

Newcastle Parent Partnership Service



A review 2011-12

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Introduction

A new Advisory Group for the Parent Partnership Service has been established this year. One of the priorities identified by the group is to raise awareness of the service. This is something parents have also highlighted as a priority. As a result, the Parent Partnership Officer and the Family Support Manager who provides line management for the service have written this review of the work which the service has carried out over the last year.

The aim of the review is to give the following information

- What the service is for and what it does
- Reflections of the people who work for the service
- What data there is about the service
- Views of the parents and carers who use the service
- How other professionals rate the service
- Examples of difficult situations and good practice
- Key issues for the service
- What learning there is from the work of the service and what challenges arise from that learning.

This is not a formal evaluation but the intention is that it will give a sense of the achievement of the service.

The review has been written informally so that it is accessible to all of those who have an interest in the service.

The world of Special Educational Needs is very complex; in this overview we will try and present information in a way that doesn't require any specialist knowledge so it should make sense to you whether you are a parent or a professional, whether you work for

- a school
- the local authority
- the health service or
- a voluntary organisation.

What does the parent partnership service do?

People often say, “Oh yes, I’ve heard of parent partnership” – but what have they heard? What do they know about the service?

Whatever **you** know, this is a chance to know a little bit more, based on the reflections of those who use the service, volunteer for the service and work for the service.

Aim of the service

The aim of parent partnership services is to ensure parents of children with additional needs – including the very young – have access to information, advice and guidance in relation to the special educational needs of their children so they can make appropriate, informed decisions.

Local Authorities pay for the service and it is free for parents and carers to use.

Parents choose whether or not to use the service – they contact us not the other way round.

The service is confidential and impartial.

The service responds to a wide range of issues

- Breakdown of communication
- Breakdown of trust
- Needs not being met
- Part-time timetables
- Provision at risk of breaking down
- Assessment of need
- Behaviour management
- Youngsters out of school
- Placement
- Exclusions
- Lack of special educational needs paperwork
- Poor understanding of procedures
- Breach of equalities legislation.

The parent partnership service currently contributes to a variety of training opportunities for parents, including those whose children have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The parent partnership officer speaks to parent groups, team meetings and at conferences, to parents and to professionals.

Who delivers the parent partnership service?

In Newcastle the service is located at Disability North and consists of

- one full time worker, with previous experience of working with children and young people with special educational needs;
- one part-time administrator and
- two volunteers giving a few hours a week when required.

The parent partnership service in Newcastle does not work in isolation. Each local authority has its own service and they are all overseen and supported by a **national co-ordinator** at the National Children's Bureau.

The national parent partnership co-ordinator

- liaises with government, in particular the Department of Education
- hosts an e-forum for all parent partnership staff
- gathers and publishes benchmarking data for each service
- provides training on the law, mediation skills and regular updates on SEN policy and practice.

There is also an **Advisory Group** overseeing the work of this service. So that we can be sure that the service keeps the needs of parents using the service at the heart of the work, there are two parents on this group as well as the volunteers who work for the service.

The Advisory Group meets each term to consider developments that affect the service and members sit on three working groups looking specifically at

- Managing performance and disseminating good practice
- Developing local policy
- Collaborative working and awareness raising.

This is a list of the people who make up the Advisory Group and what their role is.

- **Di Robertson** - Line manager for the parent partnership officer.
- **Annie Walker** - SENCO at Hotspur Primary School.
- **Steve Brown** - Volunteer independent parental supporter.
- **Emily Neal** - Parent.
- **Jill Gregory** - Volunteer independent parental supporter.
- **Christine Cardose** - Specialist nurse for children and young people with mental health issues.
- **Alison Stanners** - Parent.
- **Caroline Grayson** - Community Paediatrician.
- **Alan Carrick** - Adviser SEN Provision and Monitoring.
- **Sheila Kingsland** - Advisory teacher for special educational needs.
- **Judith Lane** - Parent partnership officer.

