Resolution service. This is an independent, free service that may also be able to help.

SEND- The SEN and Disability Tribunal: is an independent body, set up to hear appeals from parents if they don't agree with the local authority's decision about their child's statutory assessment or Statement, or concerning claims of disability discrimination.

There are specific grounds for appeal. Parents must provide evidence to support their appeal and must keep to deadlines.

All evidence will be shared between parents and the local authority. Both sides can offer reports and bring witnesses in support of their case. Supportive Parents can support, but cannot represent parents, through the process.

Chapter 10: Parent to parent: Finding someone to talk with who shares your experience.

Why a parent support group?

Few children with additional needs are clearly diagnosed at birth. For a parent, a growing awareness that their child might have significant or profound differences can make them feel very isolated from the 'typical' experience and the support of their peers. It can also eat away at their confidence whilst absorbing considerable amounts of time and energy. This can leave those of us who have children with additional needs with few sources of friendship, support and information at a time when we need them most. Many parents will always remember that moment of relief and release, when we discover that we are not alone; when we realise that there are others sharing this 'different' journey, when we realise that it's OK to laugh again and take pleasure in the unique experiences that our children offer.

Some parent support groups are set up by parents, for parents. They are often the result of that recognition of the value of shared experience and mutual support and can become cornerstones of our ongoing development as individuals, as parents and as families. They can provide a source of help, ideas and enjoyment for children and families, and may also become a valuable source of stakeholder involvement and participation for professionals. Many of these groups regularly invite professionals along to give talks or to consult with parents. They can act as a resource for authorities, offering expertise and experience that can contribute directly to staff and parent training opportunities.

Some groups are initially set up by professionals for parents, often with a specific aim or objective in mind. It could be in order to offer support to a specific parent group within an inclusive setting (eg: parents of children with SEN within a mainstream school) or to deliver a service (e.g.: a training course for parents of newly-diagnosed children). It may be to provide an ongoing source of guidance or scrutiny for a statutory service, or to assist with supporting and advising on service development. However, it is worth remembering that these groups also hold the potential to develop into valuable ongoing sources of long-term help and support for children and families.

Does a local group already exist?

Before setting up a group it is always worth checking first for existing parent support groups running locally that can be accessed by parents and/or professionals.

Supportive Parents currently runs two monthly groups in North Somerset. We offer meetings during the evening, from 7.30pm to 9.30pm, alternating between Worle and Portishead. Details are sent out at the beginning of each term to every school and early years setting in the authority and further information on times and dates is available on our website at www.supportiveparents.org.uk We can provide parents and professionals with information about other parent-led groups in the authority. Contact our helpline for further details on 0117 9897725 (Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-2pm during term-time). Additionally, the Children and Young People's Information Service (on 01275 888778) or Contact a Family (a national charity for families with disabled children, on 0808 808 3555 or info@cafamily.org.uk) will be able to advise.

First thoughts about starting a group:

In North Somerset, Voluntary Action North Somerset (VANS) provides support to voluntary and community groups. VANS can help with finding a source of grant funding, charitable status, organisational development, IT and planning for your group, training for committees and partnership working with the statutory sector. To find out more, contact VANS directly on 01934 410194.

For parent or for professionals who may wish to consider setting up a parent support group themselves, there are a number of considerations.

- Not least is the capacity - the time and energy it takes - to achieve this successfully and sustainably. Who will drive forward this initiative? Who will 'own' the group?
- How will you ensure that the group meets the needs of those who attend?
- The group will need resources - these may be small at first but they will become a drain and a disincentive to continuing

involvement, for both parents and professionals, if they are not acknowledged and factored in at the earliest stage of planning.

- Who will be supportive; an 'ally' or affiliate of this group - a continuing source of information and encouragement - who can offer both credibility and confidence in the early stages? This might be the school or educational setting that the group is set within, or the service or provision (e.g.: Children's Centre). The group might be disability-specific (and so able to seek support and guidance from a charity like the National Autistic Society) or Contact a Family has a free affiliation scheme.
- Practical 'how to' advice about running your group - meeting others, perhaps setting up a committee, finding a venue and funding, deciding on aims and objectives, managing and publicising meetings and events, producing a newsletter or even developing a website. Contact a Family also produces useful guidance on starting a local parent's group, aimed at parents and professionals.

How can Supportive Parents help?

Supportive Parents is always happy to meet with local parent groups, to support their development. We are particularly eager to support school-based groups for parents of children with SEN. We consider that the comfort and encouragement, the in-depth experience and support that parents can offer to each other, is exceptional. It complements and enhances professional input and can significantly improve quality of life for families with children who have SEN. In our support groups we hope to generate and enhance effective partnership working between parents and professionals, so that outcomes for children are maximised.

The value of parent-led groups:

Parent-led groups have particular strengths that do not always exist within groups run by professionals. They can provide a safe environment in which to express feelings or ask questions. There is more likely to be a real sense of ownership and control by those parents attending these groups, coupled with greater levels of commitment and drive to achieve identified aims and objectives. These groups are often more sustainable for these reasons, attracting interest and expertise from other parents and

being less dependent on the long-term involvement of professionals in order to continue.

However, many successful parent-led groups have been set up by or with the support of professionals, and 'new' parents will often depend upon professionals to hear about the group's existence, so any group should identify professionals amongst their most valued allies.

Next steps:

Many groups start with a few parents, who may have met at the local opportunity group, at school or in a hospital waiting room. They may have met on a training course or might even have been brought together initially by a professional. However, they will have experienced the comfort and support of each other's friendship and shared experiences, and will wish that relationship to be extended or built on in some way.

They might start meeting in each other's homes, but quickly find this is impractical or too demanding of the individual who hosts the meeting. They may feel that they need to 'equalise' relationships within the group so that control is shared between members. They might have identified a 'purpose' for their group and wonder how to achieve those aims. For inspiration, read chapter 1 to find out more about how Supportive Parents started!

One way of helping the group to develop could be to identify a possible source of start-up support. How/where did you all get together originally? There is a range of practical resources which that service, or other organisations, may be able to provide:

- A meeting venue - a comfortable space where you feel welcome and safe. This also needs to be available at a time when it is realistic for your group to meet (e.g.: not from 3pm in the afternoon).
- Display space for information about your group - posters, leaflets etc.
- A way to reach other parents who may also be interested (this could be via a newsletter or website, that you could use to advertise your meetings)
- Start-up funding
- Access to a kitchen, so you can make a cup of coffee, to welcome new parents or speakers.

- Information source - this might be a comprehensive library facility or a member of staff who can tell you where to usefully start looking for information, advice or guidance.
- Computer access, photocopying and/or use of a telephone.
- Supportive professionals or local groups you may want to link with.

Further organisational aspects:

As your group develops beyond an informal arrangement of friends, you may wish to set up some organisational structures to share the load and meet the requirements of potential sources of grant funding. Once you have got to know each other as a group, it is essential to devote an initial meeting to making a few decisions and listing some ideas and resources to help you move forward in a way that meets the needs and interests of you all.

