

Written evidence from Anonymous (SEN 53)

Education Committee Solving the SEND Crisis

There is no need to describe again the SEN crisis. The evidence is all there. How to solve the issue? First and foremost address these points:

Separation of roles of SEN assessor, decision maker, funder, provider and policing:

There is a fundamental conflict of interest in the system. The roles of SEN assessor, decision maker, funder, provider and policing of SEN support must be separated. Local Authorities do not have the funds to deliver what SEN children are entitled to. As a result LAs:

- Refuse to assess, when clearly there is a need;
- Under assess, determining less support is needed than reality dictates, as they do not have the funding to provide support;
- Offer 'all pants, no trousers' EHCPs which containing statements like 'opportunities for...', 'inclusion in...', and 'access to'. Nothing is quantified or specified, meaning parents cannot enforce provision, and adequate funding for additional therapeutic services isn't given to schools.
- Try to cut provision at every Annual Review, regardless of whether there is evidence or not for this being appropriate.
- Use the SENDIST appeal process as a cash saving tool. For the duration of the appeal the services do not need to be provided, saving LAs funds. The LA in turn concedes the appeals days before the hearing, saving court costs and another loss on their records. We experienced this four times: Refusal to Assess, Note in Lieu (of Statement, prior to EHCP system); Content of the Statement. Again, we had to appeal during secondary transfer of EHCP.

Currently 98.7% of SENDIST tribunal are LOST by LAs showing the exact nature of the problem.

SEN funding must be separated from roles of SEN assessor, decision maker and provider. Central Government must provide the funding for SEN direct via a specialist body. It is not appropriate for this to be done via LAs if they are to continue acting as assessor, decision maker and provider.

In addition, a separate body is needed for policing of EHCP implementation. We were told we must apply for Judicial Review when it became apparent what was included in our sons EHCP was not being provided by the school. This takes vast resources and time, and isn't efficient for anyone. A separate system is needed.

Inclusion does not work for many:

Currently vast numbers of neurodiverse children are not in education, because they cannot cope with the mainstream environment. Schools and classes are of a size which result in social and sensory overwhelm causing extreme anxiety and trauma. It is the classic case of fitting a square peg into a round hole.

For inclusion to work, a number of changes are needed:

- Small schools where everyone knows each other individually and can build a relationship and trust between all those present.
- Small classes, with low arousal environment for those with sensory processing difficulties.
- All staff must be trained in SEN (ALL STAFF – admin, support, playground, everyone).
- SEN children should not be made to feel different each and every day. Learning Support Assistants, in form of 1-2-1s, further differentiate pupils from others causing additional stress.

Indeed, forcing neurodiverse children into mainstream schools is not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. The DDA requires reasonable adjustments to be made. A mainstream school environment in itself is a barrier for many neurodiverse students due: large size causing sensory overwhelm; social complexities of having many hundreds of pupils present, causing extreme anxiety; lack of training and understanding resulting in triggering behaviours from many staff (examples of staff behaviours my son experienced include: 'don't be a baby' when experiencing autistic meltdown; 'look me in the eye when I'm talking to you' from the head teacher during behaviour discussions).

More Specialist Schools for those who cannot cope with mainstream.

It has been mentioned by government some independent schools make excessive profits. While this may be the case in some instances, it's not always. Our son attends a Specialist Mainstream School for boys with SpLD. When gathering evidence for our SENDIST Tribunal hearing (Secondary Transfer stage), we looked at all the financial data. Indeed, placing our son at More House School, Frensham, Surrey, COST LESS than placing him at the local secondary with his banding of EHCP. We have looked at the school's financial data (on Companies House etc) and it is all reasonable.

My greatest wish is all LAs offered schools like this. More House is a model school I would encourage anyone working on SEN policy to visit.

My son arrived having not written a word in a school book for a number of terms. He was anxious, angry, regularly having to be removed from class (often involving restraint), the class was regularly having to be evacuated due to his meltdowns, he hated school, didn't want to attend, had no friends, and it was horrifically stressful for the whole family.

Within a year of arriving at More House my son was getting prizes for excellent behaviour, was a model pupil, and thriving academically. All at the same cost as local mainstream provision for his band of EHCP.

How does More House manage this?

