



## READING PARENT PARTNERSHIP SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

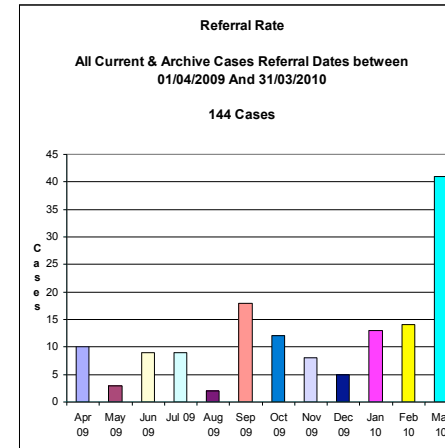
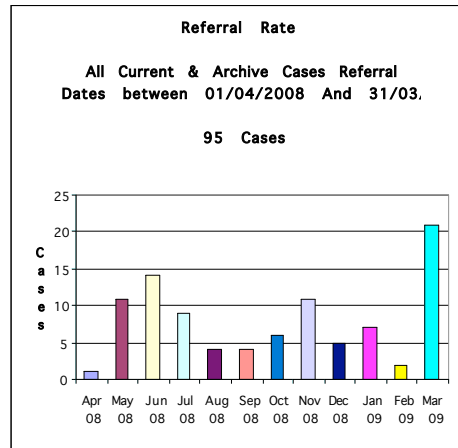
### Introduction

Parent Partnership is a statutory service which provides impartial advice and information to parents and carers of children with special educational needs. We aim to promote a culture of co-operation between parents, schools, the Local Authority and others so that children and young people with special educational needs are supported to enable them to maximise their potential. The service works within five key areas as identified within the Department for Children Schools and Families (now Department for Education) document '**Parent partnership services - increasing parental confidence**' these 5 areas are:

- Working with parents/carers
- Information and publicity
- Networking and collaboration
- Strategic influence on LA's SEN policy and practice.
- Training and advice.

From May 2002 until December 2009 the service was managed and delivered by Avril Verity and a small team of trained volunteers. In December last year, after negotiation with the Admission Team, it was agreed that Parent Partnership would take on part of the statutory Choice Advice service and the funding for this, £7000, plus savings made in the reduction in hours of the PPS coordinator, enabled the service to recruit Lesley Chamberlain to the post of Parent Partnership & Choice Adviser. The recruitment of an additional member of staff responds to a review of the service undertaken in December 2006 which highlighted the lack of career progression within the service and the potential problem of a statutory service not having any cover, for example through sick leave.

Lesley's post is 25 hours per week term time only and her time is divided between Parent Partnership work and supporting vulnerable parents through the secondary transfer process. The difficulties vulnerable parents experience often falls within the remit of Parent Partnership and as both services are required to demonstrate that they work at arms length to the authority and give impartial advice and information, for these reasons we feel the Choice Adviser role is well positioned. Since Lesley's appointment the numbers of parents using the service has increased.



By being part of national and regional networks, services are able to share good practice and this has enabled the Reading service to continually develop in line with national and local initiatives. We play an active part in the following groups:-

- National Parent Partnership Network
- SE/SC regional Parent Partnership Network
- Berkshire and Oxfordshire Parent Partnership Network
- Choice Advisers Support & Quality Assurance Network (CAS&QAN)
- Local Choice Advice network
- Reading LDD Strategy Group
- Transition Strategy Group
- Aiming High Delivery Group
- Reading Parents' Forum