- What is your group all about? Aims, objectives, hopes and dreams are important. What do your founder members want from the group? What can you offer to new members? Different approaches and goals can sit comfortably alongside each other. Try not to be too ambitious, so your group has time to settle. Remember that having fun is a valid objective!
- As a group, you will have a whole range of skills, strengths and knowledge to share - make a list! This is especially useful if you decide to form a committee at a future point, when it becomes clear that responsibilities need to be shared out. VANS can provide information and training in North Somerset.
- Who are your contacts or allies? Make another list! Some members may have close links with professionals or voluntary organisations that your group will find valuable. Linking or affiliating with another group may help you to gain credibility
- How much time and support can individual members offer? Be realistic.
- Venues for meetings need to be in the right area and accessible - but bear in mind that they can change as your group's requirements develop. North Somerset Council produces a useful guide to local community venues. Contact the Town Hall for further details; Tel: 01934 888888
- During meetings, remember to
 - do introductions

- encourage discussion
 - arrive at a conclusion or decision as necessary
 - acknowledge people's contributions
 - plan for the future (even if it's just to set a date for the next meeting).
- Publicity - access to a computer will allow you to provide good-quality posters to publicise your meetings - get the whole group involved in layout and spell-checking, and do ask permission before you put them up! There are lots of newsletters already in production that might be happy to advertise your group.
 - Take careful advice if any grant funding or financial dealings are involved.
 - Think about reviewing your progress as a group on a regular basis. This could be an annual report or meeting to celebrate your group's successes and set some goals for the future. It's a great way of demonstrating your achievements to each other, to other parents, and to professionals and services.

The value of parent support groups in primary school

In his reception year, my son was the only child in his mainstream school with a statement. I hated this and I felt very isolated. Then, in year 1, another child with SEN started, and I met a neighbour whose child had autism. I invited them both over for coffee and a chat as none of us knew anyone else who had children with SEN and it all started from there. At my son's year 1 annual review, I talked to the SENCO about starting a support group; she thought it was a great idea and said she knew others who she felt might be interested.

Life wasn't easy though, and it probably wasn't until year 2 that I really got things started. The SENCO was very supportive; she approached the Head Teacher - it seemed to take her a few 'tries' to manage! - but he became enthusiastic too! He let me put information about the group into the school's newsletter (these days, I have a display board too and he's really good about giving me access to the photocopier) - at first the SENCO acted as a point of contact for parents, as people didn't know me, but that quickly changed.

My son's LSA was very pro-active, and her enthusiasm for what we were doing and what would most benefit our children led to a room being set aside for them. We decorated it and got donations to set it up as a learning and 'chill out' area (IKEA was brilliant and gave us a donation of £250). The room was also used for SEN appointments with Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists etc. having previously been forced to find an empty room which couldn't always be counted on.

The group has been running for over six years now and even though my children no longer attend primary school its still going strong, with parents from four other local schools attending. It's not always easy to find the time and energy, but the need that parents have for someone to talk with keeps it going. Sometimes I've had fourteen parents in my living room! I think it's really important to offer them what they say they need - coffee, biscuits, a warm room, a laugh, trust and someone to talk to who knows exactly how we feel. Sometimes it's a 1:1 conversation, but we go out for meals together as well. It makes me feel good too - if I look back ten years I'd never have believed I would have been able to do this. It's given me the confidence to work with professionals to get the best for my son too - I feel that this group has changed my life.

Vanda; organiser, Bristol parent support group

The value of parent support groups in secondary school

Ten years ago, our enlightened SENco called a meeting of parents of students with special educational needs to establish whether a specific parent group would be useful. A small group of us began to attend evening meetings with the SENco at the school and gradually general issues began to emerge. At the time, Dyslexia awareness seemed to be one of the dominant

topics and we decided to hold a Dyslexia Day for the students. Our SENco was in contact with the head teacher of a specialist dyslexia school who agreed to host the event there. It was a huge success! 50 students attended and parents later reported on how relieved and inspired many of their children were to discover how many other people were struggling with similar problems and learning to cope and succeed.

It had been a massive undertaking for our SENco and small band of parents in terms of organisation. We'd split the jobs between us, raising funds from local charities and the school's Parent Association, organising transport, catering, graphics and publicity - it was hard work but worth it. It was an inspired way of launching awareness of SEN into the consciousness of the school and local community.

We have not attempted an event on quite this scale since, but we try to hold 'big' evenings at the school once a year. These tend to take the form of an invited speaker on a subject raised at our smaller termly meetings - some examples include: Maths and Dyslexia/Dyspraxia, 'Nessy', Coping with ADHD, the DORE programme and Family Learning. In addition, after the issue was raised by a number of parents, a useful evening event on alcohol and drugs awareness was organised for all parents, timed to coincide with PSHSE lessons being given in school. Holding these events not only serves to inform parents and professionals but also encourages new parents to become involved with the group itself. In addition to our own parents, staff and governors, we generally invite other interested parents and teachers from schools around the area and any other agencies that may find the subject matter relevant. This also increases the networking capacity of the group, school and local agencies.

Publicising the group can be costly. We are lucky to have the support of our very inclusive head teacher who understands our value and is happy for us to advertise in the school Newsletter, distribute leaflets through the school system and on occasion, has helped fund some print costs.

Our 'mini' meetings are very informal and usually held in a quiet corner of the local pub - we decided on this as we felt we deserved the opportunity for a pleasant and relaxed evening out

while we discoursed! If anyone requires a more private conversation, that can be arranged. These meetings consist of the Chair, Secretary, SENco, regular committee supporters and any new parents that have contacted us. It is an opportunity for parents to air difficulties or successes, share experience, offer advice or devise strategies and sometimes commiserate. Sometimes we discover that a problem is something all parents struggle with (exam stress/teenagers!) and sometimes it's just an opportunity to talk to somebody who understands or has similar problems. Sometimes it is something that can be fed back to the school, such as the need for a rest area for ME students.

Involving the school in the group is important - teachers are, at the end of the day, the people at the chalkface delivering learning under a welter of policies and strategies. It is a resource as a venue and a source of expertise, support and networking. As an active member of the group our SENco is very supportive and his friendly presence at the meetings often means that some problems can be resolved on the spot. Other problems may not be as easy, but over the years we have learnt to find and pass on information about other agencies (especially SPSC) that may be of more specific help. It is this gradual build up of a bank of knowledge that is invaluable and needs a group to share it and pass it on.

The group is also a valuable as a research and feedback resource for the school - Nussy, for example, a computer programme developed by the Bristol Dyslexia Centre, was adopted by the school's Learning Support Department after parents in the group had enthused about it and an evening was organised to demonstrate it.

By working with the school we have found it is possible to develop very positive relationships that help find strategies that support both individuals and the school in general. It also helps parents develop a closer relationship with the school so that they feel they can more readily approach staff in times of need. In this sense I believe the group has helped to foster a much more open, understanding and inclusive atmosphere than perhaps was the case ten years ago. Now we are all much keener

to find solutions and strategies rather than excuses and complaints.

