



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 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 2009, 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 was initially 25 hours per week term time only and her time was 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, we felt that the Choice Adviser role would sit well within PPS. On the 30th June 2011 the Parent Partnership Coordinator retired and from 1st July for an interim period Lesley has been seconded to the post on a term time only basis. The Parent Partnership & Choice Adviser role has been advertised on a temporary basis to the end of March 2012 so that further consideration can be given to the structure of Parent Partnership in Spring 2012. An appointment has been made, subject to receipt of a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau check and the successful applicant will start in September.

Despite significant cuts in all Government departments, the DfE are continuing to fund the National Parent Partnership Network (NPPN) at least until September 2011. The network provides opportunity for services to share good practice and identify training needs. In response to the Lamb Inquiry, which stated that some services were unclear about the difference between local authority policy and the law, the NPPN arranged for all Parent Partnership services to have access to on-line legal training with a follow up of a 2 day training course delivered by IPSEA (Independent Panel for Special Education Advice). The pass mark for the training was 75% and both Reading members of staff and one of our volunteers passed at the first attempt. The on-line training is still available but currently there is no funding for the 2 day training course.

The Lamb Inquiry also identified that many parents were not aware of Parent Partnership services. This resulted in the Government granting £132 to each service in order to raise the profile in each area. As there was limited opportunity to re-launch individual services with such a small budget, the local network of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (BOB) decided to pool their funding to create a local area Parent Partnership website which we have called "Ask Bob about SEN" This is a simple website which aims to give basic information and to direct parents to their local service. With the uncertain future of NPPN, we felt it was important to offer alternative ways for parents to find out about the 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

- Local Choice Advice network
- Reading LDD Strategy Group
- RBC Transition Strategy Group
- DECS Equality and Diversity Group
- Reading Families' 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 and verbal feedback 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, particularly in schools
- information and support given was impartial

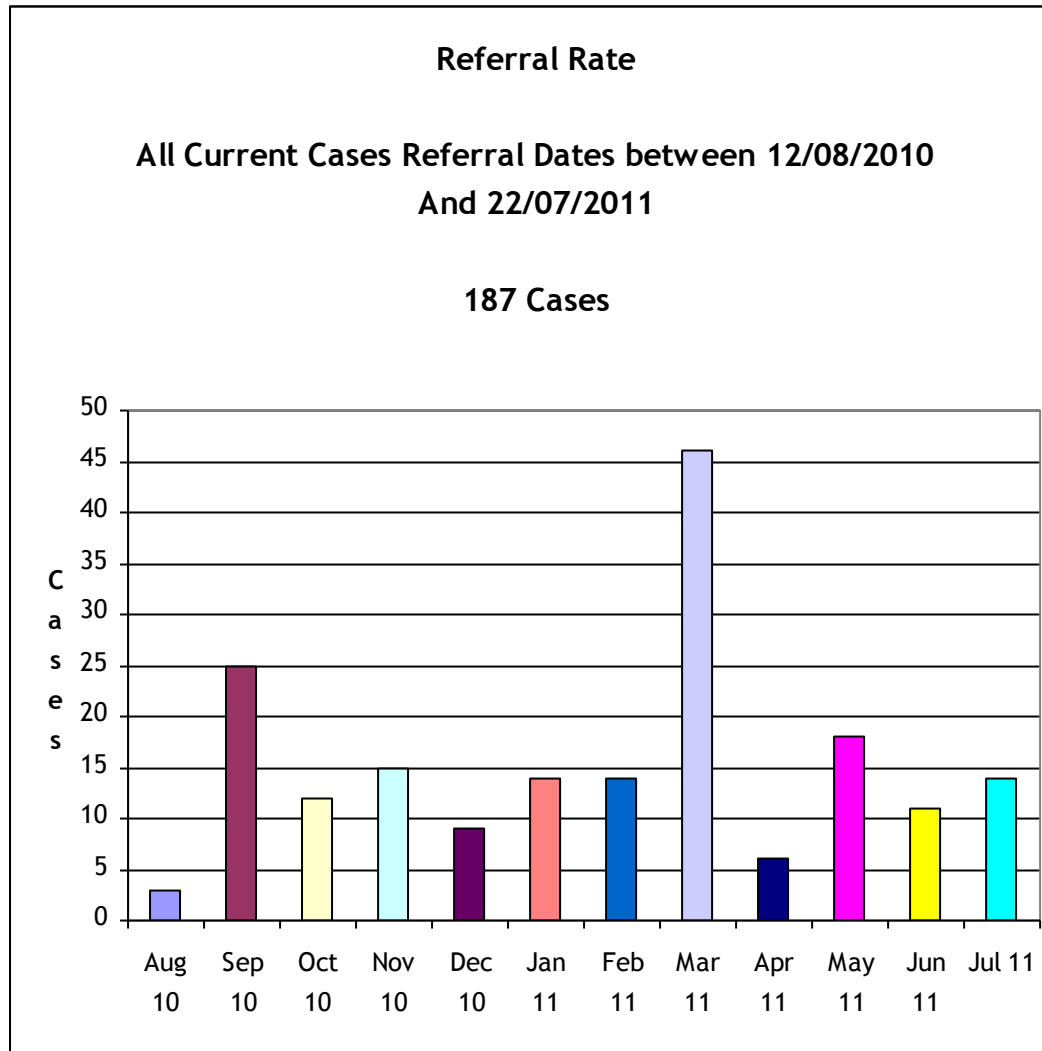
The fact that we are approached by schools, the voluntary sector and family workers to support parents shows that the Parent Partnership Service is valued by other professionals working in the community.

