

Consulting with Young people about the Education, Health and Care plan process

Introduction

This report explores the views and opinions of children and young people who have undergone the Education, Health and Care plan (EHC plan) process. It will attempt to establish whether the children and young people feel that their views have been heard and considered when decisions are made about the types of additional support required, so that they are enabled to achieve the outcomes agreed in the EHC plan.

Background

An EHC plan sets out the education, health and care support that is to be provided to a child or young person aged 0-25 years who has Special Educational Needs and/or a disability (SEND). It is drawn up by the local authority after an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment has determined that an EHC plan is necessary, and after consultation with relevant partner agencies and with children, young people and parents.

EHC plans, and the needs assessment process through which these are made, were introduced as part of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Act, and an accompanying SEND Code of Practice, sets out how local authorities must deliver these, including:

- Developing and maintaining EHC plans collaboratively with children, young people and parents; by taking into account the views, wishes and feelings of the child / young person, and the child's parents;
- Supporting children, young people and parents so that they can participate as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions;
- Supporting the child / young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes and preparing them effectively for adulthood.

This statutory requirement is also reflected in the SEND Code of Practice: one of its core principles - 'participating in decision making' - states that local authorities must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision; and that early years providers, schools and colleges should also take steps to ensure that young people and parents are actively supported in contributing to needs assessments and in developing and reviewing EHC plans.

Method

Interviewing children and young people about the EHCP process took place between October 2018 and November 2018. 44 students were interviewed in total ranging from the ages of 5 years – 24 years. (10 in primary education, 22 in secondary education, 12 in further education) All of the students interviewed had a current EHC plan in place.

Who was invited to take part?

Initially it was agreed that a Council Officer from the local authority would contact families who had recently undergone the EHC plan application process and been issued with an EHC plan. The rationale being that the children and young people would be more likely to remember the process and therefore be able to share their views and opinions about the process itself. An initial list was identified and agreed.

Letters were sent out to all families who had undergone the process in the previous academic year stating that a Council Officer would be interviewing children at their school about the EHC plan process. When the Council Officer contacted parent / carers to ask their permission to carry out the interviews at school, it became evident that the cohort of children and young people identified for this exercise was not suitable. The reasons varied from the children being too young to comment (under 5 years old), to being non-verbal with little to no communication skills. Parents also stated the child's disability (ASD) as a reason that it would be unlikely that they would remember the process itself.

The initial list was then used to identify educational establishments that were supporting children and young with SEND who lived in B&NES. The Council Officer contacted the SENCO at each establishment, discussed the scope of the project and asked whether they could identify a group of children and young people that could be interviewed. The following establishments were contacted and included:

- Special Schools - Fosseyway School and Threeways School
- Alternative Education - Aspire Academy and Catch 22 Include

- Mainstream primary Schools - St Martins Gardens School and St Keyna School
- Mainstream secondary Schools - Ralph Allen School, Wellsway School and St Gregory's School
- Further Education - Bath College
- Residential school - The Springfield's Academy, Calne and Shelling School, Thornbury
- Elective Home Education - Letters were sent to families asking them to engage in the process by contacting the Council Officer directly.

The establishments that actually engaged in the exercise were as follows:

- Fosseway School which also has a residential unit
- Threeways School
- Catch 22 Include
- St Keyna Primary School
- Ralph Allen School and St Gregory's Secondary Schools
- Bath College.

SENCOs at these establishments identified suitable students to take part in the interviewing process. No contact was made by families who have chosen Elective Home Education.

How children and young people took part

The SENCO and supporting professionals at the educational establishments designed the format of the interview process. St Gregory's School and Bath College chose to carry out the interview in one group. Fosseway School, Threeways School and St Keyna Primary School choose to carry out interviews in smaller groups of two to three students at a time. Catch 22 Include and Ralph Allen School choose to carry out the interviews individually.

In the majority of interviews, professionals from those establishments were present and involved in the discussions that took place when interviewing the children and young people. Ralph Allen School choose not to be present during the interviews and supplied the Council Officer with the student's individual one page profile, to prompt conversations about the process.