In a new development, the school now employs Parent Support Assistants and I am hoping that they may be able to take on the running of the group. This will ensure that the Parent Support Group will continue to perform its functions consistently over the long term. It will however, still need the lead input of dedicated parents in order to maintain its focus as a valuable partnership tool. At the end of the day, it is the result of the positive relationships and knowledge developed between parents/carers, school and other agencies that can make all the difference to the life-chances and outcomes of students - both now and in the future.

Sue: Chair, North Somerset School Parent Support Group

Summary: Chapter 10 - Parent to parent: Finding someone to talk with who shares your experience.

Parent support groups offer a chance for parents to meet together, support each other and share information and experiences.

Contact Supportive Parents to find out if there is a local support group. The Children's information Service and Contact a Family are also sources of information about groups in your area.

If you want to start a group up, Supportive Parents can help. Contact a Family produces an advice pack.

Groups set up or run by parents tend to be more sustainable.

Your local opportunity group, children's centre, school or similar setting may be able to offer you practical help to get started.

Don't be too ambitious to start with and remember to enjoy yourself! Find a comfortable venue, decide what your group is for and make a list of allies who will support you to achieve your goals.

Think about ways to reach other parents and don't forget to celebrate your successes!

Chapter 11: Parent participation - getting more involved

The views of children, young people and their parents are now recognised as fundamental to the development of successful and effective personal and strategic planning and policy development by all local authorities in the UK.

“Children who are capable of forming views, have a right to receive and make known information, to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter affecting them.”

Articles 12 & 13, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Children with SEN have a unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances, and their own views about what sort of help they would like to make the most of their education.²⁷ We provide forms that parents and schools can use to support children to express their views - see end of chapter 8. The local authority also has a critical role in encouraging and supporting pupil participation.²⁸

In this context the term “participation” is generally considered to refer to the advice service-users can give, to inform and support local authorities in strategic development and planning - it also implies that parents’ opinions will be asked for, via some sort of formal process, to directly inform schools and the local authority, so as to more effectively enable children with SEN to fulfill their potential.²⁹

In fact “participation” as a concept can also be considered to include:

- provision of adequate, clear and accurate information to service-users, to enable full participation in the planning process.
- regular and accessible consultations with service-users, with well-publicised, clearly identified outcomes

²⁷ see s.32. SEN Code of Practice, 2001

²⁸ see s.3.21 SEN Code of Practice, 2001

²⁹ see s 2.2 SEN Code of Practice, 2001

- involvement at a strategic level in decisions relating to service planning and development

We believe that parent participation “starts at home” - in other words, if parents are effectively informed about, consulted with and listened to with respect to their own child’s planning, they are more likely to be part of the SEN process of assessment, intervention and review for their child, and for all children.

To summarise, successful outcomes for individual children and their families will directly influence and shape strategic planning processes.

Parent participation:

Parents and carers of children with special educational needs are essential to the success of any plans put into place to support and enable the attainment of pupils. As a minimum, parents must be informed and offered advice and support, so that they do not undermine or work against these plans. At best they can help to advise and develop planning so that work done in schools is extended and enhanced and continues into the home setting, so that as a consequence children’s life chances are maximised.

The overwhelming majority of parents are fully committed to their children’s education and are eager to understand and support interventions that they identify as focused, appropriate and effective. If provided with clear information and the opportunities to meet with staff and specialist advisers, so that they are part of the planning process, they will be supportive and fully involved. Schools and local authorities have a duty to ensure that parents and children are enabled to participate in all aspects of school planning, by supplying information about the curriculum and the SEN process.

Parents also receive regular reports about their child’s attainments and will be invited to planning opportunities at intervals during the school year. For parents of children with SEN, these may also include IEP planning reviews, annual reviews of statements, or multi-agency reviews. For further information about these opportunities to participate in individual planning, go to chapter 8. Supportive Parents has a particular role in supporting parents through their child’s individual planning, so

that they are empowered and enabled to act as effective participants in this process (also see chapter 7, on meetings).

However, an additional advantage to professionals of including parents at this individual planning stage is that parents can often provide ideas or suggestions that will result in innovative or less 'traditional' solutions and enable access to a wider range of expertise. This may be because they have developed links with specialists in their child's difficulty or impairment, but also because they are likely to have developed a considerable expertise themselves. Equally their expertise in terms of their own children's needs and provision should always be acknowledged and sought after during individual planning and reviews.

Parents may well require to be provided with a wide range of alternate means of contributing to and supporting this planning process. Their personal circumstances and access needs must be factored into any and all arrangements. A wide range of information must be available in a variety of forms and community languages. This must also include access to sources of impartial information, advice and support, so that individual queries and issues can be addressed. Supportive Parents provides this service on behalf of the local authority for parents of children with SEN.

The government, through the "Every Child Matters" initiative, also requires that consultation must also take place across the full range of local authority services and their service-users, so that all groups are included, and everyone has an equal opportunity to be involved, in planning and development. Consultations must offer a range of ways that individuals can become involved - these could be via personal interview (face to face or by telephone), a "group" or open meeting of some sort, or it could be via a questionnaire or other postal, internet or email opportunity. It is essential that such processes are transparent and that outcomes are clearly demonstrated and open to scrutiny.

North Somerset has a Disabled Children's Family Network. Registering with this allows regular information to be sent via a newsletter and also provides a route to participation in service

development, as those families registered will be contacted directly when consultations or open meetings are planned. For further information about this network look on North Somerset Council's website or contact The Firs Resource Centre on 01934 632 538.

Supportive Parents has facilitated a number of consultations at the request of statutory services and independent organisations. We also endeavour to complete a service-users survey every year, so that we are directly advised by our service-users on developing and improving the quality of our service.

Getting more involved:

There are a number of ways that parents (and children and young people) can participate at a strategic level in planning and strategic development. This could include being a school governor (or for pupils, sitting on the school council), or being invited to take part in interviewing and appointing officers of the local authority, to sitting on working or planning groups at local authority level.

It can be very demanding for individuals participating at this level, in terms of time and commitment. It is therefore essential that their involvement must be carefully supported and planned. Individuals should always feel that they have access to adequate information, advice and support, training and funding so that they are able to be effective contributors to the process. If parents are interested in working with the local authority at this level, Supportive Parents will try to signpost them to a useful source of further information and we can also tell you more about our own SEN forum (see below - Vol Reps).

It is advisable that some forms of participation are facilitated by independent organisations, so that those parents who take part feel that they are able to clearly express their views without concern for their personal circumstances. There also needs to be firm guidelines set, so that everyone is clear about what the opportunity will offer - transparent and mutually agreed "rules of engagement" supports effective partnerships between parents and professionals.

Professionals often express concerns about recruiting parents to engage in participatory opportunities. Achieving strategic involvement from parents driven by the determination to ensure that “no child goes through what my child experienced” is an effective recruitment technique in the short term. However, in the long term it is likely to prove uncomfortable for staff, limit that individual’s involvement to a ‘set agenda’ and does not offer long-term sustainability to the process. Those who become involved as the result of a more successful personal experience are perhaps more likely to be able to offer positive, constructive and sustainable involvement. However, the participation agenda must not be about limiting parental involvement, but should focus on improving and extending opportunities for all parents’ voices to be heard in a positive and effective way, so that children and their families are put at the centre of planning.

