

Parent carer feedback on the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment process and the Annual Review process for an existing Education, Health and Care Plan

November 2023 – March 2024

In March 2024 we published a report with findings from surveys which were undertaken as part of Worcestershire Children First's Quality Assurance programme of the processes related to Education, Health and Care Plans, during the period November 2022 to October 2023.

As part of our ongoing improvement work, we committed to publishing a 'You said, We did' style report bi-annually, so families can see that they have been listened to and changes have been made as a result. This report is for the period November 2023 to March 2024, which is five months only, but will bring future reports in-line with the financial year.

In the period November 2023 to March 2024 we had feedback from **98** parent carers, following either the issuing of a new Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or following the annual review of an existing one. All 98 were randomly selected and contacted by phone for their feedback, the questionnaires are designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data.

This report is specifically about the qualitative data which could be found in the responses to the questionnaires. We have analysed the comments made by all the parent carers and then grouped them together under themes. As a result we have implemented changes to processes, where appropriate, and have shared the report with colleagues so they are aware of the difficulties and concerns parent/carers have experienced and can try to ensure they are not repeated.

What are Parent Carers telling us and what are we doing about it?

Overall the experience families reported was a positive one, with very high levels of satisfaction following both a new EHCP and an annual review. Only 7% of families rated the process of either the annual reviews or assessment as poor practice, with 72% rating it as good and 21% as acceptable. One parent carer said after the EHCNA process: 'This experience has been much better than the previous experience I had with an older child, the whole process went much quicker, it's been a doddle and perfect to be honest'.

When asked to comment about either process, we have taken the comments where things have not gone so well and grouped them into themes, starting with the issues which were raised most often at the top. The comments (followed by our response) can be seen below in dark blue, including the number of parents making those comments.

In this period parents were most likely to comment about difficulties with the process itself, ease of contacting their Casework Officer or the education setting for their child or young person.

Comments about the process

Eight parent/carers said they found the whole process (EHCNA) difficult and long-winded. Some would have liked to have someone to guide them through the process.

and

Two parent/carers felt overwhelmed or that they weren't qualified to select or name a suitable provision for their young person – they would like more support and help with this and said that it is difficult to know what the different options are.

Parents and carers can contact [SENDIASS](#) who can offer information, advice and support during the assessment and AR process. Parent/carers can also contact them to seek further advice or ask for what websites they can use to support their decision making.

We publish EHCNA timescales on the SEND Local Offer: [EHCP – Education, Health and Care plans](#) and information about [Applying for and choosing a school](#).

Four parent/carers said they found the portal difficult to use and frustrating.

We are aware of the difficulties experienced by some users of the portal. We are listening to parent/carers and are working with our technical colleagues to see how we can develop and improve it. We have produced a guide to using the portal which can be found on the SEND Local Offer: [EHCP – Education, Health and Care plans](#). Parents also have the option of submitting an EHCNA request via email or post.

Four families said they didn't feel listened to or involved during either the Annual Review (AR) or Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) processes.

The local authority continues to work closely with schools and SENCOs to make them aware of the statutory timelines around annual reviews and the requirement to ensure that children, young people and parents views are included within any process that takes place. In SEND Services we actively seek to involve parent/carers during the Assessment process, asking for their views and opinions.

Two families said they would prefer to have a paper copy of their EHCP and anything sent by post, rather than electronic copies sent via email. One parent carer had requested a paper copy but hadn't received one.

We apologise for this oversight, SEND Services ask parent/carers what their preferred method of communication is, and if this happens in the future parent/carers should contact the SEND Services team so that it can be rectified quickly.

One parent carer said that there was a problem with the consultation process, it didn't happen when it should have done.

Apologies that this happened, we are constantly reviewing our internal processes to ensure that we adhere to statutory deadlines, including those around the consultation process whenever possible.

Comments about the SEND Casework Officer (CWO)

Five parent carers reported that it could be difficult to speak to their SEND Casework Officer (CWO) and emails weren't responded to in a timely manner.

If you are having difficulties contacting your CWO directly, the local authority has a service level telephone line (01905 845579) which you can use to contact our administrative team, and they will book a surgery appointment for you with your allocated CWO. This will allow you to have a designated time for a conversation with them and address any concerns or answer any questions that you have.

