



## 1.8 Working with families

*“Where a pupil is receiving SEN Support, schools should talk to parents regularly to set clear outcomes and review progress towards them, discuss the activities and support that will help achieve them, and identify the responsibilities of the parent, the pupil and the school. Schools should meet parents at least three times each year.”*

- SEND Code of Practice, section 6.65

*“What makes the biggest difference is having a shared language and a shared understanding of what we are aiming for”*

- South Glos parent

Parents/carers are the most important people in their child’s life. A family centred approach for learners of all ages places the child or young person and the family at the heart of the SEND process. It relies on parents/carers and children/ young people with SEND being actively involved in the decisions that affect them. Involvement of and support for parents/carers should ensure that the most appropriate services are in place and that parents/carers have a say (co-production) in the planning of the services that they and their children need.

Parents and carers have told us that the following makes the biggest difference to them and their child:

- ✓ One point of contact in a school or setting that co-ordinates other professionals
- ✓ Clear communication
- ✓ Regular feedback on what is working
- ✓ Parents and carers included in any plans or progress discussions about their child
- ✓ Emails acknowledged within an agreed timescale
- ✓ Clear contact details for the school SENCo
- ✓ Meetings held each term (at least 3 times a year)
- ✓ Knowing that teachers and support staff really understand my child’s needs and communicate daily with me through a communication book

## The South Glos Way: A SEND and inclusion toolkit for South Gloucestershire education settings and professionals

- ✓ Meeting with my child's teacher every half term to review the SMART targets that we set together so we know what impact the support is having
- ✓ Being asked how best to communicate with me
- ✓ Sharing information about how my child is doing and the progress they are making

There is much good practice in schools and settings in South Gloucestershire and through the South Glos Way there is a renewed commitment from leaders to further engage with parents/carers of CYP with SEND. The SEND Code of Practice recognises that parents and carers know their children best of all. Parents tell us that when schools and settings take time to get to know their parents/carers well, value their expertise as individuals and see them as central to the decision making process for their child it results in increased confidence in the system. A commitment to working with parents and carers should be led by the school or setting's leadership team and reflected in the school's ethos and vision, with all staff signed up to these.

We also know and research evidences, that parents are an important support to children's learning in their educational settings. By working together parents and practitioners can make a significant and positive impact on children's learning and development.

## What must the Local Authority do?

They must ensure that:

- CYP and their parents/carers are involved in discussion and decisions about their individual support and about local provision
- Ensure parents/carers are fully involved in the EHC process from the start and are enabled to participate and co-produce the outcomes together
- Consult with parents/carers and CYP when reviewing local SEND and social care provision
- Provide advice and information in relation to SEND and involve them in developing and reviewing their local offer
- Provide a support service to parents/carers ([Supportive Parents Information, Advice and Support](#))

## What should schools and settings do?

- Schools are required to provide an annual report for parents/carers on their child's progress. Many schools already go beyond this and provide regular reports for parents/carers on how their child is progressing
- Where a learner is receiving SEN support, schools should talk to parents/carers regularly to set clear outcomes and review progress towards them, discuss the

## The South Glos Way: A SEND and inclusion toolkit for South Gloucestershire education settings and professionals

learning activities and support that will help achieve them, and identify the responsibilities of the parent/carer, the learner and the school.

- Schools should meet parents/carers at least three times each year. These discussions can build confidence in everyone in the actions being taken by the school, and they can also strengthen the impact of SEN support by increasing parental engagement in the approaches and teaching strategies that are being used. On-going discussion with parents/carers can provide essential information on the impact of SEN support outside school and any changes in the learner's needs.
- A professional, with good knowledge and understanding of the learner, and who is aware of their needs and attainment, should lead these discussions. This will usually be the class teacher or form tutor and supported by the SENCO where needed. It should provide an opportunity for the parent/carer and CYP together with the teacher to agree next steps within a timescale agreed by all.
- Conducting these discussions effectively involves a considerable amount of skill. As with other aspects of good teaching for learners with SEND, schools should ensure that teaching staff are supported to manage and lead these conversations as part of their professional development. These discussions will need to allow sufficient time to explore the parents/carers' views and meetings should, wherever possible, be aligned with the normal cycle of discussions with parents/carers of all learners. They will, however, be longer than most parent-teacher meetings and time should be made for this.
- The views of the learner should be included in these discussions either by involving the learner in all or part of the discussion itself or gathering their views as part of the preparation.
- A record of the outcomes, action and support agreed through the discussion should be kept and shared with all the appropriate school staff. This record should be given to the learner's parents/carers. The school's management information system should be updated as appropriate with a record of the meeting

To support teachers in working collaboratively with parents/carers, the National Strategies' Achievement for All (DCFS, 2009) project developed **Structured Conversations** an approach that allows for a staged dialogue comprising of a number of strategic steps.

The four-stage process is designed to:

- **Explore** – during this phase of the conversation the aim is to gain a clear understanding of the parents'/carers' perspectives. The listener is encouraged to actively listen and check their understanding is accurate through the use of paraphrasing.
- **Focus** – during this phase of the conversation the aim is to work collaboratively with the parents/carers to identify priorities and clarify the key issues.

## The South Glos Way: A SEND and inclusion toolkit for South Gloucestershire education settings and professionals

- **Plan** – during this phase of the conversation the aim is to agree targets, define the desired outcomes and develop an action plan.
- **Review** – during this phase of the conversation the aim is to summarise the meeting and clarify the next steps and further communications.

More information can be found in [Department for Children, Families and Schools \(DCFS\) \(2009\) Achievement for All: The structured conversation handbook to support training, London: DCFS \(01056-2009BKT- EN\)](#)

To further develop ways of working with families, schools and setting could:

- Audit the ways in which the school/setting school engages with parents. Prioritise areas for development and regularly review progress
- Include 'parental engagement' as a regular agenda item at meetings
- Co-produce with families the school's SEN Information Report
- Audit the reception area of school. Does it reflect the importance you place on parental engagement?
- As part of the school's accessibility strategy audit how you communicate with families:
  - o engagement of CYP and parents in co-production of plans
  - o accessibility of school and settings websites
  - o accessibility of information to CYP and their parents
  - o arrangements for meetings with parents and families.
  - o engagement of parents/carers who do not attend parent/carers/evenings and meetings
  - o information, advice and support available for parents and carers to enable them to participate fully

## Further Links

[The South Glos Parent Carer Forum](#)

[Supportive Parents](#)

[Education Endowment Foundation – Parental Engagement](#)