Vol Reps:

Since 1990 Supportive Parents has facilitated three meetings each year in North Somerset, between parent representatives (“parent reps”) and members of parent groups or voluntary organisations who support parents of children with SEN, and officers of the local authority. Our aim and purpose is to achieve as wide a range of parent representation as possible, in order to raise issues and concerns at a parent-only pre-meeting, and so develop general questions that form an agenda for meetings with senior local authority officers who have decision-making authority. All appointed parent reps for specific organisations were, and remain, parents of children with SEN and ideally our parent reps still reflect all areas of need, as identified in the 2001 SEN Code of Practice (s.7:52).

Vol Reps meetings have the identified aims and functions of;

- enabling parents to represent to the local authority issues and concerns arising at parent group meetings
- developing effective partnership between parents and the local authority, which empowers parents
- widening parental representation
- offering parents a chance to contribute directly to service developments and strategic planning

"I like the way the meetings are run, especially the pre-meeting as everyone is given a chance to put views forward in an informal setting. The agenda is kept to and the meeting finishes on time with all business covered."³⁰

Parent reps are expected to act as representatives on behalf of their group or organisation. In addition, with their agreement, they agree to act as a valued conduit to other parent members of their group and offer the opportunity for networking, and for information on SEN issues to be disseminated or gathered. Parent reps are also asked their permission to share their contact details with statutory services, who may wish to issue invitations to parents of children with SEN to meetings or events, or to conduct consultations.

If a group or organisation is unable to provide a parent rep or member, they can still provide comment or offer suggestions to Supportive Parent's Local Coordinator (who facilitates the group), to be given consideration at the pre-meeting when the agenda is set. The notes arising out of the meeting with the local authority are currently sent out to 10 officers of the local authority and 23 voluntary organisations in North Somerset, although only 10 groups are able to send parent reps along to the meetings.

"I do think that I am able to discuss and share information freely with the other parent reps/members. It is an important aspect of the forum, one I find very useful. It is interesting that we all have similar thoughts and concerns."

The parents' meeting with local authority officers commences with an hour-long themed session to provide an opportunity for discussion, information-sharing or consultation. This theme is set during the previous meeting, by mutual agreement between parents and officers, when issues have been identified that would benefit from a lengthier or more specialist input. This first hour is followed by another hour when general issues can be raised by parents via their pre-set agenda, for response by local authority officers. The process of agenda-setting by parents enables them to engage in the participative process of supporting strategic

³⁰ all italicised comments taken from SPSC's Vol Reps Review, September 2007. Our thanks to the parent reps and members who contributed to this process.

planning and development, by challenging and commenting on current policy and practice.

“My involvement in Vol Reps has given me confidence to discuss issues with parents. It also helps me to see the ‘bigger picture’ of SEN issues and not just to focus on my own child’s needs when she was at school. Many parents and children have a very negative experience of education and I think my involvement in Vol Reps has also helped me to appreciate this. It has also enabled me to support colleagues who are working with families more directly. It has been, and continues to be, a vital part of the service to families and its work with other voluntary organisations means it is very accessible and acceptable to them. Thanks for everything you do.”

The Chair takes an important role in ensuring that equality of consultation and opportunity takes place during these meetings, so that all parents can participate in the process and the agenda presents a balanced representation of issues and concerns. Ideally, Vol Reps meetings are chaired by a parent; this includes both the pre-meeting and the meeting with the local authority.

Parent reps have always offered local authorities a potential source of ‘experienced parents’ who can offer commitment and who have the confidence to participate in policy development and strategic planning. The Vol Reps group continues to support its members to participate at this level, and additionally provides a networking opportunity for parent reps so that national and local information can be shared between voluntary organisations with mutual issues and interests.

“Our children always seem to be ‘added on’ to government policy, so I really value Vol Reps as a way of highlighting their difficulties and the struggles they (and the schools) face in getting their needs met. However, if our agenda is to ever really have impact, I do think it has to be aligned with the mainstream agenda in some way. So often, what helps our youngsters would benefit the majority. We aren’t in conflict, we are allies - so maybe linking with the ECM outcomes will in some way work for our children too.”

The "Every Child Matters" agenda places a requirement on local authorities to engage with parents, to develop their effective participation in service planning and development. Supportive Parents recognises that Vol Reps can only fulfill elements of that requirement. We consider that it is a tested formula that has its place in the array of participatory opportunities that local authorities must make available. Vol Reps may be particularly valuable as, for example, an SEN sub-group of a parent forum that focuses on Children and Young People's Services strategic developments.

Summary: Chapter 11 - Parent participation - getting more involved

“Participation” means the advice that children and their parents can give to local authorities to help develop effective policies, plans and services.

Good participation practice includes the Authority giving clear information and support to children and families and offering them a chance to be consulted at all stages of planning and service development.

Parents (and children) need to be able to influence plans for their child. If this happens successfully, they will probably be more confident to help the authority to plan at a strategic level.

Parents know their child best. Because of this, they might come up with good ideas that professionals would never have considered. They should be offered lots of different ways to share their ideas, and support to take part in planning.

Supportive Parents can help parents to feel confident and well-informed.

Parents of children with SEN can come to our Vol Reps meetings. These meetings offer a chance to meet with senior officers from the Local Authority and discuss general issues and concerns about SEN provision, policy and practice in North Somerset.

Appendix 1: SEN Jargon buster

ACTES: stands for Avon Consortium Traveller Education Service.

ADHD - stands for 'Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder': ADHD is a range of problem behaviours associated with difficulties with attention span, including restlessness and hyperactivity.

Annual review: The Review of a Statement of Special Educational Needs which a Local Authority (LA) must carry out within 12 months of making the Statement and then on an annual basis.

Annual Review Report: A written progress report completed by the school for an Annual or Transition Review meeting.

Annual Review Summary: A written report completed by the school recording all information and recommendations from the Annual Review meeting and sent to the LA for consideration.

Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO): An experienced Early Years practitioner employed by the LA to assist non-maintained Early Years settings in the management of SEN and inclusion. Area SENCOs provide advice and support for children identified with SEN and training for SENCOs in settings.

ASD - stands for 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder': The term used for a range of disorders affecting the development of social interaction, communication and imagination.

Baseline assessment: The assessment of a child's aptitude and ability as they start school.

BESD: stands for 'behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties'.

CAF: stands for Common Assessment Framework. This is an assessment to get a complete picture of a child's additional needs at an early stage. It looks at all unmet needs and helps children to get access to the right service earlier.

CAMHS - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service: Service to provide help, support and care for children and young people suffering from mental health problems.