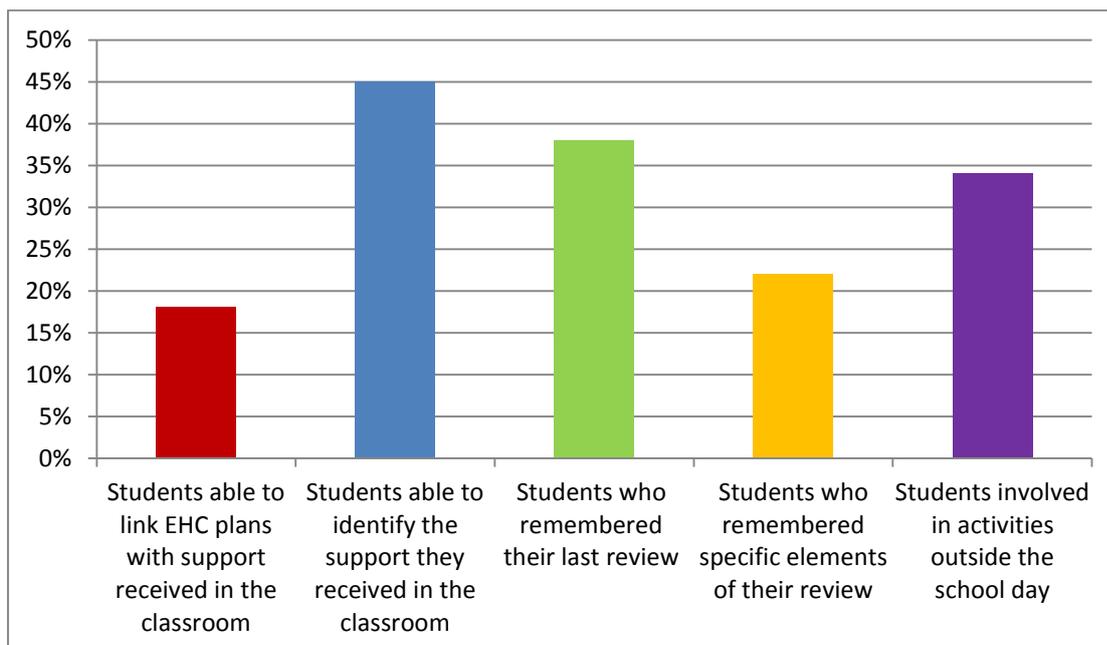
The interviews consisted of a number of open questions and conversations about additional support received in a setting. Please see appendix A for the type of questions used to encourage discussion. The interviews themselves took no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Findings

It must be noted that the support of the SENCO to arrange and facilitate the interviews was critical in gathering the views from children and young people with an EHC plan. The interviews were conducted using open questions to gather the thoughts and views of children and young people. The reader must therefore bear in mind that the views and opinions are perceptions of what they remembered taking place rather than actual facts.

Out of the 44 students interviewed, none of them could explain the EHC plan application process or the process of converting a statement to an EHC plan. This could be attributed to the fact that it is often adults that start the process in regards to applying for an EHC plan. The process itself is also very complicated and drawn out. Another factor to consider is that some of the students that were interviewed had established EHC plans in place and have had them in place for a number of years.

The interviews focused mainly on annual reviews and gathered children and young people's opinions about them. Annual reviews generally follow the same format. Children and young people attend the meeting at the beginning for about 20 minutes. They often prepare for meetings by reviewing their One Page Profile or if older 'Your Choice Your Future' paperwork. They then use their One Page Profile as a prompt to talk about themselves to the adults in the room. They may be asked some questions by professionals before leaving the room. The general perception was that all the children and young people interviewed are invited to their review and given the choice about whether or not to attend. A few children / young people (3) felt it was difficult to talk to adults about themselves. One student said it was 'cringey'.



18% (8) students were able to link EHC plans with the support they receive in the classroom. They understood that if their support needed to change then so did the provision and outcomes in the EHC plan. Older children and young people had a better understanding of the links between EHC plans and the support they receive in their education.

45% (22) students could identify the support they receive in the classroom. Students aged 8 years and upwards found it easier to identify the additional support more so than their younger peers. A reason why students may find it difficult to identify additional support in special schools is that all students in the classroom are accessing the support and classroom sizes were smaller. In mainstream primary schools, additional support is also often delivered in the classroom alongside their peers. As the inclusive practices are embedded into the classroom, the children and young people are less likely to be identified by peers or taken out to class to receive the support that is required. The majority of students liked the support they received in the classroom and felt the support aided them to achieve their EHC plan outcomes.

38% (17) remembered their last review and the reason for this. It was to review their educational outcomes and set targets for the following year. Young people from Bath College seemed to know more about the options around independent living options than their peers in other establishments.

22% (10) of students remember elements of their review such as sitting at the top of the table, choosing biscuits for the meeting, changing their One Page Profile. One student commented that the review was too focused on educational pathways, rather than focusing on other aspects of life such as options to moving into independent living.