Thoughts of the volunteers

The volunteers who work for the service recorded what working for the service means for them.

“Being called upon to go to meetings with parents may happen at short notice, or may be planned well in advance, as a follow up. An initial phone call to the parents is really important: in connecting with them, finding out about their child and what they hope to achieve from the meeting. The main tasks then include taking detailed and legible notes as well as contributing to the meeting (continually using eye to eye contact to assess if the parents’ wishes/hopes are being met). This may mean asking a few pertinent questions for example, to clarify or add to action points.

The challenges for me personally have been: firstly, to relinquish my former professional role, especially important when meeting with former colleagues; and secondly to ensure that the report for parents conveys all that was said, with due clarity and positivity.”

“I guess I chose to do voluntary work for parent partnership for several reasons. After retiring from my professional role in education, I wanted to put the knowledge and skills I had accumulated to good use and working with parents seemed a good way of doing this. Parents and carers often have to cope with lots of different professionals becoming involved in their family’s lives when their child or children have additional needs. Consequently they have to listen and take in input from a number of sources, particularly when they attend meetings in schools, which can be a pretty overwhelming experience. I like to think that sometimes my being there in a voluntary capacity can help, even if it’s to reassure that person that there’s someone there for them. Also in a teeny, tiny way I want to contribute to making the education system an even more inclusive process than it is.”

Who does the parent partnership service work with?

Last year the service...

Worked with **227** parents and carers who needed the service to attend meetings with them, or to work with them to arrive at decisions or to resolve differences with schools or the local authority or to make their views known.

It supported other organisations to work with a further **135** families by providing them with information, advice and guidance

It managed to answer queries for a further **193** parents and carers who didn't need anything more than that.

Worked with **78** schools and more than a dozen preschool settings.

There were **19** different secondary schools both in Newcastle and in

neighbouring authorities, **46** primary schools **11** special

schools and **10** additionally resourced centres.

In doing so, the parent partnership officer travelled

exactly **1,300** miles to attend meetings.

Is the parent partnership service good value for money?

This section will look at the cost and effectiveness of the service.

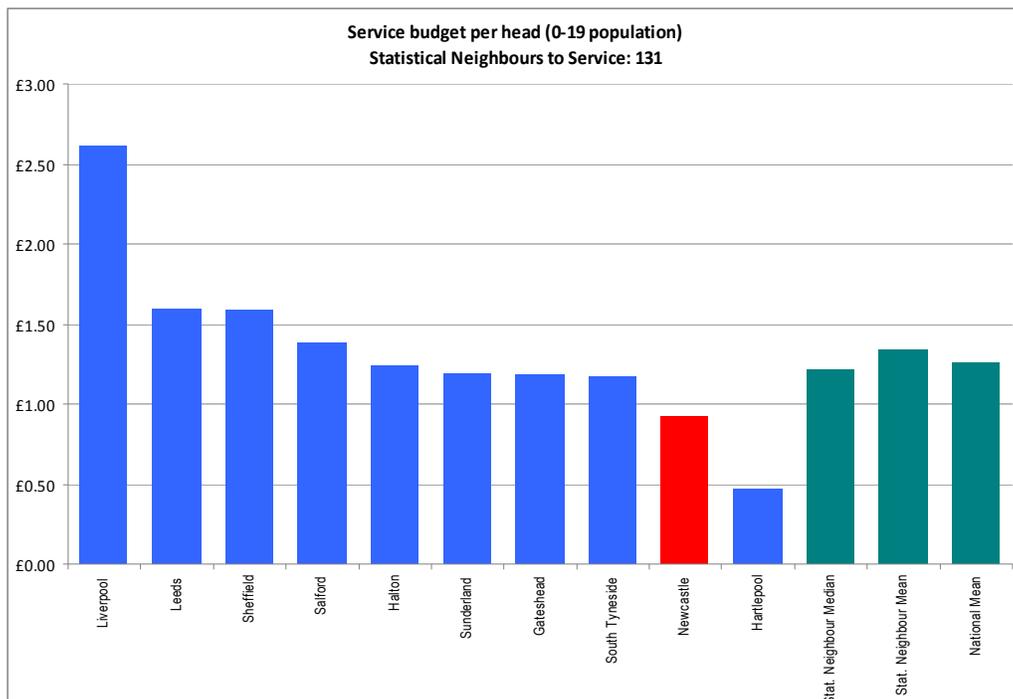
Firstly, how much does the service cost to run. There is some nationally gathered information which lets us see how spending on the service in Newcastle to spending on parent partnership services in areas similar to Newcastle. The National Parent Partnership Network collects this information about each service every year as part of their benchmarking exercise.