In the case of Choice Advice, by working collaboratively with the School Admissions team, it has been possible to support those parents who have been unable to submit a secondary transfer form. Many of these parents need one to one appointments so that the process can be explained to them and the forms filled in with them. The impact of this work is that those parents have had a chance to express their preferences and their children will be allocated a place by the Admissions team.

The more vulnerable families find the school appeal process daunting and impossible to navigate and literacy/language difficulties prove to be a significant barrier. Such parents may have strong grounds for appeal, but they do not always realise what is relevant. Regardless of the strength of their grounds, these parents need equality of opportunity in bringing their case, so that they can feel that they have done everything that they can for their children. By providing vulnerable families with the maximum level of support, they have the best chance of a successful outcome to their appeal.

New referrals

The graph below shows the number of new cases opened over the past year. This highlights the peaks in demand during September and March, reflecting the extremely high levels of Choice Advice enquiries at this time. It should be noted that these are new cases only and the service has several hundred cases on the database. Often parents return to the service on and off over a number of years as the needs of their children change and particularly at times of transition.



The Children's Trust Plan

The Children's Trust Plan has the following vision and priorities:

Our vision

We will create a positive and ambitious environment for Reading children and young people

So that they are

- Happy, healthy, safe and coping with change and challenge
- Enthusiastic and skilled learners
- Value themselves and others

Our priorities

Keeping children safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect and look after children and young people that need our care• Reduce domestic abuse and substance misuse and support families with these issues
Intervening early	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with families in greatest need as early as possible to build emotional well-being and improved health• Help young people to have high aspirations and be healthy, active citizens, making positive life choices
Learning to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure every child and young person has a fair chance of achieving, whatever their ethnicity, disability or family income• Help young people to improve their employment prospects• Help families from poverty realise their ambitions for their children and themselves

How the Parent Partnership Service helps to improve outcomes for children

Improving outcomes for all children and young people underpins all the development and work within Children's Trust. Under the Trust's priorities this is how PPS has helped to improve outcomes for children:-

Keeping children safe

The service provides:-

- Support for parents of children 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
<p>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.</p>	<p>PPS ensures that parents are aware that schools have policies on behaviour, equality and bullying. By offering advice, information and support we ensure their views and the child's views are heard and encourage follow up meetings to ensure that difficult situations are monitored.</p>
<p>Secondary transfer is a stressful time for parents, particularly those with additional needs. The Choice Advice Service offers advice over the phone and by email to any parent who makes contact. For vulnerable parents more intensive 1:1 support is offered, if necessary speaking on their behalf in school admission appeals.</p>	<p>When children are not placed in their local school, issues around safety are often high on the parents' minds. This may include issues to do with travel and peer groups. Particular issues can arise when a child has been out of school for some time and has a pressing need to attend a particular school. Parents need intensive support around the application/appeal process to ensure that their children can receive the full education that they are entitled to.</p>
<p>The service provides support, advice and information to parents of excluded children with SEN. PPS continues to support parents before and during appeals to Governors' Disciplinary panels and to independent appeal panels.</p>	<p>Parents and children are made aware of their rights and responsibilities in respect of exclusions. Information empowers parents to ensure that schools and the local authority act promptly when a child is excluded.</p>

Early Intervention

- PPS gives talks to parents whose children have been newly diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum
- We work closely with the Pre-School Support Teachers
- The Manager of the Dingley Family & Specialist Early Year's Centre is on the Management group

PPS Involvement	Outcome for children
PPS gives talks to groups of parents whose children have recently had a diagnosis of ASD and to Alafia, who support BME families whose children have Learning Difficulty and Disability	Giving parents information and advice ensures that services available to their children are made known to them, including services and opportunities provided by the voluntary sector.
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 through Family Resource UK.	The work undertaken has raised the profile of activities for children and young people and has signposted parents and carers to a variety of services that may be available to them.
PPS supports parents of children with SEN from 0-19, in a variety of ways when needing to discuss their child's education. Giving them information and helping them to prepare for meetings helps them to feel empowered and reduces stress.	We offer support to parents to empower them to play a full and active part in planning their child's education, to work with a range of professionals to ensure that the action plans that are set are achievable and have measurable outcomes.

