



SNJ response to the SEND Accountability consultation January 2016

Proposal 1:

The SEND inspection also needs to examine the number of applications for a statutory assessment of SEN, how long it took to carry out the assessment and the quality of information provided to help parents submit their application so it contains sufficient information.

LAs are known to reject strong applications that are then overturned at appeal or they are forced to back down before an appeal is heard. This happened to both of my sons. The information I applied with - more than 20 pages of evidence in each case - was initially rejected for assessment, then after I lodged an appeal, the LA agreed to assess and my boys got statements with exactly the same evidence. If this was good enough to get a statement, it should have been good enough to get the assessment without having to appeal. This is an LA tactic - turn down as many applications for statutory assessment as possible because they know only a small percentage will appeal as many families do not feel confident to appeal or they just accept an LA's (often erroneous) decision.

Parents do not, by and large, apply for statutory assessments lightly, without believing they have exhausted every kind of support available at lower levels of SEND.

It is VITAL that the SEND inspection looks at this first stage of a statutory assessment process, both the percentages of those accepted or turned down for SA and the applications themselves of those rejected (to see why they were turned down), as a part of the accountability process. This is because unless those applications that were rejected as well as accepted are examined, this widespread LA practice of turning down far too many initial applications will continue and parents will have little faith in the honesty of LAs.

Additionally, how well agencies are working together to identify children with SEND should be looked at. Often an early port of call is the GP in case a condition such as ASD or ADHD is suspected. However, parents are sometimes left out of the loop of referral letters and are not asked if they would like the school to receive copies as well, as they are a vital component of keeping everyone involved. Often the school is sceptical of a parent's concerns and are not informed

that a GP has decided to refer them on. So, an inspection should include how well schools/early years/health visitors are working with parents and medical professionals. Parents should be asked if they feel that their concerns were taken seriously and if they feel their views are being listened to - this is important for gauging how well culture change is progressing.

Proposal 2

Inspectors will evaluate how effectively the local area meets the needs and improves the outcomes of disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs.

An important aspect here is the quality of information provided to families - not just what is available but how to apply for it and the format and availability of the information. Many families miss out on help because they just don't know about it. Schools, early years and colleges play a vital role here in disseminating information and LAs need to ensure that they have provided this information in a suitable format - a school can't pass on what it doesn't know about or understands.

Parents should be asked if they are able to access the provision that exists. For example, the type of provision available and where it is located within an LA should also be evaluated. In a big county like ours, provision may be available at one end of the county but not at the other, so families without transport cannot use it unless transport is provided. Additionally, for respite, criteria for access are set too high (or only for certain age groups) or staff have the wrong information about who is eligible.

Staff are also sometimes working in silos and not communicating with each other and all too often want to push children elsewhere to protect their budgets. This ends up with parents being sent from department to department with no one accepting responsibility or offering help.

In our transfer to EHCP, I sought access to transport for my disabled 16-year-old. I was told as it was "post-16" (which there should no longer be in a 0-25 system), I had to go to SEN transport myself, who would then decide whether my son was eligible. These are not people with any medical or SEN qualification to make such a judgement - they should just be told that this child needs transport, please arrange it. I shouldn't have to justify it to them myself in a joined up process! Because I am aware of the law and I have contacts in the LA, this was set right, but I fear for families who do not have this advantage. The system shouldn't only work for people who have the ability to challenge what they are told.

In evaluating whether "outcomes" have been improved, it is vital that the definition of "outcome" is understood by everyone involved with a child. For children with

ASD, it is not just an academic outcome, but achieving an understanding of social skills and how to use them that is important. If children like this are in mainstream provision, LAs should be able to demonstrate how these "soft" skills can be achieved and maintained through transition to FE and on to university where they will be needed. This is a difficult area to assess, so the SEND inspectors must find a way to adequately evaluate this.

We hope that access criteria for all SEND services can come under scrutiny. Parents from various LAs say they have been told that children with ASD do not qualify for disabled children services such as direct payments.

Parents will also want to know what will happen to LAs who fail inspections. How will families seek redress if their child has missed out on important help because their application was unfairly turned down or their school did not provide the right help?

How can parents complain about poor services to LAs should also be considered. If an application for an EHCP is going too slowly or an LA staff member is being obstructive or has knowledge gaps, we think it is important for LAs to have a "troubleshooting hotline" where an issue can be quickly looked at by someone senior. Parents don't have time to wait for an arduous complaints system when they need something sorted out immediately. Quite often a service like this could make all the difference to getting timely help and to parent satisfaction. We think it should be recommended as good practice by the CQC/Ofsted or the DfE when giving advice to LAs about improving their services.

Proposal 3:

A wide range of information will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of local area arrangements to identify disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs; and to meet their needs and improve their outcomes.

It would be useful to know what is meant by "a wide range of information" because sources of information locally differ so the collection of information would need to differ for each local area. Additionally, we often find that parents learn far more about how to seek help themselves for their child's SEN from national websites such as ours than they do from local authorities or schools. This means they may end up getting the help but not because the local area provided the necessary help to start off with.

Looking at statistics is good, but often the stories behind the stats are much more illuminating. For example, a Local Offer site might look nice but not contain sufficient useful information or be difficult to navigate or lack feedback capabilities.

How are LAs getting feedback from young people with SEND? Is there a flow of information from a wide range of SEND students in FE (possibly in a college that is in a neighbouring county) via learning support back to the LA or direct from the students?

How does the flow of information follow the child from the early stage of health visitors through to early years and beyond and back to the LA for evaluation? Again this isn't just hard figures but views and opinions - what is an LAs method for securing this feedback?

How well is the local Parent Carer Forum is being supported in getting information out to parents should also be evaluated. PCFs receive £15k a year from the government for strategic involvement and providing information and training for families with SEND. Are LAs working closely with the PCFs in a cooperative way to co-produce resources for families? How well is this being done as part of the flow of information?

How well is the IASS working within this to provide local information to signpost parents?

Proposal 4

A wide range of ways will be used during the inspection to obtain the views of disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs, and their parents and carers.

Are there any other ways by which we could ensure that the voice of children and young people, parents and carers are fed into these inspections?

In the past I have found that my own sons have not been interested in taking part in and kind of 'focus group' and I am sure many are like that, so some ingenuity will be needed!

One idea could be using interactive animation in an app that walks a young person through scenarios that could reveal their thoughts. This could be useful but would take considerable care to create.

One possible problem could be ensuring that schools send requests for feedback to every parent of a child with SEND, including the ones who are likely to make negative comments.

Additionally, some parent carer support groups rely heavily on closed Facebook groups to pass on information, rather than use email newsletters, so many parents do not receive the information.

For parents, using a wide range of media and of course, asking popular SEND websites like ours, www.specialneedsjungle.com that also have large social media followings to help get the word out would be helpful. We would be happy to consider hosting a SEND inspection page that is updated to list the areas that are currently being inspected with links to the relevant feedback pages. This would mean that Ofsted would need to work with us to ensure that information is online at the right time. Contact us at Tania@specialneedsjungle.com