The majority of children and young people felt they were listened to and when requests for change in support are made, they felt professionals took the time to understand their opinions and act on them. This was not just when reviews took place; this was throughout the academic year. Students felt that these changes were carried out in a timely manner. However, there were two students who identified times that they were not listened to. One was regarding the type of support received in a certain classroom lesson and another when the young person's views differed from their parent's viewpoint. Young people are entitled to their own offer of impartial information, advice and support which is separate from that of their parents. Advocates or supporters could be used at reviews to offer information and advice on all aspects of the SEND agenda including preparation for adulthood to allow for the young person's voice to be heard.

Another observation to note was that children and young people were also identifying things they would like to do, such as learn about independent travel which hadn't been identified previously.

Older children and young people felt positive about their future plans and able to identify aspirations and possible career paths. Some could identify pathways to achieve their aspirations. Others were less confident.

34% (14) of students are involved in activities outside the school day. They attend targeted groups, sports clubs, Swallows (an opportunity for teenagers to stay away from home and learn independent skills). None of the students identified that the skills they learn outside school / college can contribute to the outcomes identified in their EHC plans. A few students requested to join clubs such as scouts but did not identify this could be discussed at reviews.

Conclusions

Overall the students, who receive additional support through the EHC process, like the support they receive and feel that it helps them achieve the outcomes in their EHC plan. The majority of children and young people felt they were listened to and that their opinion is considered when making decisions in their reviews. When requests for change in support are made; they are acted on in a timely manner. They felt professionals took the time to understand their opinions. However there was evidence that there are times when their views are not acted on especially where the child's views differ from their parent's views. This could be improved by offering impartial information and support to the child or young person in the form of advocates / supporters whose role is to offer information and advice on all aspects of the SEND agenda including preparation for adulthood.

Older children and young people had a better understanding of the links between EHC plans and the support they receive in their education. Young people also felt positive about their future plans and able to identify aspirations and possible career paths. However work needs to be done so that younger students understand these links. More work also needs to be done to ensure that all aspects of the student's life i.e. the skills they learn outside the classroom, such as attending clubs, should be included when working towards achieving EHC plan outcomes.

Recommendations

- Annual survey of children and young people undertaking the EHC plan process – collect and analyse experiences to improve process for future applicants. The focus of the consultation could also include children accessing Early Years provision and those that are home educated. Questions could include whether students have been offered and/or accessed other supporting services i.e. Advocacy for year 11's at Off the Record (currently commissioned until July 2019) and impartial information and support (IAS)

Children and young people are made aware of supporting services such as impartial information and support (IAS) / Advocacy for pupils in year 11 to develop EHC plans for further education. IAS is available to all children and young people and should be promoted at assessments and reviews – Children and Young people can access this support through the SEND Partnership Service and Off the Record.

- Children and Young people to access Independent Advocacy at reviews (more likely at secondary school age) The SEND Partnership Service are developing this service and is planned to be in place after 2020.
- Report to be shared with SEND Strategy Group and Parent Carer Voice – to share findings and for feedback on this report.
- Report to be published on the SEND Local Offer website – for Public access to report

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December 2018.

Appendix 1: Questions to ask young people that have undertaken the EHCP process

1. Do you know what an EHCP is?
2. Was the EHCP process explained to you?
3. Were you asked to attend any meetings?
4. Was there any work done with you to plan for the meeting?
5. Did you know why you were asked to attend the meeting?
6. Did the officer do anything to help you express your views?
7. Did you feel listened to?
8. Did you feel part of the process?
9. What did you like about the process?
10. What could be done differently?
11. What are the good things about having an EHCP?
12. What does good support look like to you?
13. What are the not so good things about having an EHCP?
14. Is there any other support you require or has the EHCP process covered everything?
15. Do you receive any additional support outside School?
16. Is there anything that you would like to change about the EHCP process or learning points that you would like to share?

Appendix 2: Educational Establishments Visited

Primary School (Mainstream) 3-11Years

10 students – Two aged 5 years, two aged 6 years, one aged 7 years, one aged 8 years, two aged 9 years, two aged 10 years.

Seen in groups of three and one person wanted to be interviewed alone.

Group 1 – One 9 year old, two 10 year olds

Students could identify support in the classroom and they remembered completing their one page profile with Mrs Wong. Support was identified as adult help with numeracy, maths and being supported to take time out. All the students felt that they are listened to. When asked whether they would like to change anything about their support, one student said they would like their timeout to take place in the treasure room where there are bean bags.

