

Feedback From Families – Summer Term 2024

Overall Themes for the Term:

- SEND Team communications needs to improve
- Annual Review process needs to improve
- Lack of School places (including for September)
- Lack of Ordinarily Available provision from schools and Early Help
- Transport, especially post-16

SEND Improvement & Safety Valve Update with Families (via Zoom) – Wednesday May 15th

Full Q&A document available on our website: [SEND Update with WBC & Health 15th May 2024](#)

Themes:

- More focus needed on mental health in schools
- Lack of Educational Psychology service
- Need for early intervention/needs led intervention by schools
- Annual Review process (needs to improve)
- SEND Team vacancies
- Transport – the importance of getting it right
- Short Breaks – how can parents get involved and feedback
- ADHD assessments for children not in school

SENDIASS Drop-in's

(SVW attend to chat with parents and gather feedback/signpost whilst parents waiting to see SENDIASS). Total attendees Summer Term = 45

Comments from those attending the drop-ins:

April – child's health needs not considered on EHCP, and school named was mainstream Parents had serious concerns of seizures with child that would not be able to be managed in mainstream. "it appears that no one even reads the EHCP when deciding on a school – they just get put where there's a space and job done". Another family felt there was no support for children in out of borough school.

May - Comms with SEN still raised as concern by parents however Marlene Vinda in SEN team mentioned for positive support given to parents. Multiple mentions of no-one from SEN team attending A/R years 10 and 11. Frustrations raised that SEN email answerback says, "we will respond in 5 days". This is more harmful than helpful.

June - Parents not aware of services available to them in the borough. Schools not communicating any Local Offer or support group info. Specific needs such as Non-Verbal child and Deaf child raised as lack of specific support

July – more anxiety from parents with children out of school for extended time – 1 was more than 2 years with no communication with family discussing potential school place. No work offered from school so providing private tutoring. Parent asks, 'how long will this go on for'. EHCP for another child only highlighted best scenario and didn't highlight real needs. Another Parent waiting for follow up details for Way Forward meeting as detailed in covering letter with decision to Not Assess – was notified by Sendiass these meetings have stopped. No communication with affected parents.

Parent Carer Participation Groups via Zoom and face to face – 25th June

Parents attending: 7 via Zoom and 3 face-to-face meeting.

Priority areas for improvement:

Meetings highlighted the struggles with communicating with the WBC SEND teams and how many are physically and mentally affected by the stress and lack of control to support their child through education which families without a child with SEND can do. Stresses and struggles of having a child with SEND are compounded by the lack of communication, support, information, options and very often money as parents are having to give up work to support children not in school and some paying out for private tuition or counselling

Some suggestion from the Parent Carer Participation Group to help improve services:

We asked for your specific feedback on the SEND Voices Wokingham annual SEND survey; Ordinarily Available Provision; School Transport and how SEND Voices Wokingham can further promote ourselves so we can reach and help more families with information and the opportunity to have their say on their lived experiences.

Some of the key points that were raised were:

- SEND Voices Wokingham SEND survey not being distributed to families by schools – did the survey get sent to them? How can we improve communication from school to families
- Feels like professionals talk to themselves and do not coproduce with families
- Many families aware of the Ordinarily Available Provision but felt more support should be given to school by WBC on how schools can provide support on existing funding or provide more funding and resource. Parents felt guilty for needing SEND support and using resources.
- families feel many schools are not upholding the Ordinarily Available Provision. Schools should be monitored for what they are providing and held to account when they are not providing
- School transport communication was a concern as there was no perception of co-producing with parents to get appropriate transport set up in timely manner and more concern when the service appeared to be ceasing Post 16. Reassurance was given that each case was being looked at on a case-by-case basis and for parents to call Transport to discuss needs.

SENDIASS Training sessions

(SVW host these online sessions) - 23 parents attended across 3 sessions

EHCP Process – 13th May (12 parents) – Session comments:

Not getting response from the SEND team

EHCP Annual Reviews -12th June (2 parents attended) - Session comments:

Concerns about Mental Health of children that are anxious going to school but mask at school and how to get this identified in EHCP

PfA 24th June (9 parents) – Session comments:

Parents concerned about being out of borough and forgotten about.