Children's Centres: Children's Centres are places where children under 5 years old and their families can receive seamless holistic integrated services and where they can access help from multi-disciplinary teams of professionals offering: full day care, early years education, child and family health services, including ante-natal services, parental outreach, family support services, childminding support for children and parents with special needs, effective links to Job Centre Plus.

Choice Advisors/Choice Advice Service: provides parents with advice and support for children starting in Reception Year at Primary School and Year 7 at Secondary School

Circle time: A technique for raising pupils' self-esteem in school

Clusters: Groups (usually of schools) who cooperate for training/discussion etc.

The Code of Practice: A Guide for parents, schools and LAs about the help they can give to children with Special Educational Needs. Schools, Local Authorities and Children's Social Services must have regard to the Code when they work with a child with Special Educational Needs.

Connexions Service: A service for all 13-19 year olds to help them prepare for the transition to work and adult life.

Connexions Personal Advisor (PA): provides a universal information, advice and guidance service for young people 13-19 years at school, in further education, in or out of work.

Contact Point: A system to help identify children and the services they are receiving. It aims to achieve earlier identification of needs, more co-ordinated services and better communication/closer working practices between staff supporting families.

Core Assessment: If needed this is carried out by Social Work staff from Children's Social Care following an Initial Assessment. It is a detailed assessment to look at child/family needs -

significant health needs, physical disability or behavioural problems requiring a number of different services. It must be completed within 35 working days.

DCSF: The Department for Children, Schools and Families is one of three new government departments set up by the Prime Minister on 28 June 2007. DCSF is responsible for improving the focus on all aspects of policy affecting children and young people, as part of the Government's aim to deliver educational excellence.

DDA - Disability Discrimination Act (1995). The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) aims to end the discrimination which many people with disabilities face.

Delegated Funding: All schools receive their funding from Central Government through the Local Authority according to a range of formulae, which are calculated according to the number and age range of each school's pupils.

DFES: Department for Education and Skills has now been taken over by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Disagreement Resolution: LAs must provide arrangements to help prevent or resolve disagreements between parents whose children have SEN and the LA or school. Using this service does not affect parents' right to appeal to the SEN Tribunal.

DoH - Department of Health: Responsible for setting health and social care policy in England.

DRC: stands for Disability Rights Commission - now known as the Equality and Human rights Commission. The 2 Codes of Practice relating to disability remain in force - the Code of Practice for Schools and the Code of Practice (revised) for providers of Post 16 education and related services. These 2 codes explain the duties to avoid disability discrimination in Education.

Early Years Settings: All pre-school educational provision nursery classes and schools, day nurseries and preschools.

Early Years Action: When a child is identified with SEN, help is given that is additional to or different from the help most other children have an IPP or Playplan will usually be drawn up.

Early Years Action Plus: This targeted help and planning includes input from the Area SENCO.

Educational Psychologist (Ed Psych) (EP): A person who has trained in psychology to understand more about the way children think, learn and behave. They can help find out why some children are having more difficulties than others in school.

Education Welfare Officer (EWO): EWOs work by inviting schools to discuss children whose irregular attendance is causing concern. They then make contact with parents either by telephone, letter or home visit. Education welfare officers will always work with parents and schools to try to bring about improvements in the level of attendance and also the child's well being at school.

EMAS: stands for Ethnic Minority Achievement Service.

EOTAS: stands for Education Other Than At School.

Extended Schools: These schools provide a wide range of activities and services in partnership with a wide variety of organisations. These extended services will be shaped by the needs and demands of pupils, parents and wider community.

FE: stands for 'Further education'

Foundation Stage: This begins when children are born and lasts until the end of their Reception year.

Health Visitor: A qualified nurse employed by the Health Service who gives advice on general child health, particular health problems and has specific responsibility for monitoring a child's progress and advising parents when needed.

HI: stands for Hearing Impairment.

HIRB: stands for 'Hearing impairment resource base'

IEP: Individual Education Plan - A set of short-term learning targets set down for a child with special educational needs. This is usually put together by the SEN Coordinator and teachers, but parents and pupils should always be involved. An IEP should be

reviewed at least twice a year, but a more frequent review is often appropriate.

Inclusion: Educating all children, including those with special educational needs, in mainstream (local) schools

Independent Parental Supporter (IPS): The IPS must be someone who can support parents, encouraging parental participation and helping the parent understand the SEN framework. Independent means someone who is independent of the decision making process that determines the type and level of support for a child with special educational needs. IPSs will often be someone from a voluntary organisation, a Parent Partnership Service, another parent or a friend.

IT / ICT: Information technology (now called information and communication technology)

Key Stages

Foundation Stage: Birth-5 years (end of the Reception Year)

Key Stage 1:	Years 1-2	Ages 5-7
Key Stage 2:	Years 3-6	Ages 7-11
Key Stage 3:	Years 7-9	Ages 11-14
Key Stage 4:	Years 10-11	Ages 14-16

LA: stands for 'Local Authority'

Lead Professional: One person who is responsible for helping the child and family through the system and to make sure they get the right services at the right time.

Learning and Skills Council (LSC): deals with all issues relating to funding and training post-16.

Learning Difficulties: A child has learning difficulties if they find it significantly harder to learn than most children of the same age.

Locality Teams: Re-organisation of Children's Services staff, so as to carry out work in a multi-disciplinary way across four areas of North Somerset; North, Central, Weston South & Weston East.

LSA: stands for Learning support Assistant (see also TA)

Mainstream school: An LA maintained school that is not a special school. Mainstream schools form the majority of schools and include Infant, Junior, Primary and Secondary schools.

Maintained school: A state school including community, foundation and voluntary schools as well as community special and foundation special schools.

Mentor or Learning Mentor: An adult or older pupil who is linked with a child to provide support across a number of areas such as learning or behaviour.

MLD: stands for moderate learning difficulties - children who have greater difficulties in learning than 98% of children of the same age.

Monitoring: The ongoing assessment of work, progress, expenditure or achievement

Multi-disciplinary: Involving professionals from a range of disciplines (usually Education, Social Care and Health)

Named LA Officer: The person from the LA who liaises with parents over all the arrangements relating to statutory assessment and making of the statement.

National Curriculum: Provides structured and assessed education through Key Stages (see SATS for more information).

Note in Lieu: A note that may be issued to the child's parents and school when, following a statutory assessment, the LA decides not to make a statement. The note should describe the child's special educational needs, explain why the LA does not think it necessary to make a statement and make recommendations about appropriate provision for the child. All the advice received during the assessment should be attached to the note and sent to the parents and, with their consent, should also be sent to the child's school.

Occupational Therapist (OT): Are employed by the Health Trust and work with the child, parents and teachers, Occupational Therapists use therapeutic techniques (advising on equipment and environmental adaptations where appropriate) to improve a child's ability to access the physical and learning curriculum.

OfSTED - Office for Standards in Education: A non-ministerial government department established under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 to take responsibility for the inspection of all schools in England. Find reports on individual schools at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Paediatrician: A doctor specialising in the needs of babies and children.

Parent Partnership Services: provide information and support to parents of children with SEN to help parents to play a more active and informed role in their children's education.

