

A Guide to Working with Parents of Children with Special Needs

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Introduction

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GUIDANCE & GOOD PRACTICE FOR SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Background

In January 2001 the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City Parent Partnership Project seconded a SENCo as Parent School Partnership Worker. The secondment was for one year and focused on developing models of positive partnership between schools and parents of children with special educational needs. There were two aspects to the work:

1. To support a number of schools, bidding in to the project, in piloting or developing initiatives to promote effective partnerships with parents of children with special educational needs.
2. To research, develop and produce good practice guidance for use by all schools in planning their own development of positive partnerships with parents.

The Project wrote to all schools and asked for requests for support for development work and/or examples of existing practice in working with parents of children with special educational needs. These related to the three main categories for the work, which were:

- Communication with parents (e.g. discussing concerns, listening to parents' views, producing written information for parents etc).
- Involvement of parents (e.g. involving parents in school life and their child's learning, target setting, reviews, courses for parents etc).
- Support for parents (e.g. parent groups or networks, voluntary organisations etc).

Some seventeen schools or families of schools received support for development work. Schools were from the City and the County and primary, secondary and special schools were represented. There was a wide range of geographical areas in the sample. Examples of projects undertaken by schools or families include:

- producing written information for parents about SEN provision
- auditing communication between parents and schools
- researching and responding to parents' views, needs and interests
- setting up community rooms

- establishing support groups:
 - in local areas
 - between schools
 - between special and mainstream
 - for parents of children with particular needs (e.g. dyslexia)
- providing workshops for parents on particular topics
- supporting parents accessing training
- creating lending libraries of resources for parents to use at home
- linking parents of children with more complex needs with other parents in mainstream schools
- developing homework packages
- trials of home visit systems for parents of children with SEN.

This development work, along with schools offering examples of existing practice, experiences of colleagues in the LEA and direct contact with parents, has helped inform the production of this good practice guidance. Thanks are due to all those who offered their time, patience, insight and wisdom to the production of these materials.

About this guide

Audience.

This guidance is intended for use by staff working with children with special educational needs in mainstream, special and pre- school settings, and for those supporting staff in these settings.

It is intended to assist schools in appraising and auditing their own practice and identifying priorities for points for action.

Content.

A. The main guide contains three chapters:

1. Communication
2. Involvement
3. Support

These relate to the areas under which the work was planned (see above). The three chapters can be used together or alone. However, there is an amount of cross over between the sections and staff may find it useful to check through the main questions of the other two chapters for any additional relevant sections.

B. Supporting materials to the main guide:

Audit tool sheets: These are made up of the main header questions from the guide and can be used to record schools' responses to the issues in the main guide (see how to use below).

Poster: There is a poster to accompany the guidance that is intended for display in school staff rooms and other prominent places around school (parents' notice board for example). This poster has been developed with a group of parents and Independent Parental Supporters connected to the Parent Partnership Project. It contains the most significant messages from the guidance, under headings identified by parents as representing six of the important issues for them.

Format / layout.

The main guide uses three distinct formats to help identify the source of the information.

1. **Audit questions**
A series of questions that aims to assist schools in examining and developing their own practice and arriving at points for action. There are further subsidiary questions that expand upon the main headings. (These header questions also form the structure of the Audit Tool Sheets to allow for direct reference to the main guide.)
2. **Parent views**
Some of the key experiences that parents have in their contact with schools and ways parents feel these could be improved.
3. **School examples**
Examples of strategies practised in schools to support some of the issues raised by the audit questions.

How to use this guide

Whom to involve:

Effective use of the guide in schools would involve asking the views of the whole school community (including parents, office staff, midday supervisors, teaching and non teaching staff, governors, relevant support agencies et al) about all, or particular aspects, of the guide. The use of a critical friend from outside school, who knows the school well and whose opinion is unbiased, but valued, also makes for a more effective exercise.

Deciding on size and scale.

The guide can be used to complete a full or partial audit of schools' current policy and practice relating to the issues covered. The exercise can be as comprehensive or specific as appropriate to the school at any particular time. Schools may wish, for example, to undertake a full initial audit with smaller, more specific exercises subsequently. It is hoped that schools will find it a useful tool for an exercise at a staff meeting or during an INSET day, for example.

The time and energy required to complete an audit needs to be recognised in making arrangements for staff responsible for its implementation. Schools' individual factors, affecting workload and appropriate time commitment, will influence the nature of the process relevant to each school.

Audit Tool Sheets.

Schools can also use the guide in conjunction with the audit sheets that accompany the guidance. These sheets are intended for schools to record their existing practice and note any points for action. They are, primarily, made up of the header questions from the main body of the guide, together with key prompts on the issues pertinent to that question. They are most easily and effectively used alongside the main body of the guidance for reference and expansion of the points for consideration.

These audit sheets can also be used for others involved in the audit (as above) to record their views on school practice and points for action. It is helpful to consider extracting, or adapting, particular questions or sections as appropriate. The sheets may be used for individual responses, or for a record of feed back from a particular group.

The sheets can be photocopied for multiple use or for re-audits.

Review arrangements.

Once the initial exercise has been completed a date and system for review of the issues (and especially the points for action) should be agreed. This would be most effectively and efficiently achieved if the audit's action points fed into the school improvement plan and became part of school's ongoing development arrangements. This audit should not be viewed as an isolated exercise.

When changes of staff occur (particularly the SENCo) the audit and points for action need to be discussed with those taking over responsibility. The outcomes of the audit should be part of any induction for new staff.