Secondly, what the people who have used the service have to say about it, how useful they found it, how they felt about the quality of service they had had and whether they would recommend the service to other people.

Finally, what other professionals say about the service.

How much does the service cost?

Newcastle spends just under £1 for every young person up to the ages of 19 living in Newcastle so that those people needing to use this service can do so without charge. Only one of the local authorities similar to Newcastle spends less than this to provide a service, one local authority spends more than £2.50 for every young person up to the age of 19.



What do parents and carers say about the service?

“We want you to know that your help, hard work, encouragement, support and management of our difficult situation are extremely appreciated.”

When this family first contacted the parent partnership service their daughter never left the house unaccompanied, was school phobic and hadn't accessed education for six months, she now attends a mainstream school.

“We have so much to thank you for - your incredible support has been invaluable to us.

You have known exactly who to put us in touch with to get the help we have needed every step of the way.”

This young person was struggling to access his mainstream school, neither he nor his family were accessing any support.

His needs have now been assessed and he is doing well at school. His family have had support from health and social care as well as specialist educational services.

“Just a little note to say a huge thanks to you and the parent partnership for all your help with’s change of placement.

It continues to be a resounding success and she is a lot happier now, both at school and at home! I don't think it would have happened without your input.”

This young person was attending a mainstream secondary school; she was becoming increasingly socially isolated.

She transferred to a maintained secondary special school, where she is flourishing.

Parents are great at saying how much they appreciate a service, but they know better than anyone what the services' limitations are too.

"The service try their best but they are stretched and therefore unable to hand hold or spend hours reading reports so I have still had to cover my own ground work independently, which is exhausting and extremely time consuming. A 1:1 worker would be an 'ideal' but that's a wish away.

Parent partnership helped to confirm many of my fears but also gave me a glimpse at what light may be at the end of the tunnel. It's great to have them at the end of the phone and the advice that is given out is accurate. You don't need to hear good things when you know what the reality is and I think the honesty is one of their best qualities."

This comes from the parent of a young man with autism who has struggled in a number of settings.

This is from the parent of a little girl with complex needs.

"I have used the Parent Partnership several times and have found it a great help in prompting school to listen to my requests about my daughter's education; and in translating some of the language used by professionals into words I understand. However there are limits to what the partnership can achieve, and I know that I will still need to keep challenging the school, despite the parent partnership officer's contribution."

"Thank you so much for all the support you have given us over the years. At times we have not known where to turn and sometimes felt on our own, as people do when they have a child who needs extra care and attention,

Thankfully you were there to help us, to arm us with the information that we needed at times to help our son achieve what is rightfully his – an education!

What do professionals say?

An informal survey has been carried out with stakeholders including, educational psychologists, head teachers, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), voluntary sector partners, family support workers, social workers, early years professionals, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists.

Twenty five questionnaires were completed; everyone asked had heard of the parent partnership service and the majority had a good understanding of what the service does because they had experienced the service supporting the parents and carers they have worked with.

Professionals responded to questions on the impact of the service on the outcomes for children and young people and families, on the accessibility of the service and on the quality of the multiagency working. They were also invited to make suggestions for improvements to the service.

These are some of their comments...

“The parent had initially been upset and seemed fearful. She seemed reassured and much happier after a meeting in which the PPO had played an important part.”

“One of our families who were disgruntled about the school’s support for their son has reported that since they received the parent partnership officer’s support they are now more aware of statutory policies and what their rights are.”

“I attended a review meeting that was “difficult” with conflicting views and information, the parent partnership professional was extremely supportive and facilitated an agreed way forward.”

“I feel the service is invaluable to help parents/carers make their way through the SEN system, support their decision making and help them have their say in the process.”

“I find the service accessible but some parents are not informed that the service exists when their child is on the SEN register.”

“Parents often give anecdotal evidence of the differences the parent partnership officer has made to their children and encourage other parents in the group to contact her – needs very little advertising from us!”

“Personally the parent partnership officer has helped increase my knowledge of SEN and therefore my ability to support parents I come into contact with.”

“I have also telephoned the parent partnership officer for professional advice around SEN to ensure that the children and families I am working with are supported.”

“Sometimes it is the first time a parent feels they have been listened to.”

And their suggestions for improvements to the service...

“A safeguarding of current resources or increase if possible. Given the forthcoming changes in SEN systems parents will need continued access to advice and support.”

“I have not seen any literature or promotion of the service. Also I do not know how referrals to the service are made.”

“More parent partnership hours should be available as sometimes parents cannot get support at a meeting.”

“I feel it may be useful for more parents to be aware of the parent partnership service as early as possible.”

Case Studies

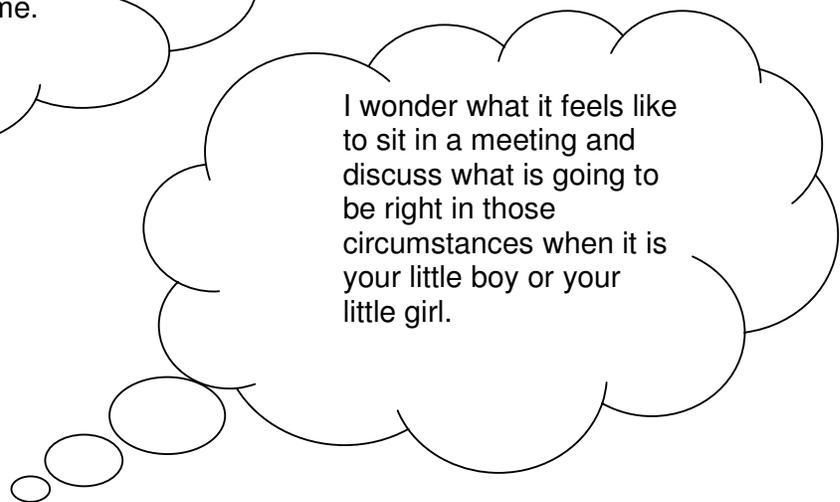
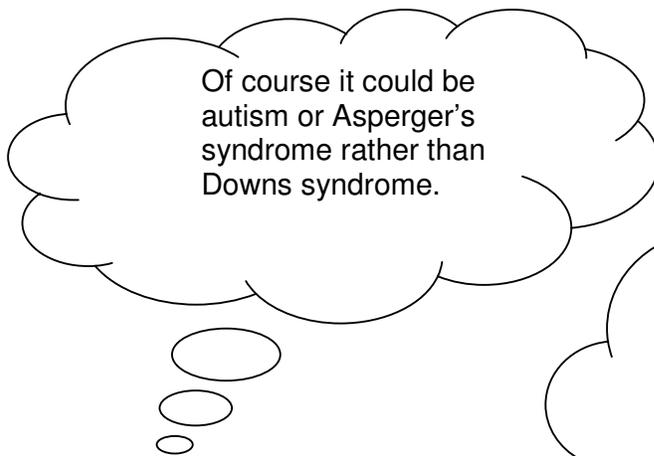
This section will look at three different case studies, they are examples of families who have used the service and they describe some of the issues that were facing the families and their children. We have put examples in so that you can read about real things happening to real people. The final example is one where professionals and parents have worked together on behalf of the child.

Case Study One

“Where should my child go to school?”

This young person is a very young person, with Downs Syndrome. The family have had a really good experience at their local primary school. Whilst the school love this young person and have seen them grow and develop, the staff have concerns about whether they are the best place to meet this young person’s academic and social needs.

The family would like their child to be part of the local community, they value the work that school are doing but understand the limitations of a mainstream school setting and the growing ‘gap’ between what their child will achieve and what others are achieving. They also know that there is a highly regarded special school that is confident that they can meet this child’s social, emotional and academic needs in a small protected environment.

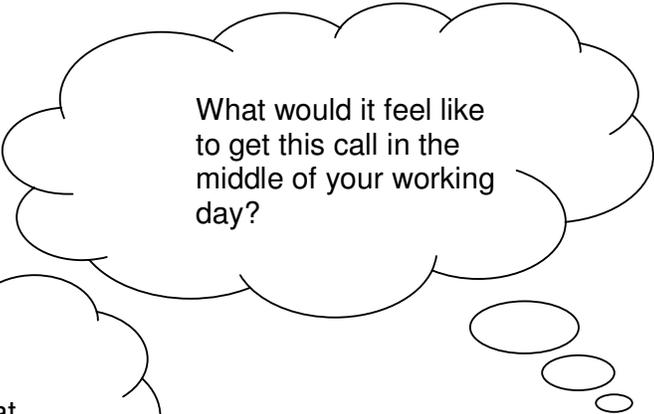


Case study two “Is this inevitable?”

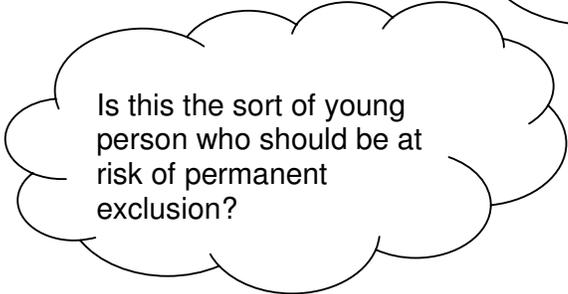
This young person is in his teens, he has always found it difficult to concentrate, fidgets all the time, gets his ‘b’s and ‘d’s mixed up, is disorganised, and acts without thinking. With the onset of adolescence he has developed a strong sense of justice. His ‘persistent low level disruption’ has earned him regular detentions and recently a couple of exclusions.

Then a phone rings in class, he is rummaging in his coat pocket for something at the time and the teacher tells him to leave his phone alone. He is quick to point out that he hasn’t touched his phone – he was looking for his pen. He is reminded how much trouble he has been in recently and told that he shouldn’t be answering back. He points out that he hadn’t done anything wrong. The teacher needs to get on with the lesson, and resolves the situation by sending him out of the classroom to cool down.