Physiotherapist: A therapist who supports children with physical and medical needs, helps with exercises and provides advice to parents and schools.

PMLD: stands for Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. In addition to very severe learning difficulties, pupils have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical condition. Pupils require a high level of adult support, both for their learning needs and also for their personal care.

Portage: Home based pre-school education for children with special educational needs. LAs usually provide Portage services. The Portage service is named after the town of Portage, Wisconsin, in the USA. There is a national Portage association, which provides a Code of Practice and accredited training. Portage home visitors work in partnership with parents, helping parents to help their child.

Proposed Statement: This is a draft copy of the statement, offering parents 15 days to comment on or request adjustments, before a final document is drawn up.

Provision Map: A table of support showing what the school is providing for their SEN pupils, so parents can better understand what support is on offer, when and where from.

PSA: stands for Parental Support Advisor. PSAs carry out early intervention work, working directly with schools and parents in a preventative way and signposting to specialist services when needed. The service will offer parenting support and information, work with parents to support their child's learning, support with school attendance, punctuality, behaviour and exclusions.

PSHE: stands for Personal Social Health Education.

PSP - Pastoral Support Plan: To be put in place to help modify a pupil's behaviour. They should be put in place where a child is at serious risk of permanent exclusion.

Psychiatrist: A doctor who helps people who have difficulties with the way they feel and behave. Child psychiatrists specialise in helping children.

Published Admission Number: Refers to the number the school can admit to the relevant age group in any one year.

Pupil Referral Unit (PRU): An establishment for pupils who would otherwise not attend school.

QCA: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. The Government Agency responsible for all matters related to the curriculum from early years to Post-16 education.

SATs - Standard Assessment Tests/Tasks - National tests and tasks to ascertain the level of attainment reached by pupils at the key stages of the National Curriculum, i.e. at 7 years at the end of KS1 and at 11 years at the end of KS2.

SEAL: stands for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning.

Section 139a Assessment: (formerly s.140) a written report on a student's educational and training needs and the provision required to meet them. Connexions Staff have a statutory requirement to carry these out from Year 11.

SEN: Special educational needs. A child is said to have a special educational need if he/she finds it more difficult to learn than most children of the same age.

SEN Co-ordinator (SENCO): Member of staff of a school or early education setting, who has responsibility for co-ordinating special educational needs (SEN) provision within that school.

Sensory Support Service/Sensory Impaired Team: A team of experienced qualified teaching and non-teaching staff who provide skilled support for children who have hearing, vision and multi needs sensory impairment including deaf/blind. Teaching staff offer a wide range of skills to teach and support children and families from the time of diagnosis in the critical early years and throughout school life.

SI: stands for Sensory Impairment

SLD: stands for Severe Learning Difficulties. Pupils with severe learning difficulties have significant intellectual or cognitive impairments. They may also have difficulties in mobility and co-ordination, communication and perception and learning self-help skills. Pupils with severe learning difficulties will need support in all areas of the curriculum.

SLT: stands for Speech and Language Therapist. They help children who have speech, language and communication difficulties.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SEND): An independent body established under the 1996 Education Act that hears appeals by parents against LA decisions on assessments and statements. From September 2002, parents have become able to lodge an appeal against a school if there is an issue around fixed term exclusions, or if the child's parent/carer feels their child has been discriminated against because of their disability. The tribunal's decision is binding on both parties to the appeal.

Special School: A school which is specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Statements whose needs cannot be met in a mainstream school.

SPLD: stands for Specific Learning Difficulties in a particular area of the curriculum.

Statement of Special Educational Needs: A legal document that sets out a child's special educational needs and all the extra help he or she would receive.

Statutory Assessment: Statutory Assessment is a formal procedure, which involves the collection of information from as many people as possible. Assessment works best when all involved; parents, school staff, health and social services, psychologists and other LA staff, work in partnership to secure the best outcome for the child.

Teaching Assistant/Learning Support Assistant/General Assistant (TA/LSA/GA): A person employed in school to support children's learning under the direction of a class teacher.

Transition Plan: A plan devised following the year 9 annual review and updated at subsequent annual reviews. The purpose of the plan is to draw together information from a range of individuals within and beyond the school in order to plan coherently for the young person's transition to adult life.

VI: stands for 'Visual impairment' (loss of sight).

Appendix 2: SEN policies and practice guidance in North Somerset

We include below a selection of the policies and practice guidance available on SEN and related issues in North Somerset. Copy and paste the web address into your browser to go directly to these sites. For further information, contact the Town Hall directly on 01275 888 888 and ask for the relevant department or contact Supportive Parent's Information & Support line on 0117 9897725 (10am - 2pm, Mon, Wed and Fri during term-time)

Education Support Services: <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Education+Support+Service/esspublications.htm>

- **Policy and Practice Guide for Specific Learning Difficulties: Dyslexia and Dyscalculia**
- **Transition:**
- **Secondary Transfer:
A Framework for Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 Transfer**

Behaviour Support Team: <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Education+Support+Service/esspublications.htm>

- **Behaviour Support Team Menu of Services**
- **Behaviour & Attendance Working with Parents Document**
- **Primary National Strategy - SEAL Report gives information about materials developed by the DCSF to improve the behaviour and attendance of primary school children.**

Learning, Language and Support Team:

- **Learning, Language & Communication Team Menu of Services lists the services offered to Foundation Stage, key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 learners with learning, language and communication problems**
- **SALT: Speaking & Listening Together Programme details the outcomes of this programme**
- **SALSA: Speech and Language Secondary Age is a fact sheet about this project**

Education Welfare Service <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Education+Welfare+Service/guidance.htm>

- **Guidance on Attendance Policies**
- **Behaviour Support Plan 2004 - 2007**
- **Pastoral Support Programmes Guidance and Templates**
- **Negotiated Transfers**

- **Protocol for Reinclusion of Permanently Excluded Pupils**
- **School Attendance Matters Policy**
- **Parenting Contracts**
- **Complex Placements Protocol**
- **Policy and Procedures for Full-Time Early College Admissions**
- **Home Schooling**
- **Children Missing Education Policy**
- **North Somerset Area Child Protection Committee Protocol for Responding to Children and Young People Missing from Care or Home in North Somerset**
- **North Somerset Council Procedure for Reporting Hate Incidents**
- **Introduction of Penalty Notices for Dealing with Some Instances of Non-attendance**
- **Drug Related Exclusions**

Education Welfare Service- <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Education+Welfare+Service/Behaviourandexclusionsguidance.htm>

- **Behaviour Support Plan 2004 - 2007 WARNING: this is a large document**
- **Behaviour Support Improvement Plan 2006 Review**
- **Negotiated Transfers**
- **Protocol for Reinclusion of Permanently Excluded Pupils**
- **Pastoral Support Programmes Guidance and Templates**
- **Exclusion from School (3rd edition) - Guidance to Governors and Headteachers**
- **Complex Placements Protocol**
- **Guidelines for the Use of Restricted Physical Intervention in Schools**

Educational Psychology Service <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Educational+Psychology+Service/publicationsandguidance.htm>