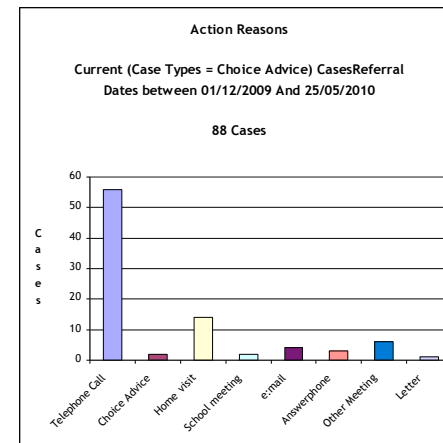
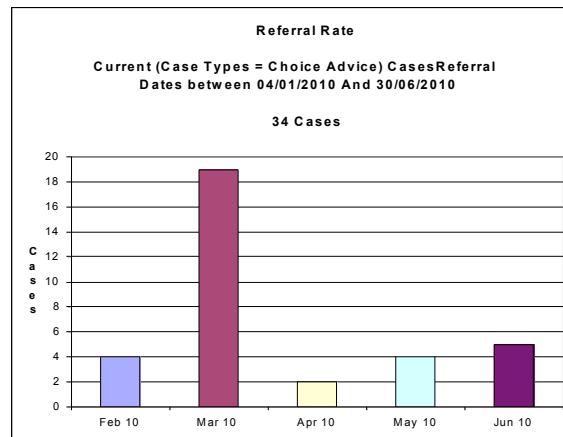
## Impact

Parent Partnership and the Choice Advice services' key aim is to ensure that parent/carers have the right information and support to enable them to contribute to decisions made about their child's education. We do this by providing information and by building relations between parents, schools and the local authority. Whilst it is difficult to prove that what we have done was key to any outcome, we know from evaluations sent out to parents that:-

- they felt the service listened to their concerns
- the information given was easy to understand and helped them feel better informed
- the support given improved relationships with professionals
- information and support given was impartial

The service aims to enable parents to make informed decisions about their children's education. The majority of the support the service provides is given to parents over the telephone or by sending out information by e:mail or letter(71%). We also give talks to groups of parents, thus reaching out to more parents than we have recorded on the database.

Telephone support needs to be given sensitively and parents need to feel confident that the service is confidential and they are being given independent advice. Evaluations show that parents feel it is sometimes the first time that their views are being heard and their first call, in particular, can be quite time consuming. Other service activities include support at school and local authority meetings (12%) and home visits (12%). The following charts show how the Choice Adviser's time has been spent on advising parents around secondary transfer.



## Every Child Matters - Impact of Parent Partnership

The 5 outcomes of Every Child Matters are universal ambitions for every child and young person, whatever their background or circumstances. Improving outcomes for all children and young people underpins all the development and work within Children's Trusts. Under the 5 headings of the ECM agenda this is how PPS has helped to improve outcomes for children:-

### Be healthy

- Parents from the Forum have been involved in the Dingley and Occupational Therapy reviews
- Parents are informed about the service by CAMHs, SOCOM, Paediatricians and Children's Action Teams
- Mediation is encouraged whenever appropriate in order to reduce conflict and the stress of tribunals.

PPS Involvement	OUTCOME (FOR CHILDREN)
Individual and groups of parents are supported by being given relevant information and appropriate signposting to meet their child's medical needs.	Giving parents information and advice ensures that services available to their children are made known to them. Reading children have benefited from resources available through the charity Cerebra which works to promote, protect and improve early neurological health and well being
PPS has been actively involved in the Aiming High for Disabled Children, Short Breaks initiative. The service has helped organise high profile events publicising this to parents.*	PPS has worked with Reading Sport & Culture through Aiming High for disabled children, which has enabled children to access activities within the borough, encouraging physical activity and promoting healthy lifestyles.
PPS supports parents in a variety of ways when needing to discuss their child's education. By giving them information and helping them to prepare for meetings helps them to feel empowered and reduces stress.	Well planned meetings lead to measurable action plans for children and young people.