A review of the whole guidance periodically is advisable as practice, personnel and perspectives change.

General principles

When working with parents remember.....

"It is the parents' 'unreasonable' commitment to their child that makes them a good parent!"

Anon.

Much of the information in the guidance is relevant to working with all parents. However it is helpful to remember that it can be more crucial and relevant to a parent of a child with special educational needs, who may already be feeling anxious or even that they are a burden to school. Staff should recognise that parents' previous experiences may lead them to appear either over-apologetic or over-assertive. Staff can make a significant contribution to empowering parents and reassuring them that they, and their child, are truly welcome as active partners.

True partnership, without blame, can only grow where there is a real willingness to overcome any barriers that school presents to a child's successful inclusion, rather than regarding a child as having a series of needs to be met.

Much of the content may seem fundamental and essential rather than "good practice". This reflects the experiences of parents and may be viewed differently when read by staff from another school. Some of the apparently less important issues from a school's perspective are very significant to parents and enhance the successful inclusion of the whole community.

Schools should also have regard to the barriers it may present, not only to its pupils, but to all connected to it. Therefore a parent's own needs should also be considered in any policy or practice to be implemented.

The principles and practice that are contained in this guidance are truly effective only if they are shared and implemented by the whole community:

It is crucial to successful and effective relationships with parents for principles and practice to be shared by the whole school community.

The SEN Code of Practice

The following extracts highlight the principles that underpin this guide:

The SEN Code of Practice states that :

Parents hold key information and have a critical role to play in their children's education. They have unique strengths, knowledge and experience to contribute to the shared view of a child's needs and the best ways of supporting them. It is therefore essential that all professionals (schools, LEAs and other agencies) actively seek to work with parents and value the contribution they make. The work of schools and professionals can be more effective when parents are involved and account is taken of their wishes, feelings and perspectives on their children's development. This is particularly so when a child has special educational needs. All parents of children with special educational needs should be treated as partners. They should be supported so as to be able and empowered to:

- recognise and fulfil their responsibilities as parents and play an active and valued role in their children's education
- have knowledge of the child's entitlement within the SEN framework
- make their views known about how their child is educated
- have access to information, advice and support during assessment and any related decision-making process about special educational provision.

These partnerships can be challenging, requiring positive attitudes by all, and in some circumstances additional support and encouragement for parents.

Code of Practice 2.2, 2.3

Key Principles in Communicating and working in partnership with parents.

Positive attitudes to parents, user-friendly information and procedures plus awareness of support needs are important. There should be no presumption about what parents can or cannot do to support their children's learning. Stereotypic views of parents are unhelpful and should be challenged. All staff should bear in mind the pressures a parent may be under because of the child's needs.

To make communications effective professionals should:

- acknowledge and draw on parental knowledge and expertise in relation to their child
- focus on the children's strengths as well as areas of additional need
- recognise the personal and emotional investment of parents and be aware of their feelings

- ensure that parents understand procedures, are aware of how to access support in preparing their contributions, and are given documents to be discussed well before meetings
- respect the validity of differing perspectives and seek constructive ways of reconciling different viewpoints
- respect the differing needs parents themselves may have, such as a disability or communication and linguistic barriers
- recognise the need for flexibility in the timing and structure of meetings.

Code of Practice 2.6, 2.7

Schools working in partnership with parents

The school is often the first point of contact for parents. Parents should be fully involved in the school-based response for their child, understand the purpose of any intervention or programme of action, and be told about the parent partnership service when SEN are identified. Schools must tell parents when they first identify that a child has SEN. It is vitally important that schools welcome and encourage parents to participate from the outset and throughout their child's educational career at the school. Schools need to regularly review their policies to ensure that they encourage active partnership with parents and do not present barriers to participation. Schools should seek to actively work with their local parent partnership service.

Code of Practice 2.10

It is important when using this guidance not to presume knowledge of parents' views or experiences but to..... ask a parent!!

N.B. Throughout this document:

- for 'parents' read 'parents or carers' (including all those with parental responsibility)
- for 'SEN' read 'special educational needs'.

Communication



SEN

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1. COMMUNICATION

1. How do you welcome parents when they visit school?

- Who is responsible for greeting parents?
- Are all staff courteous and welcoming?

It helps parents feel welcome if:

- The entrances to school and reception areas are clearly marked.
- Any systems for security (such as signing in etc) are explained.
- Somebody directs or escorts parents to where they need to go or:
 - They are told where to wait.
 - Members of staff are told promptly that a parent has arrived for an appointment.
 - Reception staff have time to greet and assist visitors.

2. How do you let parents know who's who?

- Do you display the names and roles of staff in school?
- Do you provide a list of posts and responsibilities?
- Are parents aware of how they can contact key people such as:
 - Class Teacher
 - Teaching Assistants
 - SENCo
 - Head Teacher
 - SEN Governor

3. How easy are you to contact by telephone?

- Have you tried to contact your own school by telephone?
- Have you asked parents if they have experienced difficulties and acted on any feedback you have been given?
- How quickly do you respond when the phone rings?
- Do messages reach the right member of staff promptly?
- Is the answer phone left on even when the office is manned?

Parents say:

- It helps if when staff ring they identify themselves clearly.
- It is useful if staff summarise what has been said.
- A phone call is sometimes valuable and there may be no need to meet (although major information is best kept to a face to face meeting).
- Parents may not use an answer phone if their call is urgent or they have already left a message and had no response.
- Some parents may not feel comfortable or able to use an answer phone at all.

- It is useful to know when is the best time to ring or to be told when to ring back.
- It helps if the member of staff checks if this is a convenient time to talk (not the children's bath time for example).

4. What opportunities do you create for informal contact with parents?

- Are parents aware of good times to contact staff?
- When possible are staff available at the beginning or end of the day?
- Is there a time when the SENCo can be contacted? Do parents know when this is?
- Do you recognise and address the possible effects (of a SENCo's time commitment elsewhere) on liaison with parents in the SENCo's own class?

Example of practice in schools:

SEN staff hold regular, advertised surgery or clinic sessions, when parents can drop in to discuss progress or issues arising. Staff who have used this approach say that it helps to build relationships, can prevent issues growing and that these sessions are often well attended by parents. They are particularly useful if teaching assistants are available as well as the SENCo

- Are parents contacted with positive information as well as when there are difficulties?

Staff contact at least one parent with a positive piece of news each week and feed this back to the Head Teacher on planning sheets. Staff find that this promotes the achievement of children and allows opportunities for more casual contact with parents, which in turn eases the more formal meetings that are necessary. Parents say that this helps stop them from 'dreading the phone call'.

Parents say it makes it easier to talk about difficult issues if they already have a good relaxed relationship with staff.

5. What arrangements do you make to ensure parents are aware of the needs of their child?

- How are parents involved when a need is first identified?
- How are parents informed that a need has been identified?
- Are parents spoken to personally?
- Are parents given a written record that explains school has recognised their child's needs?

Many schools have standard letters for this purpose and parents say these are best shared at an initial meeting and not sent home cold.

- Does school have a booklet that explains the Code of Practice and school's own arrangements?
- Are concerns, expressed by parents, acted upon quickly?

Parents say it helps if:

- Staff recognise that parents are the people with greatest knowledge of their child.
- Staff treat parents' concerns with respect and do not dismiss what they say.
- Staff make a written note of issues raised by parents.
- Staff arrange a time to discuss the action they propose to take as a result of concerns expressed.

6. What arrangements do you make to ensure parents are aware of the provision made for their child?

- How are parents made aware of what support their child is receiving?
- Are parents clear about the nature and frequency of support?
- Are parents aware if their child is being withdrawn from class?
- What opportunities are there for parents to meet any additional adults working with their child?
- Do parents know about any resources or equipment used with their child?

7. Are you open about funding and levels of support that are available?

- Are parents informed about sources of funding without this being used as an excuse?
- How do you explain the different sources of funding?
- Do you provide information for parents that explains:
 - AWPU?
 - ASEN?
 - MSG?
 - Family Delegated Monies?

Parents say:

- Information on funding helps them to be realistic in their expectations of support and demystifies the school system.
- They understand better the information relating to their own child's and school's allocation of funds, if they have access to the Parent Partnership Project leaflet on "Resources for special educational needs in mainstream schools".
- It aids their relationships with other parents if all parents understand funding for SEN.

8.How are parents kept up to date with the level and nature of support that their child receives as their child progresses through school?

- Are parents told when there is a change of personnel for outside agencies involved with their child?
- Do you keep parents informed about changes of staff within school?
- Are parents aware of arrangements to cover long and short-term staff absences?

Parents say:

- This is particularly important on transfer between classes or phases.
- They are likely to assume there is no longer any support for their child, at the start of a new academic year, unless they are informed of arrangements.

Some schools send parents an annual update letter, which details the level and amount of support and the names of staff working with their child. Parents find this helps provide clarity particularly at the start of a new academic year.

9.Do you think about how you present written communications?**Parents say it helps if:**

- Sentences are short and text is kept to a minimum.
- Text is:
 - a clear style (simple jargon free language)
 - plain script (e.g. Arial or comic sans)
 - a good size (14 font as this)
 - well spaced (1.5 or double)
- Everyday words are used and specialist terms explained.
- Text is broken up by use of bullets, fonts, highlights, or graphics.
- A personal touch is used such as a signature or photograph.
- Copies are available in community languages, large print, on tape or in Braille where necessary. Some parents welcome information on a floppy disk so that they can alter it to suit their needs.

10. When you send home letters do you: -

- Send it via a reliable distribution route?
(This may not be book bags!)
- Ensure that copies are sent to parents when their child was absent?
- Pin copies to notice boards or entrance doors?
- Have copies of old communications stored for a while and accessible to parents?

Parents say it helps if:

- Newsletters go out at regular predictable times.
- Different colours are used for different types of communication (ensure a good contrast between font and paper).
- Graphics are used to indicate any action required.

e.g.



Please phone school to arrange an appointment.



Please make a note of the date.



Please fill in and return the



Please send money for....

11. What written information do you provide for parents about SEN issues?

Do you have:

- Standard letters e.g. initial letters, updates, review invitations etc?
- A booklet to explain your school's systems for SEN?
- Copies of your SEN/Inclusion policy available to parents?
- An SEN report in the Governors' Annual Report to parents?
- Appropriate information in the school prospectus?

Some points to consider when writing a booklet for parents:

a) Decide whom to involve.

It is useful to involve a range of people connected with school to ensure differing views and perspectives are considered. For example you may like to ask:

- A member of the school's learning support team,
- Parents,
- Governor responsible for SEN,
- SENCo,
- Outside agencies.

b) Decide on the audience.

Are you intending to give your booklet to all parents or only to parents of children with SEN for example? Parents may need information before you realise they do.

c) Decide on the key content.

Consider what information you want to include, what questions you want to answer and what terms you want to explain. Remember to avoid jargon.

d) Choose a style to present the material.