We have included information about phone surgeries on the SEND Local Offer: [EHCP – Education, Health and Care plans](#)

Three parent carers said it would be better if they could be kept informed of progress, without having to chase, and if there is nothing to report, just a note to say that, so they know they haven't been forgotten.

We work to statutory deadlines around the EHCP process, and these are published on the SEND Local Offer: [EHCP – Education, Health and Care plans](#). CWOs are unable to provide regular updates outside of the key points within the statutory process. If you are worried as a parent/carer you can contact our administrative team, and they will book a phone surgery appointment for you with your CWO.

**Two parent carers said that they didn't know who their CWO was, or how to contact them.
and**

Two parent carers said that it would've been better if they could have had the same CWO throughout the process.

We recognise the importance of consistency and continue to work to develop our workforce to ensure that our CWOs are as resilient and consistent as possible. If a parent/carer is unsure who their CWO is, they can contact our administrative team to ask – details of team contact numbers and team members are published on the SEND Local Offer: [SEND Services](#)

Two parent carers said it would have been better if they had known what days their CWO work, and that part time working has implications on timescales as it can delay getting answers to queries.

A notification has been sent out to all members of the SEND teams reminding them that their email signatures must contain information about their working days. Parent/carers can contact the administrative team, who will be able to answer any queries, or if not, refer them to someone who can help. The admin team can also book a phone surgery appointment with their CWO, if appropriate, which will give the parent carer an allocated time to discuss any queries they may have. CWOs are aware of statutory timelines and organise their workloads accordingly within their working week.

Two parent carers said their CWO had left Worcestershire Children First and they weren't informed.

We do have changes in staffing from time to time and a list of the current staff is on the SEND Local Offer, which is updated monthly, [SEND Services](#). The local authority has a service level telephone line (01905 845579) which you can use to contact our administrative team, and they will book a surgery appointment for you with your allocated CWO. This will allow you to have a designated time for a conversation with them and address any concerns or answer any questions that you have.

One parent carer said the method of contact could be difficult, particularly for working parents – telephone calls cannot always be answered, and emails can be difficult to access.

We ask parent/carers what their preferred method of contact is, and we try our utmost to adhere to this. If telephone contact cannot be made, then the CWO will leave a message or try again at a later time/day.

One parent carer said that it would be better if the CWO could explain who SENDIASS are rather than just sending their contact details.

We are looking again at the letters that go out, and, as part of this we will revise the information we include about [SENDIASS](#) in them. We include information about who SENDIASS are and what they do on the SEND Local Offer: [Who to contact for advice and guidance](#).

Comments about educational settings

Nine parent carers said the plan was fine but school or college weren't doing what they had agree to do in the Education, Health and Care Plan.

The local authority (LA) continue to work hard with LA schools to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the responsibility of educational settings to deliver the contents of the plan and how they can be supported to do this. The LA have regular meetings with SENCOs via the SENCO Forum. We have also included information on the SEND Local Offer for parent carers about what to do if they're not happy with their educational setting. [I'm not happy with an educational establishment](#).

Five parent carers said the communication between them, and the school or setting could be difficult.

Parent/carers should discuss any issues with the school direct with them first, we also suggest that they can seek advice and support from [SENDIASS](#). We continue to encourage schools to engage with their parent/carer community and have published a co-produced Parent Carer Engagement Toolkit, which is a free resource schools can download. [Parent carer engagement toolkit | SEND Local Offer](#)

One family said that they thought most of the professionals worked well together and communicated except for school.

We continue to aim to improve communication between agencies. Feedback from our joint assessment meetings trial shows the positive effect this way of working can have. The local authority (LA) work with education settings SENCOs through the SENCO forum to improve communication links.

One parent carer said that they felt school 'dragged their heels' when it came to requesting an EHCP.

The LA continue to work with schools to ensure they know what evidence is needed for an EHC needs assessment and parent/carers are able to make their own request for an assessment. Parent/carers can also contact [SENDIASS](#) for advice and support

One parent carer said they found communication with school very difficult once their young person was no longer attending – they felt that school didn't feel they were their responsibility anymore.