Really helpful (course) lots to digest, thank you for running. I don't know where I'd have found all this out otherwise.

Early Years Drop-in with WBC (via Zoom) - 23rd May

2 parents attended

- Very useful session with loads of helpful information

Parent Carer Health Engagement event 6th June

Attendance – spoke directly to 6 families, contacted by others who could not attend on the day but looking for information.

- Would like parent support sessions/drop-in that are in the evening (for working parents)
- Local Offer hard to navigate and find information
- Pre-school feedback – don't know where to signpost families to for information

Carer Information Event 10th June

Attendance – 17 families

Parent commented that questions on PIP forms need more clarity - questions seem belittling family needs

- Transport –Post 16 – letter received about cease of service, but child still needs service.
- Where is support for Adopted children - many need support in school but may not have diagnosis
- No holiday provision for children with disabilities “I may need to resign from my job if unable to resolve this”
- Closing Addington’s after school club and no alternative – how are parents able to work if no childcare options are available
- No guide on where to go or what to do prior to diagnosis
- EOTAS policy needs to be clear – AND needs to be published
- Respite care and regular holiday clubs for all needs should be available

Coffee Morning/Drop-in & Chat 11th June

Attendance – 7 families attended (this new drop-in)

- The family starting their SEND journey supported by case worker but just as child was to going to panel heard through social media their case worker had left – no communication – no-one would answer calls/emails - no one could help with the case.
- EHCP document was sent in a format that could now be edited for family to make changes. School had a totally different format more suitable for their purpose but No consistency or tracking of changes made to EHCP document issued. Process was not clear – have been supported by Sendiass website information – but this should be available and sent with the document
- Formal complaint not responded to.

- Sen drop in promises of updates and better communication not met
- “Post 16 is like being thrown off a cliff” “we’re shouting into the void”

WBC Preparing for Adulthood Event 13th June

- “Post 16 transport – why is this being stopped; our child still needs it “
- Local Offer website difficult to find what’s needed
- Families unaware of PFA!
- Need earliest communication to help transition into adulthood
- Primary schools are more supportive of children with SEND without EHCP. Secondary schools only supporting if have EHCP
- “Is there a directory of what clubs are available that would be suitable for Post 16?”

General Questions / Comments Summer Term ‘24

General feedback and themes via email and social media

SEND Team Communications/Complaints process

- Why is Safety Valve taking preference over those already in the system? The day-to-day work is just not happening
- Complaints are not being answered in a timely way – 20 days and we have still not had a response
- I would also like to share my concerns that Wokingham LA are two weeks overdue submitting final EHCP and the end of term is fast approaching for a meeting with the named school. NO ONE picks up the phone and the case worker assigned does not answer phone messages or emails
- Unfortunately, the SEND team haven't been providing updates every two weeks as promised at the SEND team drop-in and also their letter promised. Getting an update from them is as hard as usual!
- Parent promised 2 weekly updates on secondary school placement for my child in February, they haven’t heard anything from the SEND team.
- The quality of information provided following EHCP application was not adequate, nor was the information provided from the way forward meeting. No constructive information provided. The SEND Case Officer saying, ‘that’s above my paygrade’ and that they receive a ‘ridiculous’ number of referrals was neither appropriate nor helpful.
- Is anyone else just having no response from WBC? They sent a draft plan, Senco and I replied with some amendments and school choice and neither of us have heard anything back! I’ve emailed, she’s emailed and called and nothing!

- EHC needs assessment not meeting statutory timeframe
- SEN team still not responding about moving my son schools
- I'm at my wits end. I have been chasing a response to my questions about my son's case (and to even know who our case worker is!) since March and still have no response. I raised a formal complaint at the beginning of June via email to the children's services complaint email address. Automated response said someone would be in touch in two days but suffice to say I haven't heard a squeak from anyone. How the hell am I going to get any answers? I really need some resolution before next academic year, but I'm just exasperated. (I've emailed Jamie Conran et al multiple times with no response). Why is it so flippin' difficult?!
- I'm really struggling to get a response and I've emailed several times and copied in both Sam Philo and Jamie Conran.
- I tried calling today and was hung up on three times. I asked the switchboard to send a message too. I'd just like a response or to talk to a person if possible 🙌 I'm going a bit crazy and feel like I'm harassing them

Support at School

- School unable to meet child's needs (6 years old) so advised family to de-register and Home Educate. School would not put in support or help family with EHCP application.
- My local authority has told me I need to obtain a letter from a consultant saying my Autistic teenager is unable to manage mainstream school in order to obtain alternative provision. I don't believe this to be lawful but that's another battle I'll be starting but in the interim I need to get this sorted as he's been out of school since November 2033. Obviously if we wait for an appointment with CAMHS we are looking at years so looking to go private.