Try to balance a clear, easy to read style with one that is suitable for adults and not patronising or so simple it does not address all your requirements. It is useful to look at existing examples, but remember that your booklet needs to reflect your school and meet the needs of your parents.

e) Trial the booklet.

Once the booklet is drafted, agree a process to trial and obtain feedback before distributing it to parents as a whole. This may take a little time and organisation, but could save a good deal of enquiries later due to lack of clarity or errors. Trial with parents and professionals to ensure the information is clear, accurate, meets the purpose for which it was intended and is sufficiently comprehensive. Ensure that any information about other people (e.g. outside agencies) is to their satisfaction.

f) Arrange to present the booklet to governors and to explain its content and purpose.

g) Distribution of the booklet.

Once finalised, decide on the time and method of distribution to parents. This may be at the initial meeting for all new parents and then again when a child is identified as having SEN for example. Make sure that you have a system to ensure the booklet continues to be distributed and available to parents after the initial exercise.

h) Review.

It is helpful to review the booklet and to obtain further feedback from parents six months to a year after it is introduced. Agree a time with the working group to review and update the booklet to ensure its contents remain fresh and relevant.

12. Is your SEN/Inclusion policy available to parents?

A good policy would contain:

Core information

- Objectives of the school in relation to SEN/Inclusion
- Names of key staff (SENCo, SEN Governor et al)
- Admission arrangements
- Facilities to aid access
- Information on any kinds of provision in which the school specialises
- How SEN provision is co-ordinated
- How SEN policy and provision is evaluated
- Arrangements for complaints

Identification, assessment, provision and review arrangements

- Measures to ensure identification of needs
- Assessments used
- Support systems available and access to the curriculum
- How progress is measured and monitored
- Allocation of resources
- How pupils are integrated into the wider aspects of school life

Outside support arrangements

- Training for staff
- Input from education support services
- Links with other schools and relevant transfer arrangements
- Partnerships with parents
- Relationships with other agencies (social services and health for example)

Parents say it helps if:

- The policy is available to parents and not stored away where it is unobtainable.
- The policy is written with consideration of a parent audience as well
- The policy is photocopied free of charge to allow parents to read it at home.

13. Do you have a clear complaints procedure?

- Are all staff familiar with the procedures?
- Have Governors agreed the procedures?

Parents say it helps if:

- There are clear steps to the process.
- There are informal stages first and they do not have to go to senior management to be taken seriously.
- They know the time within which school aims to respond.

Suggested steps to consider including in a complaints procedure:

Informal stages:

1. Parent talks to class teacher or form tutor
2. Parent talks to SENCo. A plan of action is agreed with parent, class teacher, teaching assistant (where appropriate) and SENCo
3. If no agreed plan can be reached head teacher is involved and a meeting called with teaching assistant, teacher, SENCo and parent all present. Strategies are agreed and a review date set.

Formal stages:

4. If issues remain unresolved for parents they complain to the governing body in writing.
5. When no agreement can be made with school parents complain to the LEA.

A good complaints procedure would show time lines within which the school plans to respond.

The complaints procedure should be available in the school's policy for Special Education Needs.

14.Does the Governors' Annual Report to parents contain: -

- Information on the school's SEN/Inclusion policy and provision?
- General information about funding for SEN and how it is spent? (Including ASEN, MSG and standards fund monies for example)
- An update on any new developments or significant changes?
- Information on use of outside support agencies?
- Information on links with other schools or the LEA?
- Information on to what extent the school's premises are accessible?

In reporting to parents, schools must ensure that it is not possible to identify any individual children from the information provided. It is helpful for all parents to be aware of the funding for SEN in school as it helps to dispel misconceptions and prejudices.

Parents say it helps if the report contains:

- A section that has basic information.
- A section that has news and is chatty in style.
- A section that contains simple facts and figures that help explain provision and funding in school (numbers of children in school with SEN, numbers of hours of support available and a simple budget statement relating to SEN, for example).

There are a number of good audit tools available to support schools in researching parents' views. The audit sheets accompanying this guide are intended to aid schools in seeking parental views, either in written format or verbally, and can be used in part or adapted to a school's particular needs. However, schools have found that involving parents to devise a questionnaire themselves, relating to issues they feel are pertinent, produces useful and perceptive results.

**If you want to know how effectively you are
communicating.....
ask a parent!!**

Audit Tool Sheets

Supporting materials to A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

1. Communication

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>1. How do you welcome parents when they visit school?</p> <p>(Signs, reception, procedures)</p>	
<p>2. How do you let parents know who's who?</p> <p>(Roles and responsibilities)</p>	
<p>3. How easy are you to contact by telephone?</p> <p>(Response time, messages, answer phone)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>4. What opportunities do you create for informal contact with parents?</p> <p>(Drop-in time, positive contact)</p>	
<p>5. What arrangements do you make to ensure parents are aware of the needs of their child?</p> <p>(When school identifies or in response to parental concern)</p>	
<p>6. What arrangements do you make to ensure parents are aware of the provision made for their child?</p> <p>(Nature, frequency, resources)</p>	
<p>7. Are you open about funding and levels of support that are available?</p> <p>(Information for all parents)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>8. How are parents kept up to date with the level and nature of support that their child receives as he/she progresses through school?</p> <p>(Staff changes absences, new class)</p>	
<p>9. Do you think about how you present written communications?</p> <p>(Jargon, clarity, alternative format)</p>	
<p>10. When you send home letters do you:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Send it via a reliable distribution route? ● Ensure that copies are sent to parents when their child was absent? ● Pin copies to notice boards or entrance doors? ● Have copies of old communications available? 	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>11. What written information do you provide for parents about SEN issues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Standard letters ● Booklet re. SEN ● Copy of policy ● Governors' AGM ● School prospectus ● Other 	
<p>12. Is your SEN/Inclusion policy available to parents?</p> <p>(Accessible physically & in content & format)</p>	
<p>13. Do you have a clear complaints procedure?</p> <p>(Informal & formal steps, timed, agreed)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>14. Does the Governors' Annual Report to parents contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information on the school's SEN policy and provision? ● Information about funding for SEN and how it is spent? ● An update on any new developments or changes? ● Information on links with other schools or the LEA? ● Accessibility information? 	
<p>15. What systems are there for parents to express their views on procedures for special educational needs in school?</p> <p>(Via questionnaires, meeting & on key issues)</p>	