\*see under achievements

## Stay safe

The service provides:-

- Support for parents of children with SEN being bullied in school
- Support around secondary school transfer for vulnerable groups.
- Support for secondary school appeals where parental choice of school has been influenced by the desire to safeguard their child's vulnerabilities
- Support for parents of children with SEN who have been excluded from school

PPS Involvement	OUTCOME (for children)
Children with learning difficulty and or disability are twice as likely to be bullied at school. Some parents find this a particularly difficult issue to deal with and will contact the service when they feel that schools do not listen to their concerns.	A consultant was commissioned by the LA to review bullying in schools and PPS was asked to seek parental views on this issue. Revised guidance has now been put in place reflecting both parents' and children's views.
Secondary transfer is a stressful time for parents, particularly those with additional needs. Lesley, the Choice Adviser, offers advice over the phone to any parent who makes contact. For vulnerable parents and those who have children with SEN she provides 1:1 support and helps them with appeals.	When children are not placed in their local school, issues around safety are often high on the parents' minds. Of the 5 appeal cases Lesley has been actively involved in, 4 have found in the parents favour thus allowing the child to attend the school of first choice.
The service provides support, advice and information to parents of excluded children. Last year PPS supported parents before and during appeals to <i>Governors' Disciplinary panels.</i>	The service has been instrumental in one pupil being reinstated before the <i>Governors Disciplinary Panel</i> met and another pupil having their exclusion rescinded.

## Enjoying and Achieving

- Parents are supported at a variety of school and local authority meetings including Annual Reviews of Statements. Informed parents feel better able to ensure their child receives the best support available so they can enjoy school and maximise their potential
- Service leaflets are offered in different languages to parents where English is their second language.
- The service promotes Short Breaks through the Aiming High initiative
- Schools, Children Centres and Community organisations are made fully aware of the role of Parent Partnership Service.

PPS Involvement	OUTCOME (For children)
Parents are supported to complete documentation relating to their child's special educational needs. Some parents have been supported in expressing their views in their preferred first language through collaborative work with Alafia.	Parental views help to inform decision making regarding appropriate provision for their child. Some parents feel more empowered when they are given the chance to speak in their first language.
Through the Reading Parent Forum, parents were able to influence how Aiming High Short Breaks funding was spent to improve services for their children.	Increased opportunities for children with LDD through the Youth Service, Family Link; Children's Opportunity Group; Reading Culture & Sport; Berkshire Autistic Society; Reading Autistic Families Together
Parents hear about Parent Partnership from a wide range of sources:- Family Resource UK, CATs, Sensory Consortium, paediatricians, SEN section & the EP service, schools, voluntary and community organisations.	Referrals from a wide range of services helps parents to understand the support that may be available for their child.

### **Make a positive contribution:**

- Parents are supported and encouraged to express their own and their child's views in decision-making processes at Annual Review and during the Statutory Assessment process.
- Parents' views influenced LDD Strategy and Aiming High events.

<b>PPS Involvement</b>	<b>OUTCOME (for children)</b>
Parents are given clear information and advice around statutory procedures and the requirements of the SEN Code of Practice	Parents feel confident and empowered to ensure that available, appropriate provision meets their child's needs.
Through the Forum, increasing numbers of parents are involved in strategic development.	Users of services have more influence over policy and practice, thus ensuring that resources reflect need.
Through the Forum, parents' views were taken into account when the LDD Strategy was written	The strategy has 7 priorities for children & young people with LDD, 5 of which were identified by parents. Training of all staff working with children with LDD was parents' top priority which is now reflected in this strategy

### **Achieve Economic Well-Being**

- Parents are given information regarding post 16 opportunities
- Transition Reviews are attended with parents

<b>PPS Involvement</b>	<b>OUTCOMES (FOR CHILDREN)</b>
PPS, together with AHDC steering group, organised an Education event at the Town Hall that focused on transition at all stages of a young person's education career.	Parents were given the opportunity to talk to key professionals about transition through the different stages of their child's education.
Parents are supported at transition reviews	Young people are given the opportunity to consider options available to them.