School Places/Phase Transfers

- Following advert for phase transfer sessions for Sept 25:
We don't even have a secondary phases transfer sorted for this September! It's been a total mess as it has been for many families this year for year 6 to year 7!
- What about phase transfer post 16 for this year, we still do not have a final EHCP, nor the provision named. Deadline was the end of March. There seems to be nothing we can do to progress this
- We have an 11-year-old still with no school place for secondary in September. We have had numerous issues also and it takes several emails over weeks to get a response.
- Nearly July and my son still doesn't have a secondary school allocated. No updates or contact from WBC even though I have tried calling and emailing for updates and discussions.

Annual Reviews

- Final EHCP issued following AR (very late) naming post18 education that was not consulted on and not the YP/family's choice
- Family not receiving timely response to emails when requesting additional reports for Annual Review which is very out of date.
- Families experiencing very different timelines for ARs.
- Anyone experiencing delays with AR decisions from WBC? AR was held in March, still nothing from WBC despite chasing them (end June)!
- We had our AR the same day. Received the draft on 18th April that we returned with lots of amendments and now awaiting final
- We've had a draft plan since March and heard nothing since. I have emailed Jamie Conran not Sam but no luck. I give up tbh,
- Our AR was last year it took 3 months to get the paperwork. We have questions and concerns about the paperwork which are still unresolved. Our case worker left at the end of last year and I am still yet to be told who is now managing my child's case, despite asking many times.
- AR taking so long that parents don't know the post 16 placement and can't make decisions on placements or transport
- So, Wokingham SEND team have a new type of annual review...A 'monitoring annual review' that takes place when an AR is due and have an active tribunal. It will always result in a no to amend and will not inform the tribunal process or working document. I don't think they have read the SEND regs, law or understand a statutory process. I just despair with the whole situation!
- Our Annual Review taking over 33 weeks to complete!
- We had an annual review in March and have received no paperwork. School say it's councils responsibility. Is that the case and if so, how do I find out where her updated EHCP is? How soon after the AR are we meant to receive the updated paperwork? It's over 3 months now

EOTAS

- Outstanding EOTAS travel expenses unpaid after constant chasing
- No process for children on EOTAS to obtain OT Assessment (even when requested to get assessment privately, this was then rejected by the SEND panel)
- EOTAS - families that are just being left to manage on their own, have no support, child has no provision, AR not being carried out properly and being massively delayed meaning new provision and update provision is not happening for months and months. To allow children just to sit at home with nothing is unfair.

Mental Health Service

- New DRS/CETR Leaflets for young people - Could you help me understand which service providers are aware of these services (DSR/CETR) please as our current mental health NHS service is completely unaware. Thank you

Social Care

- Parents are not happy that minutes of CIN meetings now being taken by social worker and resulting minutes very inaccurate. Also, CIN plans are inaccurate.
- I've not been happy since this change either (SW taking minutes of meetings). As for scoring, we don't even get scored! So many inconsistencies and I've been very unhappy with no evidence of my feedback/requests being recorded by them, just told that it's been noted.
- The irony of Early Help - Intervention at the right time. BUT you need to wait at least 12 weeks for an assessment. Early help emailed us after an initial phone call (where we were told it would be a 12 week wait) to say they have reconsidered and decided there was nothing they could do and as all the issues were education based the SEND team had to manage them and this would be passed on - but it was the SEND team who said Early Help needed to be involved. So just another example where there is no joint working and services see themselves in little boxes. We were also told by Early Help as we already had so many professionals involved, they would have been a step before where we are so could offer nothing as it would be less than we already had in place.
- No short breaks/respite care available unless you are on low income (HAF), this is penalising working families who would happily pay for respite care, but nothing is available.