Learning to Work

- Parents are supported at a variety of school and local authority meetings to discuss their child's education, 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
- With the Reading Families Forum we hold events to raise the profile of opportunities for children and young people

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. We ensure the pupil's views are also heard
Working closely with Reading Families' Forum and the voluntary sector using Participation Funding, we have organised a "Life after School" event	High profile event involving a range of service providers to promote opportunities for young people after leaving school. 3 groups of young people presented to delegates, different ways to conduct a Transition Review.
Parents are offered support 1:1 at Transition Annual Reviews	We ensure parents have a good understanding of the purpose of the Transition Plan (Section 139a Learning and Skills Act 2000)

Participation

- 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.
- We now have over 550 parents and carers on the The Reading Families Forum database.
- 14 parents have attended the Parents Participating Confidently course

PPS Involvement	Outcome
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.
PPS Staff have delivered 3 Parents Participating Confidently courses	Parental evaluation confirms that they found the course helpful and would give them more confidence in expressing their views. Three parents now sit on strategic groups

Parent Partnership Service Achievements in 2010/11

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 7th year. For this and the past 3 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 with the exception of "confidentiality". The service continues to be sited in an open plan environment which makes it difficult to guarantee that confidential conversations are not overheard.

Last year the benchmarking document was approved by the Parent Partnership Management Group. This year there has been a delay in the issue of the formal documentation by the National Parent Partnership Network, so at time of writing the

formalities of the benchmarking process have not yet been completed. It is hoped that the documentation will be issued by the National Parent Partnership Network in the next few weeks.

Aiming High – Parent Participation

The Coalition Government has 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 Government's Green paper on SEN provision place parents and families at the heart of its proposals to ensure that outcomes improve for children with additional needs. 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.

The Government Grant of £10,000 for Parent Participation continues to be funded. For the past 3 years we have worked closely with parents and the voluntary sector to encourage parent participation. Berkshire Autistic Society act as treasurers for the budget and Reading Families Forum Steering Group has been formed from parents and other stakeholders.

Following the initial Aiming High for Disabled Children consultation with parents, parent/carers identified the need for a one stop shop and in response to this, Reading Families Forum has been able to organize Family Information and Fun Days. At these events, we provide activities for children and young people and invited service providers to disseminate information to families. Evaluations have been very positive and the Family Forum now has over 500 forum members.

The events that the Reading Families Forum has organised have been well received and have given parent/carers information on a range of issues and activities/opportunities for children and young people. In the past academic year we have been able to hold another Family Information and Fun Day at the Academy Leisure Centre, fund a BME event on "transition", a conference and information day on transition to adult services held at the Avenue Centre, two opportunities for parents to raise questions to the PCT Commissioner about reviews of services and a Town Hall event specifically with siblings in mind.

Reading Families Forum now has its own management group which has strong parent representation and from local voluntary groups.

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

Staff attend and speak at 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 PPS is part of a regional and national group which feeds back to the Department for Education. The regional group recently responded collectively to the SEN Green paper consultation. There is also participation in a local Choice Advice network.

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 was produced in collaboration with the Admissions team and will be posted out with the secondary admissions pack in September.

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.

Main issues concerning parents in 2010/11 and possible implications for future practice

- Some schools do not make the Parent Partnership Service known to parents
More PPS involvement in school staff training e.g. speaking at SENCo conference
- Parents continue to be concerned about the lack of knowledge and training of school staff around disability
Encouraging communication between schools and parents to allow the sharing of knowledge and experience and ensuring that parents are aware of the most appropriate avenues to raise their concerns
- There are growing concerns about the lack of special school places
Working with the Reading Families Forum to enable parents to continue to influence policy and practice and to understand the decision making processes within the authority
- Some parents feel concerned about schools becoming Academies in the areas of school admission and support for children with SEN
Choice Advice can support families both in their choice of schools and appealing for Academies and PPS will work with Academies and parents to ensure that children receive appropriate support
- Some parents still feel that professionals do not see them as equal partners
Parents benefit from PPS training and advice to give them a way of making their voice heard when dealing with professionals
- Parents have expressed concern about the delays in referrals to other agencies, in particular OT and CAMHS
Parents can be supported and given confidence to press for earliest possible referrals
- Parents can feel confused about who to contact and how to access services when their child attends a school outside Reading
PPS can help to clarify this for parents and support parents at school meetings in other local authority areas

PRIORITIES FOR 2011/12

PPS Aims	Desired Outcomes
"Effective Communication with Professionals" - training course designed by Oxfordshire & Kent from the Southern Parent Partnership network to continue to be delivered, with consideration being given to the creation of a shortened version.	Training will enable participants to engage effectively with professionals and encourage more parents to be involved in strategic development. A shorter version would require less resources to deliver and might attract a wider range of parents
Finding a suitable office location for the service	PPS to be fully compliant with all exemplars
Supporting 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.
Maintaining and developing relationships initially forged by Avril Verity with professionals and voluntary groups.	Parents continue to receive the benefit of the close understanding between the PPS and these other agencies and PPS can work with professionals and voluntary groups for mutual benefit.
Training and supporting the new member of staff	Parent Partnership and Choice Adviser to be able to participate fully in the work of the service as soon as possible.