Involvement



SEN

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2. INVOLVEMENT

1. Are parents encouraged to come in during the school day?

When parents are helping in school do you:

- Explain when to arrive and how long parents can expect to be needed?
- Explain any activities clearly and how you would like these supported?
- Make sure parents know the tea and coffee arrangements and where to find adult toilets?
- Ensure that any guidelines on adults in schools are followed?

2. Are parents welcome, by arrangement, to come and take part in support sessions that their child may attend outside of class where appropriate?

- Do you ensure that arrangements are appropriate and beneficial for parents, staff and pupils, giving particular thought to confidentiality issues for other children involved?

Parents say that support sessions can seem mysterious and they would welcome an understanding of what their child does during this time.

3. Are homework tasks clear in order that parents know how to support their child?

- Do you have systems to ensure parents are aware of what homework their child has and by when it should be completed?
- Are you explicit about what degree of support you are expecting parents to provide for any particular activity?

4. Do you produce or provide clear and succinct information about how to support children at home?

- Do you have information on supporting literacy, numeracy and science activities and: -
 - Do you make use of information available from other sources (on spelling, reading and mental maths strategies for example)?
 - Do you ensure that where parents may not be able to offer support (and particularly for the range of secondary subjects) children have all the information they need to complete the assignment by themselves?

5. How do you ensure that children with special educational needs receive the appropriate amount and level of homework?

- Do support staff liaise with teaching staff when setting activities to be done at home?
- Do staff, from different departments or subject areas, liaise over frequency and quantity of activities set for pupils with SEN?
- Do staff differentiate homework tasks to ensure that they are appropriate to individual children's needs and abilities?
- Do staff present activities, and receive assignments, in different formats? (On tape, disk or pictorially for example?)

Parents say that:

- It can be de-motivating to receive homework that is at an inappropriate level for their child's needs.
- They and their child can feel overwhelmed by large amounts of homework and that it helps if activities relating to their IEP are not in addition to class activities.

6. Do you have resources available for parents to borrow to support activities at home?

- How do you ensure parents are aware of resources that are available and how they can be accessed?
- Are parents aware of how to make best use of resources available?

Some schools have enlisted the help of parents to make and put together banks of resources for parents to use at home. Resources made by parents and/or children themselves can be motivating and encourage children to take care of the materials they borrow.

7. What arrangements do you make for more formal meetings?

Do you:-

- Offer alternative times and ask when would be most convenient?
- Give parents at least two weeks notice?
- Remind parents verbally the day before if possible? (Or via the homework diary if suitable)
- Say how long the meeting is expected to last?
- Tell parents the purpose of the meeting?
- Explain who will be present and what their role is?
- Inform parents if they need to contribute a report (verbal or written) and offer support to prepare this if appropriate?

Some SENCo's arrange for a member of staff to offer to meet briefly with parents prior to a major review meeting, to make them aware of what school is likely to say and to ask if there are any issues or questions they would particularly like to raise at the meeting. This helps ensure that important issues are not left to the end of the meeting or missed completely. It also helps parents to feel more confident and better involved with school. SENCo's who have used this approach say that it is a productive use of time and that parents welcome the support.

- Offer the services of an interpreter when appropriate?
- Provide arrangements for childcare if possible?
- Do you hold meetings in an environment: -
 - Which is private?
 - Has adult seating?
 - Minimises interruptions (has a notice on the door 'meeting in progress' for example)?

8. How do you involve parents in meetings?

Parents say it helps if:

- The meeting starts on time.
- Everyone knows who is chairing the meeting.
- Everyone introduces themselves and explains their role before the meeting starts.
- Everyone gets the child's name right!
- All present agree to treat information with the appropriate level of confidentiality.
- Relevant reports are circulated before the meeting.
- Contributors have the relevant information to hand.
- Parents are asked their views and given the chance to ask questions of professionals present.
- Everyone is open, honest and sensitive about issues discussed.
 - Staff are frank about their own expertise and willing to seek advice.
 - Staff are positive, but do not try to hide or deny that a child has needs, either to the child or parent.
- Everyone uses easily understood language.
- A verbal summary is given at the close of the meeting, ending with points for action.
- Concise, clear minutes are circulated within two weeks of the meeting.
- There is an opportunity to ask further questions at a later date.

A follow up appointment is especially important when parents have been told new, major or distressing information. Schools that offer these routinely, in such circumstances, say that it is not always possible to gauge a parent's reaction at the initial meeting. Parents, who appear to have coped well, may still welcome another appointment, but may not request one unless it is offered.

- Are you able to help parents make arrangements for care of siblings or for waiting children?
- Do you provide toys for pre-school children?
- Is it possible for a member of staff to look after waiting children?