Therapies

- OT therapy as stated in EHCP has not been delivered for 2¹/₂ years.

Transport

- ITT was included as part of my child's AR (yr11). I contacted Optalis to arrange this and told there was no capacity to do this
- What about those not wanting a personal budget as it gets complicated for benefits etc if you've got money in your bank account? WBC currently pay Alternative Provision direct for them to do the picking up and dropping off as a taxi wouldn't work. At a glance I'm worried that I'd have to be given money and then pay them myself.

- Shocking to hear there is no longer help for low-income families. I don't know how I'm supposed to afford from £41 this year to it being £95 next academic year a month. 😞
- ITT assessment and training should take place well before the end of the academic year and avoiding the exam period. This would allow the young person's capability and suitability for independent travel to be resolved so that any transition is seamless and stress-free. It is happening far too late this year leaving no time for assessment or training to happen before the end of the academic year.
- Transport request not answered in a timely manner (1 month) and no response when chased.
- Post 16 transport as feared they have allocated a PTB, with the option to appeal. The policy states that a person already in receipt of post-16 COT before September 2024 will not have that COT withdrawn. This was also discussed in detail at the two council meetings and parents were reassured that this would be the case.
- Post 16 transport policy - we are of the opinion that officers are not applying the policy in the way the councillors suggested at the meeting last year
- CTU not co-producing solutions with families when travel issues raised by transport providers

Feedback on SEND Drop-in Sessions with Jamie Conran/Sally Furness

May 14th with Jamie Conran (face-to-face) & Sally Furness (online)

16 families attended

Feedback collected 4 weeks later July 24

We recently contacted all the families who attended either in person or via zoom for their feedback. We asked the following:

- Was the session useful?
- Has progress been made?

We received 7 responses from the 16 families we contacted with the following feedback:

Were the sessions useful?

Of the 7 responses 4 said it was definitely useful to have a face-to-face meeting (much of this driven by communication issues with individual Case Officers), but others said that it was a waste of time and in 1 case left them even more distrusting of the SEND team.

Has progress been made?

1 parent said progress had been made (although now ongoing communication issues with the Case Officer)

1 parent said issue resolved ahead of meeting, but pleased to meet with Jamie and appreciated that he acknowledged the issues the SEND team have

1 parent given incorrect information

1 resolved, but not due to meeting with Jamie, it took a formal complaint

1 some progress being made, but very pessimistic due to ongoing communication issues and whether things are actually agreed going forward

Some comments:

- It was really useful to get some dedicated time with Jamie and I felt he listened and understood where I was coming from. So, whilst the meeting itself was good, it actually made no difference to progressing my child's case.
- It was very helpful for me, Jamie gave the go ahead for what I needed and then got it ratified through panel after, was all followed up in writing to confirm the funding required and the assessments have now taken place. Now we are just struggling with general communication like a lot of others, so I welcome another 1:1 session.
- He acknowledged there were problems with the team and said that he was trying to improve things.
- I was really hopeful that the session would get things moving, however I did not have any further contact after the meeting despite being told I would have a call the following week and things would be on a spreadsheet until resolved. So unfortunately, I had high hopes for the meeting, but it hasn't made any difference and lack of communication has continued to be an issue.
- Thank you for arranging the session, and I would like to attend to speak to Jamie again as it's helpful to be able to have face to face conversations. But my honest feedback is that it was, unfortunately, a bit of a waste of time on this occasion.

December meeting feedback:

- Following my meeting with Jamie, I had no further contact with him. We were assigned an interim case-officer who proved to be ineffective and was dismissed after three months, we were then reassigned Charlotte Woods, another interim case officer who was very effective with identifying a new setting for our son, however as soon as the placement offer came through, she left her post and we have been assigned another interim caseworker called Andrew Pressley. Andrew is overwhelmed by his caseload because we have had very limited contact with him since the transition commenced.
- Sadly, our experience of the Wokingham SEN team has been appalling and we have not been well supported because the service is stretched and incapable of meeting the needs of everyone requiring SEN support.