## PRIORITIES FOR 2010/11

PPS Aims	Desired Outcomes
"Effective Communication with Professionals" - training course designed by Oxfordshire & Kent from the Southern Parent Partnership network, to be delivered	Training will enable participants to engage effectively with professionals and encourage more parents to be involved in strategic development.
Parental involvement in monitoring and feeding back on the Aiming High Short breaks initiative	Continued improvement of inclusive local services and greater opportunity of access to mainstream activities for all children
Choice Advice Service to continue to be developed and signposted by the authority, schools and other local organisations	Vulnerable parents and professionals know who to contact and can access the help that is needed.
The Forum to continue to meet and be involved in consultations.	Policy decisions will continue to be influenced by parental involvement thus ensuring services meet the needs of users.

## Achievements in 2009/10

The Government sets out expectations of good practice in the provision of Parent Partnership and all services are encouraged to complete an annual benchmarking exercise, now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year. For this and the past 2 years these activities have been measured against the Government's exemplars and I am pleased to say that the service now meets at least good or best practice in all areas. However, whilst the service continues to be sited in an open plan environment, it is unlikely that the service will meet best practice in the aspect of confidentiality. (see appendix - *to follow*)

The document is signed off by Melani Oliver, Head of Service, on behalf of the authority.

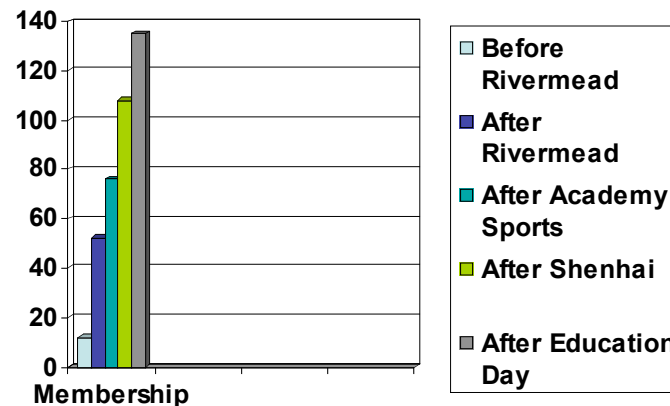
## Aiming High – Parent Participation

Conservative - Liberal Democrat Government has come together with a driving ambition -to put more power and opportunity into people's hands. In the cabinet paper "Building the Big Society" it states - "*Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all.*"

The 'Every Child Matters' agenda places parents and families at the heart of its reforms to ensure that outcomes for children improves. This together with the Government's Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) initiative, launched in May 2007, is going some way to ensure that parents views are influencing local policy and practice.

Together with Berkshire Autistic Society, the service was successful in its bid for the AHDC Parent Participation funding. This was £3000 for 2009 and £10,000 for the last and current financial year. With this funding we have been able to working closely with parents and the voluntary sector to encourage parent participation. Berkshire Autistic Society agreed to act as treasurers for the budget and a Steering Group was formed from parents and other stakeholders.

Two high profile events held at Rivermead and Madjeski Sport in March and October 2009 followed by a well attended BME event in March 2010 jointly organised by Alafia, the Parents Forum, the Family Information Service and Berkshire Autistic Society, resulted in growing numbers of parents joining the Reading Parent Forum. In response to parental request, we also ran an Education day at the Town Hall which focused on the different transition stages of a young person's education career and included a joint PPS/Choice Advice workshops.



To ensure the forum continues after the AHDC funding has ceased, with parents' permission we transferred the database to Family Resource UK and Joanna Thomas-Wright, the LDD Development Officer has amalgamated this with the Family Resource database which now totals 442 parents.

The Parent Partnership and Aiming High Participation steering groups have now amalgamated to form a newly created management group which has broad representation from stakeholders and an independent chair.

Parents have influenced the LDD, Short Break and bullying strategies in Reading and have had opportunities to meet with service providers, including the PCT, through forum meetings and the events mentioned above.

Parents through the forum identified lack of support post ASD diagnosis and Berkshire Autistic Society has successfully bid for a grant that has funded a sessional worker to provide this kind of support. Ruth Pearse, the Forum facilitator, has also bid for some money to set up a similar scheme for parents whose children have a range of disability.

