

Engaging with Parents

...it is in the child's best interests for a positive dialogue between parents, teachers and others to be maintained...¹



What does the Code say²?

- There is a new focus on parental and family involvement.
- Local authorities **must** have regard to:
 - The views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents.
 - The importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.
- Approaches should be much more family-centred with family needs driving training requirements. The Code calls for a localised approach to workforce development.
- Services need to collect evidence of the child or young person's outcomes that can be shared with parents.

Research snapshot...

Studies over the past 20 years have highlighted that substantial numbers of families have reported a 'constant battle' with the multiplicity of agencies and professionals involved, the lack of co-ordination between different agencies and the burden of multiple contacts.³



What are the Key Issues for SLCN?

- In general, the pathfinder areas found from their work that different ways of working are called for. This is likely to mean in the first instance that settings and local authorities need to ensure parents are aware of the importance of their role in the reforms. It will require settings to ask parents to consider in preparation for meetings, what is going well for their child right now, and what could be better.
- The children's workforce need skills around working with parents of children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), such as active listening and person-centred planning – to draw out what outcomes are valued by parents and families, and how these can be incorporated into targets for the setting.
- Priorities for parents of children and young people with SLCN include key people in their child's life to become more knowledgeable, tolerant and supportive of their child's needs⁴, which again is likely to require a focus on ongoing workforce development.
- Parents of children and young people with SLCN value outcomes related to increased independence and inclusion of their children and recognise the vital role that communication skills play in the achievement of these skills. It will be important for practitioners to show parents how small steps will lead to these longer term outcomes.

A little more about...

In September 2011 the government appointed 20 pathfinder sites to test out the ideas in the original SEND green paper. These sites, made up of 31 local authorities, were tasked to develop and trial: an integrated assessment process; a single, joined up 'Education, Health and Care Plan'; and personal budgets across education, social care and health, and adult services as appropriate for children and young people from birth to 25 years.

- There may be a range of obstacles to achieving parental engagement: some parents may have specific needs themselves, including SLCN, and may need personalised approaches to access information, and to make choices to do with their child. Some parents may find the process daunting. Settings need to identify obstacles and how to overcome them.
- Different approaches and levels of support for parents may be required at different points in the child or young person's educational journey.
- Meaningful engagement with parents and families takes time and energy and this needs to be factored into a setting's approach.
- Staff may be unfamiliar or unconfident in using approaches such as person-centred planning, particularly in relation to SLCN.
- Parents may be at different stages in their understanding or acceptance of their child's SLCN, which requires sensitive and responsive support from staff.

For example...

Parents are likely to require most support during times of transition: such as when difficulties are first identified; from nursery/childminder to reception; on entry into school; during the development of an EHC plan if this is required; and on transition out of school. Settings need to consider these transitions and arrangements they have in place in terms of supporting parents.



What are the Key Strategies for SLCN?

There are a number of general strategies for supporting practitioners to work effectively with parents of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This may include: recognising the importance of support at home, skill-sharing with parents and effective key-working. There is more information about these generic approaches available on the [TCT website](#).

More specifically in relation to SLCN:

- Staff need to be skilful in **identifying where parents are in terms of their understanding and acceptance of their child's SLCN** as this is pivotal to effective engagement with parents. This can be a very emotional journey, and it is important that parents have the opportunity to discuss their feelings and explore their thoughts about their child and his/her future. Some parents will need more support from settings than others, which has time implications for the setting. Involving specialists, such as Speech and Language Therapists to help with this and ensure a shared understanding may be very important.
- There is often a lot of jargon associated with SLCN. Practitioners need to **ensure that information and discussions are clear and jargon free**.
- Settings should work out the **approaches to supporting a child's SLCN that will work best for their parents**. there should be flexibility according to what parents need. This is likely to vary between parents and also change over time.
- Staff may require **training on person-centred planning approaches** for children and young people with SLCN, and how to effectively engage with parents. A number of additional resources can be found at [LINK](#)

For example...

Approaches may include workshops on aspects of communication, home visits to meet with parents, meetings focusing on communication, inviting parents to training, and setting up good methods of sharing information such as home-setting books or regular phone calls.

A little more about...

Engagement means to involve people in a way that makes them know their contributions are valued. **Participation** means being part of the decision-making process and actively influencing change. The Reforms call for parental participation which means families need to see themselves as integral to the support around their child, and also sharing responsibility for decision-making.⁵

Research snapshot...

Pathfinder areas have emphasised the need for a blending of skill-sets: that all staff working with families with SEN or disabilities need the knowledge, understanding and skills to provide effective support during the planning and delivery process, and that in this process there is likely to be some blurring of professional roles.

What does success look like?



From the parent's perspective:

- The people who support my child know him or her well. I feel that they like my child and want the best for him/her. I feel they are knowledgeable, tolerant and supportive of my child; understand what interests him/her and what is important to my child.
- I contribute to decisions about my child – through reviews and also the partnership I have with the setting my child is in.
- I am informed of choices for my child, and am supported in understanding the choices.
- My child has targets around increasing his/her independence and communication skills that we can also focus on at home.
- My child's education and experience reflects what matters to them – it is personalised.



References



1. SEND Code of Practice Section:1.7
2. This section references the SEND Code of Practice: Chapter 1, section 1.1
3. Sloper, P. (1999) *Models of service support for parents of disabled children: What do we know? What do we need to know?* Child: Care, Health and Development, 25, 85-99.
4. *The perspectives of children and young people*, The Better Communication Research Programme
5. NNPCF, Contact a family and pathfinder champions co-production workshop materials; *Engagement and participation of children, young people, parents and carers – version 5*, October 2014, Appendix 5



There is a wide range of other guidance available to help practitioners deliver the Reforms which Communicating the Code seeks to add to rather than duplicate. Follow [this link](#) to find additional resources and support and [this link](#) to see examples of good practice and case studies relating to the Code of Practice.

This document can also be downloaded from our website at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk