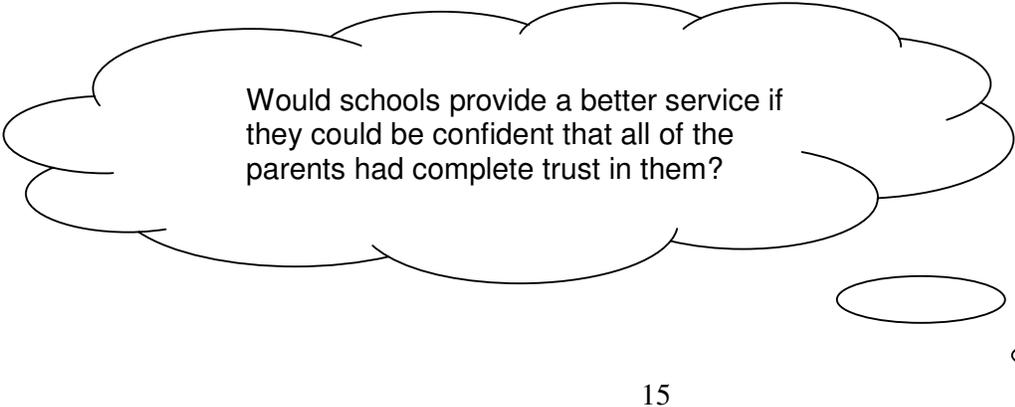
He is seen by a senior manager, who rings his parents, explaining that this sort of thing is happening repeatedly, the head will have no alternative but to exclude him for 10 days this time – it’s all in the school’s behaviour policy – you need to come and pick him up – now – he should have realised by now that he just can’t carry on like this, if he’s not careful he will end up being permanently excluded.



What would it feel like to get this call in the middle of your working day?



Is this the sort of young person who should be at risk of permanent exclusion?



Would schools provide a better service if they could be confident that all of the parents had complete trust in them?

Case study three

“What does inclusive education look like?”

Children with additional needs provide a challenge that can give rise to some really good practice.

This young person has complex needs and is deaf. His mum contacted the service in December 2005 when he was at a private nursery, she found the service through the website when she was looking for information about sign bilingual provision. His first language is British Sign Language (BSL). His parents stressed his need for a translator to work with him so that he can access and understand in a learning environment.

He has had inclusive and appropriate provision as a result of numerous meetings involving grass roots workers and senior managers, each contributing their expertise and understanding. A team soon evolved, it included his mum, his dad, his twin sister, the nursery Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO), the nursery key worker, the learning support assistant (LSA) who is hearing impaired and fluent in BSL, the BSL translator for the LSA, the teacher for the deaf, the educational psychologist, the head of the sensory impaired service, the area SENCO for pre-school children and the parent partnership service, not including the medical professionals.

Over the years the nursery has been replaced by a primary school and a specialist teacher for the visually impaired and a social worker are now part of the team as well as even more medics. Good communication, a high level of respect for the expertise and knowledge of others in the team and open-minded, solution-focussed problem solving attitudes have ensured that this young person has been included in the life of the school he attends, despite changes to his diagnosis, the demands of the curriculum and staff absences.

The primary school continue to provide a high level of resource, fulltime BSL support assistant cover, full time translation for that person, specialist input from a teacher of the deaf on a weekly basis. They have created an inclusive environment not just allowing someone with different needs into their school or setting but continuing to learn as they go along.

Conclusion

Some learning points from the case studies

- **Partnership**
Solutions to even the most unusual and unexpected problems can be found when everyone is prepared to get round a table to talk and listen and to learn; even when this is very difficult.
- **Communication**
Parents and schools can communicate respectfully and listen to each others' concerns then plan a way forward. Outcomes for children and young people improve when this happens.
- **Flexibility**
When something hasn't worked schools can listen to everyone's opinion and then try something else and get good results.
- **Commitment**
If everyone involved is determined to get it right for a child or young person and to be inclusive then it is possible to make a difference.
- **Reward**
Schools and parents working together can ensure that children and young people flourish and schools with an inclusive attitude towards children and young people with Special Educational Needs can be enriched by their presence.

Still more to learn and questions to ask

- How do we ensure that the voices of parents and children are listened to and responded to by schools, the local authority and the government so that we respond to the needs of all?
- What can the parent partnership service do to help this to happen?
- How can we reduce the number of young people with autism or Asperger's syndrome struggling socially at a mainstream school?
- How can this Local Authority provide enough spaces for all the children and young people who need to be in specialist provision?

Can you imagine a system where it was possible for all children to be learning in a school where they can really flourish?

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