### **Raising the Profile of the Service and collaborative work with voluntary organisations.**

Staff attend parenting groups, eg Time Out for Special Needs and the ASD support group. Regular meetings are held with the LDD Information Officer at Family Resource UK. We maintain close liaison with key local voluntary groups such as Berkshire Autistic Society, Reading Dyspraxia Association, the Dyslexia Association and Reading Mencap to ensure the service is known to a wide group of parents.

### **National Parent Partnership and South East/South Central Networks**

The PPO is part of a regional and national group which feeds back to the Department for Education. The regional group recently responded collectively to the Lamb Inquiry which scrutinised parental confidence in SEN provision. All PP services, alongside the Children's Workforce Development Council, have been involved in producing a Functional Map for Parent Partnership services.

### **Publications:**

The service liaises with colleagues to provide information leaflets in a range of different languages. The website has been updated this year to ensure compliance with minimum standards and provides links to other local and national organizations. The PPS leaflet has

been updated and a Choice Advice leaflet and poster were produced in collaboration with the Admissions team and will be posted out with the secondary admissions pack in September. All parents will receive a copy of the leaflet and schools will be sent a copy of the poster.

**Policies:** The service has the following policies published on the website:

Confidentiality and Impartiality policies

**Database:** The service continues to use a customized database that helps with data management and the annual benchmarking exercise.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **Main issues concerning parents in 2009/10**

- Some schools do not make the Parent Partnership Service known to parents
- Parents continue to be concerned about the lack of knowledge and training of school staff around disability
- There are growing concerns about the lack of special school places and uncertainty about schools becoming Academies
- Some parents still feel that professionals do not see them as equal partners
- Parents are concerned about the lack of secondary speech and language provision in Reading
- Parents have expressed concern about the delays in referrals to other agencies, in particular OT and CAMHS
- Parents feel that cross border policy differences are confusing and can sometimes disadvantage their children. (eg Reading LA can offer Reading Schools 5 hpw of medical support, this is not available in neighbouring authorities' schools; differing levels of delegated funding; differing services offered to Reading children in out of authority schools)

### **Possible Implications for Future Practice**

- More PPS involvement in school staff training
- "Effective Communication with Professionals" to be offered to professionals as well as parents.
- Reading Parent Forum to continue to influence local policy and practice
- Opportunities for Parent Forum to meet with commissioners of services
- Parents need to be provided with opportunities to gain a better understanding of decision making processes within the authority and to believe decisions are mainly needs led, not resource driven.

## Potential risks

The Choice Adviser is able to support parents around secondary transfer and it has been very well received, particularly by the most vulnerable parents in the locality. Despite this being a statutory service, the original funding from the Government will no longer be available after April 2011. Feedback from parents is very positive and we hope that in future years, the service will be able to be funded from the authority's core budget.

Over a number of years the DfE has commissioned many reports regarding the impact of positive parental involvement to help raise standards in schools and improve outcomes for children. The authority values parental involvement to ensure that services are designed to meet the needs of the local community. The Aiming High Participation Funding will cease in April 2011, so it will be important to ensure that the Reading Parent Forum is able to continue to provide a robust mechanism for gaining parents' feedback.

Budget constraints may lead to lack of opportunity to develop the service. As all local authorities will need to make significant savings across services, it may now be an opportunity to look at working more collaboratively with other Berkshire Parent Partnership services.

## Glossary of Terms

AHDC	Aiming High for Disabled Children
CAMHS	Children & Adolescence Mental Health Service
CAT	Children's Action Team
DfE	Department for Education
ECM	Every Child Matters
EP	Educational Psychologist
LDD	Learning Difficulty & Disability
PPO	Parent Partnership Officer
PPS	Parent Partnership Service
SEN	Special Educational Need
SOCOM	Social & Communication Clinic