Parent/carers can raise any concerns they have with their casework officer, if we are aware that a child is not attending, we are able to monitor the situation. Referrals can be made to the local authority 'Children Missing Education' team, or we can work with the school to put in effective alternative provision and/or interim provision.

Comments about the annual review (AR) meeting

Seven parent carers didn't feel the right people attended or contributed to the annual review.

Schools have to follow statutory guidelines regarding timings and annual reviews. This can sometimes mean it conflicts with agencies own timeframes and notice for meetings. In these circumstances the relevant agencies should provide a report which is appropriate for the AR and less than one year old. [EHCP Annual Reviews | SEND Local Offer](#)

One parent carer said that sometimes they had to instigate the annual review (AR) themselves because the school/setting had failed to do so.

The annual review process is devolved to schools and settings in Worcestershire and the local authority continue to work with them to ensure that they are aware of their statutory obligations. We have included information on the SEND Local Offer for parent carers about annual reviews. [EHCP Annual Reviews](#)

One parent carer said that now their young person was at college they were no longer invited to the AR meeting, despite having attended all previous ones.

Parent carers should raise any concerns they have with the college. Once a young person becomes 16 it is they who are invited to the meeting and parent carers can come along as support. If they are over 18 and have capacity, the duty is to invite the young person and not the parent carer.

One parent carer said they would have preferred an actual meeting, rather than having the AR done via email, as it was.

Annual review meetings can be face to face or virtual and should take place every year. If a parent carer has concerns about the way the meeting has been organised, they can discuss it with their casework officer or raise it as a complaint via the complaints process.

One parent carer said they asked for the Annual Review (AR) meeting to be rearranged because they could not attend but the meeting went ahead without them.

The school or setting should endeavour to ensure parents and carers can attend an annual review meeting where they wish to and it's appropriate. The parent carer can raise their concerns with the education setting or with their casework officer.

One parent carer said there was no annual review (AR) meeting.

If an annual review is not held, the parent carer should raise this with the education provider in the first instance, and if this doesn't remedy the situation then they can contact the local authority who will liaise with the education provider to ensure that an annual review is arranged at the earliest convenience.

Comments about health services

Five families said that they thought most of the professionals worked well together and communicated except for their Paediatricians. They also said Paediatricians have long waiting lists, and they had to wait a long time for appointments.

And

Two families said that they thought most of the professionals worked well together and communicated except for within health, saying that they don't seem to communicate well with each other.

In April 2024 Worcestershire's services for children and young people with SEND were inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

As a result of the inspection, the local area partnership have co-produced a Priority Action Plan (PAP) to address two priority actions which the report detailed as urgent. The local area partnership includes NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, Worcestershire Children First and Worcestershire County Council. The first of these priorities' centres around the improvement of health pathways and their waiting lists. A copy of the PAP, can be found here: [What we're doing to improve SEND services following the 2024 Ofsted and CQC inspection | SEND Local Offer](#)

Two parent carers said they were disappointed with the speech and language provision, which was delivered in school, their child either didn't make progress in school or the parent felt they could be given more information about how they can support their child's progress at home.

And

One parent carer wanted support for their child from the occupational therapy service but had been refused based on the service criteria.

We would encourage parent carers to raise any concerns they have with the individual health professional concerned. If they are unhappy with an NHS service they can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who offer confidential information, advice and support: [Patient Advice and Liaison Service \(PALS\) - Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust](#).

One parent carer said they were disappointed that physiotherapy isn't delivered at their young person's college.

If physiotherapy is a requirement of section F of an EHC plan, then the local authority would provide that separately to the college placement. However, a college should not be providing a positive consultation if physiotherapy is a requirement of the plan, and they are unable to commission or deliver that service.

Comments about the EHCP

Four parent carers said the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) wasn't specific or that some of the reports were 'woolly'.

The local authority is continuing to work with professionals within the local area partnership to ensure that they have a clear understanding of what the statutory duties around specificity and quantification of section F provision are, and we aim to improve the quality of plans by ensuring that all those involved in their writing are able to provide this.

Four parent carers said that some information in the EHCP was out of date and irrelevant (AR).