9. How are parents involved in their child's targets and IEP?

- What systems do you have for ensuring that parents are aware their child has an IEP (or other education programme)?
- Are all parents given a copy of their child's IEP?
- How are they involved in setting, supporting and reviewing targets?

Home visits at time of identification and / or first review to inform parents of systems, meet staff, and involve parents in the target setting process can be helpful. These can help build confidence and relationships with staff and lead to parents feeling more comfortable about visiting school. It can help if staff make the arrangements informally (but clearly) and explain that they are not coming to inspect the home and there is no need to tidy up!

- Are IEP's written in parent friendly formats?
- Are parents given examples of activities they can do to support the targets?
- Do you have clear routines, known to parents, for reviewing IEP's?

Parents say that:

- It helps to know when targets are likely to be reviewed (so that parents know when to expect the IEP) and: -
- For schools to send home another copy of the IEP two weeks prior to the review in order that:-
 - Parents can send in their comments, whether or not they are to attend the review.
 - Parents can prepare their contribution on progress made and appropriate next steps, ahead of the review meeting.

10. Do you actively involve parents in preparation for entry, transfer or transition?

- Do you recognise and utilise the information and expertise parents can offer when preparing to admit a child?
- Do you involve parents in preparations for a child to transfer classes or key stages once in school?
- Are parents able to meet new staff ahead of transfer to a new class or school?
- Are parents involved in deciding and arranging strategies and systems to ease entry and transfer?

11. Do you provide workshops for parents on particular issues relating to SEN?

When arranging workshops for parents do you?

- Advertise and promote the event vigorously (in writing and by personal approach)?
- Rotate the time of day that the workshop is held to enable different parents to attend?
- Ask parents on which topics they would like a workshop?
- Consider appropriate time commitments for the workshop?
- Use a suitable, relaxed venue (not always the school hall)?
- Deliver information in an interactive and practical way whenever possible?
- Provide clearly written notes on the content of the workshop for parents to take away with them?

Parents say they are more likely to attend workshops if:

- The event involves their children too.
- They are reminded of the event near to the day.
- The topic seems relevant to their child.
- Someone else that they know will also be going.
- Crèche facilities are available.
- The event is informal.

12. Do you support parents in accessing training or qualifications?

- Does your school host training for parents run by other organisations?
- Do you encourage and support parents for whom this would be relevant?
- Do you make parents aware of other training opportunities that might be of benefit to them (e.g. training available through the voluntary sector)?

Parents say they are more likely to access training if

- They are encouraged to attend by a member of staff or another parent.
- They feel it is relevant and interesting.
- It will be of benefit to themselves or their child.
- They feel they have the necessary skills to take part.
- The time commitment and practical arrangements are realistic (travel, childcare, venue, expenses etc.).

13. Do you provide opportunities for parents to be involved in developing policy and decision-making in school?

In addition to those opportunities for parent governors, are there opportunities for parental involvement in a particular area of work?

For example:

- Producing written information for parents (e.g. the school brochure, admission information, homework booklets et al).
- Policy development (in particular: behavioural, pastoral, inclusion, SEN).
- Home school agreements.
- Setting up community rooms.
- Researching parents' views.

**If you want to know how involved parents feel with school.....
ask a parent!!**

Audit Tool Sheets

2. Involvement

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>1. Are parents encouraged to come in during the school day?</p> <p>(Guidelines followed)</p>	
<p>2. Are parents welcome, by arrangement, to come and help in sessions that their child may attend outside of class where appropriate</p> <p>(Confidentiality)</p>	
<p>3. Are homework tasks clear in order that parents know how to support their child?</p> <p>(Response time, messages, answer phone)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>4. Do you produce or provide clear and succinct information about how to support children at home?</p> <p>(Arrangements for when parents unable to support)</p>	
<p>5. How do you ensure that children with special educational needs receive the appropriate amount and level of homework</p> <p>(Present & accept different formats)</p>	
<p>6. Do you have resources available for parents to borrow to support activities at home?</p> <p>(How to access & use)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>7. What arrangements do you make for more formal meetings?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer alternative times? ● Give two weeks notice? ● Remind verbally the day before? ● Say how long the meeting might last? ● Tell parents the purpose of the meeting? ● Explain who will be present and their role? ● Support parents if they need to contribute to a report? ● Offer interpretation services? ● Provide childcare? ● Hold meetings in an environment:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which is private ● Has adult seating? ● Minimises interruptions? 	
<p>8. How do you <i>involve</i> parents in meetings?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get child's name right? ● Circulate reports? ● Relevant information to hand? ● Confidentiality respected? ● Introductions made? ● Open & honest? ● Jargon free language? ● Parents' views/questions valued? ● Verbal summary + minutes? ● Follow up appointment? ● Childcare arrangements? ● Other strategies: 	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>9. How are parents involved in their child's targets and IEP?</p> <p>(Parent-friendly formats & clear routines for setting, supporting & reviewing IEP's)</p>	
<p>10. Do you actively involve parents in preparation for entry, transfer or transition?</p> <p>(Recognise & utilise parental expertise)</p>	
<p>11. Do you provide workshops for parents on particular issues relating to SEN?</p> <p>(Research topics & timing, advertise well)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>12. Do you support parents in accessing training or qualifications?</p> <p>(Raise awareness & confidence)</p>	
<p>13. Do you provide opportunities for parents to be involved in developing policy and decision-making in school?</p> <p>(Other than as parent governor)</p>	

Support

4

SEN

GUIDANCE & GOOD PRACTICE FOR SCHOOLS

3. SUPPORT

1. What information (provided by other sources) do you have available to support parents?

Do you provide:

- Information published by the LEA on SEN provision?
- Information from local Parent Partnership services?
- A copy of the Code of Practice (and summary document)?
- Copies of information for parents published by the Department for Education?
- Information about services available through Health and Social Services?
- Information about local support groups?
- Published information on voluntary organisations?
- Information about different types of special needs and disabilities?