- **Sharing the Reality: Autistic Spectrum Disorder in North Somerset**
- **Educational Psychology Service Guidance to Schools 2005-2006**
- **Educational Psychology Service Pre-School and Portage Guidance for those Working with Pre-School Children**
- **Joint Strategy for Mental Health and Psychological Wellbeing of Children and Young People (including those with Learning Disabilities)**
- **Policy and Practice Guide for Specific Learning Difficulties: Dyslexia and Dyscalculia**

Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/EOTAS/>

- **Guidance on the education of school age parents**
- **Complex Placements Protocol**
- **Dual Placement Protocol**

Special Educational Needs (SEN) <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Special+Educational+Needs/policiesandguidance.htm>

[Accessibility Strategy 2003 - 2006](#) - Strategy to overcome barriers preventing access for children and their carers to buildings, curriculum and information

[Access Strategy Action Plan](#) - Programme of action for delivering the Accessibility Strategy 2003 - 2006

[Audit Funding Guidance Pack 2009 - 2010](#) - Guidance for schools on the criteria for audit funding and how to apply including application forms. This is a Word document which will enable completion of the forms online.

[Baytree School Sample Equalities Policy](#)

[Disability Code of Practice](#) - Supports schools in developing provision for children with disability

[Dual Placement Protocol](#) - This document sets out the arrangements made in circumstances where a pupil can be registered to attend both a mainstream and special school.

[Guidance for Special Needs Assessment](#) - Informs schools, parents, education services and colleagues in other agencies of our procedures on identifying, assessing and providing special educational needs

[Guidance on the SEN Code of Practice for Mainstream Schools](#) - Guidance for mainstream schools in the implementation of the code

[Inclusion and Equality Guidance for Schools](#) on meeting the legal and good practice requirements

[Joint Working Between Children & Young People's Services, Health and Connexions for Children with Complex Needs for whom there is Shared Agency Concern](#) - Multi-agency protocol for working effectively to support children whose needs cross organisational boundaries

[Monitoring of SEN Funding](#) - A framework to monitor funding and to ensure it is used effectively in mainstream schools

[OfSTED Evaluating Inclusion in Schools](#) - Outlines criteria for the support for under-achieving pupils

[School Self-review for the Inclusion of SEN Pupils](#) - Schedule for reviewing the inclusion of SEN children and young people in early years settings and primary and secondary schools

[Statutory and Complex Issues Panel Guidance Notes](#) - The SCIP Panel is a central decision-making panel which deals with all Special Educational Needs, Statutory decisions, complex placements, multi-agency support and children and young people without an identified educational placement.

Bullying - guidance and leaflets

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/bullying/>

- **North Somerset Council Anti-bullying Strategy and Guidance to Schools 2006 - 2008**
- **Education Welfare Service Leaflet No. 5 - What can I do if my child is being bullied at school?**

Looked after children

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Children+Looked+After/>

- **Strategic Plan for North Somerset Council: Working Together for Children and Young People in Care**
- **Children in Care: Guidance for Raising Educational Achievement**

Education Family Support

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Education+Family+Support/>

Domestic Abuse - Guidelines for School Staff in North Somerset document and Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Early Years Staff.

These should be read in conjunction with our Domestic Abuse: A Guide to Supporting Preventative Work in North Somerset.

Home to school transport:

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Transport/>

Equalities: <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Equalities/>

Sensory support service: <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Sensory+Support+Service/>

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Education/Education+services+and+teams/Sensory+Support+Service/>

Appendix 3: Voluntary organisations, sources of information and Support Groups for Parents and Carers in North Somerset

Supportive Parents

Offers a monthly support group held alternately at Mendip Green School, Worle, Weston Super Mare on a Tuesday and at The Folk Hall, Portishead on a Thursday 7.30 - 9.30 p.m. and are run by the local co-ordinator, with parental supporters in attendance. Interested professionals are also welcome to attend.

For dates please see Supportive Parents' website

www.supportiveparents.org.uk

or phone 0117 9897725

ADHD Parents' support group: This group is open to any parents/carers of children with a diagnosis of ADHD and is run by the assistant psychologist and the clinical assistant in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health team every second Wednesday of the month in the Children's Services at Drove Road, Weston-super-Mare. For further info contact Amy Savile (Asst. Psychologist) or Claire McGinty (Clinic Asst.) on 01934 629660

ASBAH (Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus) www.asbah.org.uk
Contact Ann Gillard 01275 331407 or email anng@asbah.org

Black Carers' Project: This support group for black and ethnic carers (adult and young carers) is not funded for work in North Somerset but has a website which can be accessed at www.blackcarersproject.co.uk Contact Project Manager on 0117 914 4491/2

North Somerset Black & Minority Ethnic Forum: The Badger Centre, 3-6 Wadham Street, Weston Super Mare, BS23 1JY, Contact 01934 414455.
Website: <http://www.srec.org.uk>

Bristol & Avon Chinese Woman's group: St Agnes Church, Thomas Street, St Pauls Bristol BS2 9LL Tel no: 0117 9351462

CLIMB - Children Living with Inherited Metabolic Diseases: Provides family support and information helpline. Contact Kate Wall 01761 472380 or go to www.climb.org.uk
National tel no: 0800 6523181

Contact a Family

A national charity working across the UK to support families caring for children with any disability or special need.

National contact 0808 808 3555 www.cafamily.org.uk or email

helpline@cafamily.org.uk

North Somerset contact: Jan Seamer 01275 462550.

Crossroads: North Somerset Crossroads Carers Support Service
The Carers Centre, 1 Graham Road, Weston super Mare, BS23 1YA
Tel: 01934 411855 www.nscrossroads.org.uk
Crossroads publishes a newsletter, offers individual appointments for carers to talk about their needs and find out about services and support available. Free counselling, courses, outings and advocacy service.

Disability Information Services - DISS is a disability information service. It gives free, confidential and impartial information on anything to do with living with disabilities. Tel: 0808 808 5252

Downs Syndrome Association North Somerset

See 'The Firs' below under Social/leisure/support groups for details of DSA coffee mornings.

Downs Syndrome Support (BADSS Bristol Area)

A local charity for Parents and guardians of children with Downs Syndrome or their friends and family who would benefit from help and support from other Parents. Contact Andrew King on 0845 6422377 or www.badss.org.uk or e-mail info@badss.org.uk

Dyslexia: Support Group for adults and for parents of children with Dyslexia or Dyspraxia. Contact Sue Bond 01934 511557 or wdds@hotmail.co.uk

Dyslexia Centre: 10 Upper Belgrave Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 2XH (tel; 0117 973 9405).

Dyslexia Action: 2nd floor office suite, 14 Whiteladies Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 1PP (tel 0117 923 9166)

Dyspraxia Foundation (Bristol): This support group no longer meets. Parents can contact the national organisation on 01462 454986
www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Dyspraxia and Occupational Therapy: see entry for The Skills Club, below

Sensory Processing Support Group: For parents of children with Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Down's Syndrome runs 3rd Monday of every month from 7-9pm at Therapy Space, The Park Opportunity Centre, Daventry Rd, Knowle, Bristol BS4 1DQ . Contact Linda Plowden (OT) on 0117 9079189.