- There are no 1-2-1 LSAs. Instead, small classes in a low arousal environment.
- There is no individual therapy (SALT, OT, Learning Support etc). All children have the Learning Development Centre as part of their timetable, and receive therapeutic support in small groups (minimum two, maximum four). No one is differentiated, while economies of scale apply.
- Everyone has a SpLD. On arrival my son immediately felt comfortable and like he had 'found his tribe'. The result, less anxiety, happier students, less resources needed for behaviour management.
- School behaviour policy is very clear and designed with the neurodiverse in mind. When a child faces a consequence for actions, they also get therapeutic support from on site specialists, and guidance from all staff to help address the underlying causes of the behaviour. This ensures reduction of poor behaviour in the long-term, as well as helping students improve their coping mechanisms in a constructive way.
- All staff (from groundsmen to the head teacher) understand neurodiversity. Everyone is accepted, and when things do go wrong a coordinated approach can take place involving the whole school staff. In other words there is consistency and continuity in support provided across every element of the school environment.

Pushing many neurodiverse SEN students into mainstream schools, is non-compliant with the DDA. It is impossible for such students to access the national curriculum when in an environment full of barriers due to their disability. The result, they are denied the education they are entitled to.

There are a number of independent schools likely to face financial trouble in the near future, and close down. Can I suggest the government considers buying these, and setting up schools such as More House in Frensham? Currently the vast majority of More House pupils are funded via EHCPs. Surely it would make a lot more sense for these to be government owned schools, rather than LAs paying private enterprises?

Academies

We have not experienced Academy Schools, and have avoided like the plague. Why? They are not answerable to LAs, meaning they're the wild west when it comes to SEN provision. Accountability must be addressed here.

National Curriculum

The National Curriculum has not changed much in decades. It is too broad, based on outdated ideas and failed to keep up with technology. For example, endless spelling tests? Today we rarely write with pen and paper and spell checks, auto corrects are available almost everywhere. For the dyslexic students this achieves little but making them feel like failures, who dislike school. To ensure a love of learning, get them involved in IT and tools to support them and let their strengths shine? Dictate, read-back and other such tools are fantastic at helping dyslexic students learn to write – they ‘hear’ their mistakes which they cannot see on the page.

Rote learning, when we all have mobiles with search engines in our pockets? Is this really effective use of school time, particular for pupils with SEN who often struggle with short term memory?

Why not focus on skills such as researching, critical thinking, analysis, presenting different opinions, good communication, determining evidence base of information, emotional intelligence, team work etc? These are the skills young people need today.

Time to get the curriculum to reflect the technological world we live in and ensure the next generation have the skills employers need.

Assessment systems

Currently SATS, GCSEs, A’Levels seem to be an assessment in rote learning and speed writing. What does this actually determine? Who has a good memory and fine motor skills? Many SEN pupils are unable to reach their potential when this is how academic ability is determined. Time to re-think how academic ability is assessed. There are thousands of highly intelligent neurodiverse children in the country who have been completely failed by this assessment system, yet have later gone on to achieve great things. Read about Jason Arday, a Cambridge Professor who would not read until the age of 18.

Early Intervention

Early intervention is vital. The brain is at its most neuroplastic when very young, and therapeutic support can have its greatest impact. The current system ensures most SEN children must wait years before they receive any support, meaning this window of opportunity has been missed. The long term personal, social and economic outcomes are significantly compromised when early intervention isn’t offered.

At their two year assessment, all children should be checked for any signs of SEN. If there’s even a hint of neurodiversity etc being present, referral to services must be immediately made and therapy offered in the immediate term.

Wider support in society

Statistics show divorces rates, job loss, stress and illness is disproportionately high amongst parents of children with SEN and disabilities. It is vital parents are supported, particularly at the very first stages of SEN being identified, to ensure best outcomes for all. Local family outreach groups must be properly funded, the voluntary sector and good will of individuals should not be relied upon alone.

With the right support parents are far better able to cope, outcomes are better for the children, and there is less burden on government when it all goes wrong (as it so often does today).

All parents of SEN children should have access to specialist advisors, who are on their side and believe them – extraordinarily this is very rarely available today. A government helpline should be established, with a network of coordinators in all LAs. These should tie in with local family networks, which must have central funding, to ensure parents have a place to offer mutual support, shared experience, and guidance at the time of need.

Strong families, ensure better outcomes, reducing demand for government resources in the long run.

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