Some schools have gathered a collection of books and leaflets about different topics relevant to parents that have been read and recommended by parents themselves.

2. What support do you offer to help parents access information?

Do you:

- Provide information on translation and interpretation services?
- Offer signed interpretation?
- Make available help with reading and writing where appropriate?
- Provide copies of your own information in community languages, large print, Braille or on tape where possible?

Parents say it helps if:

- When a parent has made known their literacy needs, a member of staff discreetly tells them the content of letters and other information sent home.
- Services are offered where appropriate without the parent having to ask on each occasion.

3. What arrangements do you make to support parents regarding the involvement of other professionals?

- Do you seek parents' permission prior to an initial referral being made?

Parents say it helps if:

- School informs parents when professionals are due to see their child.
- A meeting is offered after the appointment to discuss the outcomes with parents. This is best if with the professional concerned, but failing this a chance to discuss the outcomes with a member of staff is useful.
- Any reports are fully explained (preferably by the report writer themselves, but always with their knowledge and consent) and are written in an accessible format for parents wherever possible.

Parents recognise that it is not always possible for schools to inform them of the exact date of their child's appointment but it is usually possible to inform parents that it is imminent. Parents welcome being informed prior to the event rather than afterwards, through a homework diary.

4. How do you support parents in accessing voluntary organisations and other services?

- Are you on the mailing lists of key voluntary and statutory organisations so that you are up to date with the services they can offer?
- Do you draw the attention of parents to those organisations that may be of particular help to them?
- Do you assist parents in finding suitable recreation, play, respite and leisure services?

Did you know that the Parent Partnership Project has a website, which includes a database on organisations for parents and carers of children and young people with SEN? This can be used to search for information for parents in school. The address is: www.parentpartnership-sengroups.org.uk

5. How do you ensure that all staff are aware of the needs of children in school?

Parents say they feel better supported if:

- All staff (teaching and non teaching) are aware of their child's needs to avoid repeating information unnecessarily.
- Information is passed to new teachers at the start of the academic year.

Schools say that lunchtime staff, who have been offered training on the needs of children in their care and have a better understanding of situations that may arise, are key to successful inclusion. Some SENCo's provide talks and information on the differing needs in their school. Lunchtime staff say information on topics such as Autism, ADHD et al give them an increased understanding and enable them to care better for their pupils.

6. How do you support parents in their interactions with other parents and children?

- Do you make arrangements to inform parents and children in school about the particular needs of children with SEN (having regard to issues of confidentiality)?

Children and parents have a much better understanding if given a little knowledge about a child's needs. Parents are often willing to come in and talk directly to a class and/or other parents to explain their child's needs and how others might best support them. Schools that have tried this approach say that many common misconceptions can be avoided this way and that a culture of mutual support often results.

7. Who is available for parents to talk to?

- How do parents contact key people?
- How can parents contact the following people:
 - Teaching Assistants?
 - Head Teacher?
 - SENCo?
 - SEN Governor?
- If your head teacher is also your SENCo and perhaps also your SEN governor, do you make another member of staff available for parents to talk to if necessary?

8. Do you organise support groups?

- Have you asked parents if they would welcome the chance to attend a support group?
- Have you considered the nature of a support group that would be most suitable for the parents in your school? For example: -
- Do you provide the opportunity for parents to link with:
 - Parents of children with similar needs (e.g. ADHD)?
 - Parents of other children with similar complex needs (e.g. parents of children at stage three and above)?
 - Other parents across the family of schools?
 - Other parents living in their locality?
 - Parents from related special/mainstream schools?
 - Parents in a secondary school to which their child is transferring (particularly if this is not within the same family of schools)?

Points to consider when establishing a support group.

- 1) Consider what nature of support group would be most appropriate.
- 2) Consider whether this is to be a one off meeting, or a series of meetings, or a self-sustaining mutual support group.

- 3) Consider whether other schools could be involved (linked infant, junior, secondary or special school with parents in your area for example).
- 4) Research the views of parents about what they would welcome in the way of support groups.
- 5) Advertise the group clearly and by personal invitation if possible.
- 6) Consider appropriate timing (both in time of day and day of week). This can be a difficult issue as often there is no time that suits all; however holding the meetings at two or three of the most popular times in rotation can help.
- 7) Help with childcare needs may enable more parents to attend. Could school help provide or arrange this? Parents may be able to support each other in this if co-ordinated by school.
- 8) Parents may be able to attend if helped with transport. Can school or other parents help with this?
- 9) Consider the most appropriate venue (geographically and in nature). A family of schools establishing a support group may need to give careful thought to which school hosts meetings and be aware of any issues that may be sensitive. The most central school or a rota around schools may be most appropriate. Parents may feel more comfortable about a venue away from school. Some families of schools have arranged meetings in local restaurants with attached play facilities and have found most restaurants are pleased to offer facilities for such groups.
- 10) Ask what focus parents would like or what they wish to gain out of attending the group (a chance to air views, share concerns or give out information for example).
- 11) Be cautious about starting out by inviting speakers on particular topics. Consider how to sustain the group once the initial list of topics is exhausted.
- 12) Identify key people to involve in the group, such as the SEN governor or key parents for example.
- 13) Support any parents willing to take over the running of the group once established, in order that they feel confident to enable the group to become self-sustaining. Consider how the group will be funded. It is helpful if fund raising issues do not dominate support groups; rather they should find cost-effective ways of giving mutual support and accessing information or support from others.
- 14) Approach relevant voluntary organisations to support the group.
(See website www.parentpartnership-sengroups.org.uk)

Parents say it helps if:

- When there is a low initial turn out, follow up meetings still proceed, as groups often grow as word and interest spreads.
- The initial meetings are informal and allow a chance to chat and meet other parents. This can help to establish relationships and ensure the continuation of the group.
- During initial meetings parents are given the opportunity to discuss and influence how the group will develop.