ERIC (Enuresis Resource and Information Centre) www.eric.org.uk

Family Information Service (Formerly Children's Information Service)
Provide a one-stop source of information for the benefit of children, young people and families, and those who work with them, within North Somerset.
Email: cis@n-somerset.gov.uk Telephone: 01934 426 300

Family Centre for Deaf Children: Cranleigh Unit, Frome House, Cranleigh Court Road, Yate, S. Glos. BS37 5DE
Tel. 01454 315404, Minicom. 01454 315405. www.fcdc.org.uk.

Gifted & Talented: Support group for families who have a child who is gifted/talented. Contact Helen Gilmore for details on 01934 414877

Headway: Headway House, Frenchay Hospital, Frenchay, Bristol BS16 1LE
Telephone 0117 975 3771. Provides information, support and services for people with head injuries, families and carers.

KHAAS: St Werburghs Community Centre, Horley Road, Bristol, BS2 9TJ
Information for Asian parents with children who have disabilities or special needs. Contact 0117 9554070

Look West: Support group for families with blind or visually impaired children.

Contact the RNIB, Stillhouse Lane, Bristol on 0117 9537750
www.rnib.org.uk/parents or contact Philippe Cazalis: 0117 9341704.

National Autistic Society - North Somerset Branch: Support groups are held at: Springboard, 2a Princes Road, Clevedon on the last Thursday in the month 10am - 12 noon during term time. Contact Liz Kelly for details on 01934 628287

NAS Lynx Centre: 14/15 Lynx Crescent, Weston super Mare, the second Wednesday of the month 7 - 9pm. Newsletter also produced. For further information call Liz Kelly (Branch Officer) on 01934 628287
The Lynx Centre also hosts a number of social clubs: The Internet Cafe - Weds, Walking Group - Sats, Lynx Fun Club, 8-13 yrs, - Sats, Activity Club, 16-25 yrs - Sats, for further information regarding these clubs please call 01934 412575 or email:- nikki.edwards@nas.org.uk

The NAS nationally also offers a Befriending scheme: contact 08450704004, or refer to www.autism.org.uk

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

For information on children and young people's services - www.n-somerset.gov.uk

SCOPE: Parent telephone support groups for parents/carers of pre-school children with cerebral palsy. Tel no: 0808 800 3333 www.scope.org.uk

SENSE, Avon: www.sense.org.uk (national)

Support group for children with single or dual sensory impairment Woodside Family Centre, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DG email: woodside@sense.org.uk.
For details of parent support groups contact Senior Family Support Worker 0117 9670008.

South West Children's Heart Circle: A charity that supports children with heart conditions and their families in the units where they receive care
www.heartcircle.org.uk 0870 1252307

Springboard Opportunity Group: run specialist, structured play sessions at our friendly and welcoming purpose-built centres in Clevedon and Weston super Mare and in partnership with the South Weston Children's Centre. Also offers Stay & Play sessions each week for families with very young children, who may need extra support and a first step to Springboard.

Tel: 01275 341113

Email: info@springboardweb.org.uk

[Springboard, 2a Princes Road, Clevedon, North Somerset BS21 7SZ](#)

Tourettes Syndrome Support: Support group for families with a child who has Tourette's Syndrome. For further details contact Carol Bale on 01275 472607 www.tourettes-disorder.com (national)

Social and Leisure Support Groups for Parents, Carers and their children

The Firs Resource Centre: Manages a range of out of school and daycare provision such as specialist playschemes in Weston and Portishead, a variety of outings throughout the year based on age, ability and friendship groups. The activities are generally available to children with additional needs/disabled children and the team support relevant programmes used by children and young people in our care regarding independent skills, behaviour management, toileting and personal care programmes. Planned trips are also tailored to a child's individual needs. Events include:

[Cubs & Beavers](#) - Thurs Beavers 6-7pm, Cubs 7.15-8.15pm

[Downs Syndrome Association Coffee Morning](#) - Last Tues of month 10am-12pm

[Parents' Coffee Morning](#) - Mondays 10am - 12pm (crèche included)

[Saturday Club](#) - Term time only 9.30am-12.30pm, (need to book).

Sing Up - Singing club for school years 4,5, and 6 - Mondays 4-5pm (need to book).

After school clubs for children 11 yrs +

- Locking/St Georges, Locking Methodist Church - Mondays
- The Barn, Clevedon - Tuesdays
- Nailsea Youth House - Tuesdays
- Weston Escape Club - Wednesdays 6.30 - 9.00pm
- Friday Fun Club, Portishead Youth Centre - 6.30-9.00pm

They also set up and manage Buddy support for Out of School clubs, youth activities and uniformed organisations as well benefiting from the help and support of 85 young

progress on to becoming paid Buddies.

For more information or to book places telephone The Firs: 01934 632 538.

89a Drove Road
Weston-Super-Mare
BS23 3NX

Kingsmour Playground Club – Kingston Seymour: This is a specialist playground for children/young people with additional needs.

Family Fun days are also held in July and August.

Charges: there is a one-off charge of £2.50 on application for membership to cover the cost of an access key. More information on the rules and conditions for using Kingsmour Playground Club are provided with the application form. These are available from: The Secretary, Yeo Valley Lions Club, c/o 3 Chescombe Court, Chescombe Road, Yatton, Bristol BS49 4JZ

National Autistic Society – North Somerset Branch: Support groups are held at: Springboard, 2a Princes Road, Clevedon on the last Thursday in the month 10am – 12 noon during term time. Contact Liz Kelly for details on 01934 628287

Out of School Club for children and young people with Asperger syndrome
The club meets in Nailsea on Tuesday evenings from 7:00pm – 9:00pm

NAS Lynx Centre 14/15 Lynx Crescent, Weston super Mare, the second Wednesday of the month 7 – 9pm. Newsletter also produced. For further information call Liz Kelly (Branch Officer) on 01934 628287

The Lynx Centre also hosts a number of social clubs: The Internet Cafe – Weds, Walking Group – Sats, Lynx Fun Club, 8-13 yrs, – Sats, Activity Club, 16-25 yrs – Sats, for further information regarding these clubs please call 01934 412575 or email:- nikki.edwards@nas.org.uk

The Skills Club – led by an Occupation Therapist: St. Paul’s Parish Office Walliscote Road, Weston, BS23 1EF

Skills Clubs provides a relaxing environment to learn and develop skills and offers children and families an opportunity to join others who have similar difficulties. Families who belong to the club are also invited to join us for outings, events and parties. Individual assessments are also available. Parents stay with children. 1st Saturday in every month – 10:00 – 12:30
Telephone: 01934 419 822

Summer Wonder North Special Needs Playscheme for Under 8's:

Held in Weston Super Mare and Nailsea, for more information contact: Gill Stokes

Email: gill.stokes@n-somerset.gov.uk or call 01934 632 538