All EHCP should be reviewed at least annually, and parents and carers are able to provide their opinions around what is relevant and up to date with regard to the content of the EHCP, as are the professionals who are invited to contribute to the meeting.

One parent carer found some information was missing from the EHCP.

The local authority continues to work with parents and carers around amendment notices and should they feel that some information is missing from the EHCP, we are happy to give them the opportunity to provide us with amendments that make sure that all the information they feel is relevant is included.

One parent carer found the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) itself lengthy and difficult to understand.

The EHCP is a document that seeks to describe all of the special educational needs and provision required to meet those needs within an education setting. As such, they can sometimes be lengthy documents, but workers within the local authority, and the education setting, will work with parents and carers to ensure they have a clear understanding of what that plan is and what it means for their child. If parent carers would like additional support and information, they can also contact [SENDIASS](#).

One parent carer felt it needs to be made clear that they should provide any updated or new medical information during the annual review (AR) process.

Following this feedback, this information has been added to the page about AR's on the SEND Local Offer [EHCP Annual Reviews](#).

Comments about timeliness

Nine parent carers said it took over 15 days for changes to be made to the EHCP following an annual review (AR).

And

One parent carer said that timelines weren't adhered to, and deadlines were missed (Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment)

We continue to work hard to ensure deadlines are met and any backlog is addressed as a priority.

Comments about provision

Five parent carers said they were waiting for a space to become available at the named provision in their child's EHCP.

And

Two parent carers said there was no suitable provision for their child/young person.

We realise that spaces in some specialist provision are limited, and we are working hard to build effective, appropriate provision in Worcestershire. Details of education and provision planning can be found here: [Education sufficiency, school organisation and provision planning](#)

One parent carer wasn't happy with the provision named in the Education, Health and Care Plan.

As a local authority we have a statutory duty to use our resources efficiently, therefore we can only name suitable provision, which can meet identified need. We try hard to work with parent carers to reach agreement, but where parent carers are unhappy with the provision named, they have recourse through the Tribunal system. [I'm not happy with my child's EHCP | SEND Local Offer](#)

One parent carer said that it took too long to name the provision in the plan.

We admit that sometimes there can be a delay in the naming of provision in a plan. Wherever possible we make every effort to name provision in a timely manner, but sometimes, identifying suitable settings can prevent this.

Comments about reports submitted

Five parent carers said it took other agencies a long time to provide reports either during the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) or the annual review (AR).

Following the SEND Area Inspection in April 2024, the local area partnership are working together to address the areas for improvement identified. Waiting times have been recognised as a major priority for Worcestershire and it's one that we're working closely with local partners to address. The local area partnership has co-produced a Priority Action Plan (PAP) to address the two priority actions which the report detailed as urgent. The local area partnership includes NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, Worcestershire Children First and Worcestershire County Council. A copy of the PAP, can be found here: [What we're doing to improve SEND services following the 2024 Ofsted and CQC inspection | SEND Local Offer](#)

One parent carer wanted the ability to challenge information in reports which are submitted by professionals. They didn't feel the information in them was correct.

If parent carers raise concerns about reports submitted by professionals, the casework officer (CWO) will share these with the report writer and changes are made where appropriate.

Comments about Education Psychology

One parent carer said that they wished that they had known the nature of the call from the Educational Psychologist (EP) before they accepted it, as they couldn't give it the right attention and would've preferred to have it at another time.

This concern was raised with the Principal Educational Psychologist who has reminded the team that they need to be clear about the nature of their call and be prepared to rearrange the call for a more convenient time. The service has also prepared an information sheet for parent/carers which will be sent prior to the initial contact which outlines the purpose and what to expect from the EP assessment.

One parent carer said that they didn't think a 30-minute phone call to them and their young person for the Education Psychology assessment was sufficient. They also found the EP rude and abrupt.

This concern was raised with the Principal Educational Psychologist who has reminded the EPs to provide contact details so that if there is any further information that the parent/carer would like to share that they did not feel able to in the initial consultation, they are able to directly contact them.

Miscellaneous

One parent carer was frustrated by the personal budget process and didn't feel it was transparent.

In the last six months SEND Services have undertaken specific training for casework officers around the allocation of personal budgets to improve the advice and information that we give to parents and carers around these.