- Information about the group continues to go to all relevant parents whether or not they attended the last meeting.
- There is a simple leaflet that is given to all new parents to let them know about the group.
- The views of parents are sought (perhaps by questionnaire) on how the group should develop (particularly on the nature of topics welcomed, timing, venue, transport and childcare issues).
- Someone talks to them directly about the group.
- Someone else they know is also going or they can bring a friend (particularly to first meetings).

9. Do you have a community room available for the use of parents?

Parents say:

- Where space is limited, access to a room where information can be displayed and that is available after school or for part of the day, is helpful.
- They may like to take part in the decoration, preparation and care of the room and that this helps them feel involved.
- Where a community room is not possible, they feel more confident if meetings are held in the same room or area each time, especially on large premises.
- A notice board, that is for use for and by parents and is in a prominent position, can help parents access supportive information more readily.

10. When making practical arrangements to include children do you recognise and consider the effects the arrangements may have on parents?

- Do you try to avoid making excessive demands on parents' time during the school day?
- Do you ask parents to undertake tasks or roles that are the responsibility of school?
- Do you expect parents to be 'on call' during the school day?
- Do you expect parents to cover for absent support staff?
- Do you ask parents to take children home at lunchtime for indefinite periods and without plans to resume lunchtime attendance?
- Where parents' time and support is required do you acknowledge the impact this has on their lives?
- Do you have respect and consideration to parents' own working lives?

11. Do you support parents in making decisions about transfer on from your school (on transfer due to moving house, transition to secondary, or in planning at year 9, for example)?

- Do you help parents explore all the possibilities open to them, without prejudice to a particular option?
- Do you help parents make initial contact with prospective schools, by providing them with the phone numbers and names of SENCo's to approach, for example (or by offering to do this with them on their behalf, if appropriate)?
- When parents would welcome and benefit from support, do you offer (if possible) to accompany them on visits, or put them in touch with others who could (e.g. Parent Partnership Project)?

Parents say it helps if:

- They are given advice on what to ask and look for when visiting potential new schools.
- They are given information on sources of advice and support about transfer issues (the Parent Partnership Project, SEN Teams, or Area Office / Admissions and Inclusion for example).
- Staff they already know introduce them to a key member of staff in the new school.
- They are involved in meetings between staff to prepare for transfer.

Schools can access a range of leaflets from the Parent Partnership Project to assist parents on transfer issues. Parents are sent a transfer to secondary pack ('From Primary to Secondary'), via school, at the end of year 5 for example, and there are leaflets available entitled 'Which School?' and 'Checklist for visiting schools'.

12. Are all staff mindful not to appear judgemental in their relationships with parents?

- Are staff aware how dis-empowering it is for parents to feel that they are being judged by professionals?
- Do staff avoid blaming parents for children's individual needs, or making judgements about the support parents are able to provide?
- Do staff approach support as overcoming school's barriers to inclusion rather than needs that must be met?

**If you want to know what support a parent would like.....
ask a parent!!**

Audit Tool Sheets

2. Support

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>1. What information (provided by other sources) do you have available to support parents?</p> <p>E.g. Information from/on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The LEA ● Parent Partnership Services ● The Code of Practice ● The DfES ● Health & Social Services ● Local Support Groups ● Voluntary Organisations ● Different needs and disabilities 	
<p>2. What support do you offer to help parents access information?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Translation & interpretation ● Signed interpretation ● Support with literacy skills ● Copies in large print, Braille, on tape, in community languages <p>(Discreet support offered)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>3. What arrangements do you make to support parents regarding the involvement of other professionals?</p> <p>(Parental permission sought and outcomes explained)</p>	
<p>4. How do you support parents in accessing voluntary organisations and other services?</p> <p>(PPP website: www.parentpartnership.org.uk)</p>	
<p>5. How do you ensure that all staff are aware of the needs of children in school?</p> <p>(Key role of mid-day staff & staff new to child)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>6. How do you support parents in their interactions with other parents and children?</p> <p>(Parents talk directly to parents & children to dispel misconceptions)</p>	
<p>7. Who is available for parents to talk to?</p> <p>(Arrangements for when SENCo is also head teacher & governor)</p>	
<p>8. Do you organise support groups?</p> <p>(Research need for & nature of group)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>9. Do you have a community room available for the use of parents?</p> <p>(Explore alternatives when limited space)</p>	
<p>10. When making practical arrangements to include children do you recognise and consider the effects the arrangements may have on parents?</p> <p>(E.g. arrangements for lunchtime, absent staff or parents 'on call'.)</p>	
<p>11. Do you support parents in making decisions about transfer on from youR school?</p> <p>(Offer open minded information & support re.options)</p>	

Current Practice	Points for Action
<p>12. Are all staff mindful not to appear judgemental in their relationships with parents?</p> <p>(Overcome school's barriers to inclusion)</p>	