One student did remember her review. She remembers sitting in the review, adults talking about her and she was colouring a picture. When reviews are carried out one student requested that they have a squidgy toy or sand to play with.

Group 2 - Three students aged 8, 9 and 10 years

Support was identified as adults helping with all aspects of learning, i.e. person helps me by writing on the board, getting extra help in maths tests. One person in the group remembers their one page profile.

One student remembers setting up the room for their review, choosing the biscuits and talking about how they were getting on with school work and other people. One student remembers talking about her ADHD at the review and discussing speech and language

Support out of school was described as Mum and Dad helping me with homework and spelling out tricky words.

Group 3 – Two students aged 5. One student aged 6

This group could not recognise the support in place. One student was accompanied by a teaching assistant. When asked 'who is this?'. The reply was Mrs Sherborne, who looks after her at school. Another student identified an adult who helped her with waiting (patience), turn taking and with school work.

One student remembers filling out a one page profile and adding his photo to it.

Group 4 - One student aged 6

This student could not remember any part of the review process. She identified that she would like to join the breakfast club (Rise and Shine)

Special School, Primary and Secondary) 4-19 years.

4 students interviewed - two aged 15, two aged 13. Seen in groups of 2

EHCP process was linked with statements and extra help in the classroom. Support included teaching assistants in the classroom and 1:1 support with reading and writing.

Generally the students understood what their review was for; to reflect on progress that has been made so far academically and to plan for the future. All the students felt listened to when they wanted their support package changed.

One young person did not go to his last review as he felt he would be “dissed” if he went. He was told that he had to go to his next review as this will be the final review before he goes to Bath College.

One young person felt he was not informed enough about what goes on at the review. He felt that he did not know what some teachers had written about him, and when he left the review last time, that was an opportunity for adults to be negative about him.

One young person wants to learn independent travel. He wants to walk to school but is worried about other students, attending other schools, bullying him.

Some students attended Gateway Club and find they do not need to be supported at this targeted club. One attended the Duke of Edinburgh as an after school club activity. When asked what activities they would like to do outside school, one young person said he would like to start scouts but did not know he could bring this up in his review.

Special School, Primary and Secondary 3-19 years

8 Students interviewed

Two students aged 13 and 16 years

When asked what an EHCP was, one student thought it was associated with healthy eating. They identified support in the classroom as the teacher writing on a whiteboard and teaching assistants helping in Maths. A teaching assistant also supports in School Council meetings. One student receives extra reading time in exams. Both students are aware of the Councillor in school, where they can go to share any of their worries.

When discussing review meetings, one student remembers being invited but didn't want to go. The other could not remember what happened.

One student has additional carer support outside school.

Two students aged 14 years.

When initially asked, one student identified the EHCP process with health and exercise. Additional support was identified as having two teaching assistants in class. One student identified having a special chair to sit on in class.

One student remembers their yearly review. They remember changing their one page profile, changing what was working well and what needed changing in respects to their educational support. The student wanted to develop their independent travel skills by catching a bus to school rather than taking school transport.

The young people attend WPA Saturday Club and Mencap groups. One student also attends a youth group at Church.

Two students aged 17 and 15 years.

Support in the classroom was identified as adults helping students understand things and being there for help when you get stuck. One student had carried out their annual review three weeks ago.

He remembers lots of adults in the room. He attends on a residential placement basis. He plans to develop his social independent skills and remembers talking about this at the review. He was invited to attend the first part of the meeting and then left. Mum and Dad told him what happened after he had left the room.

One student had been planning for their review as it will take place next week. He has looked at his one page profile to see whether it needs updating. Previously this student was receiving additional support in History. He felt he didn't need the help and asked for it to stop. The support carried on.

One student would prefer to play on his computer rather than attend any clubs outside school.

Two students aged 17

One student identified EHCPs as planning for what you want to move onto after school finishes. One student remembers their annual review and remembers that a few things were changed afterwards. Both students felt their views were listened to.

Both students attend Swallows and a club in Keynsham called Time-out

Secondary School (Mainstream) 11-18 years

Five students interviewed individually

One student aged 12 years

This student remembers her yearly review because she sat at the top of the table and this made her feel important. She felt her views were listened to and said the review was 'fun'. She likes the support she receives in school and that she can ask for people to help her. She identifies extra support as going to physio, support with getting changed for P.E and using a laptop to take notes.

She finds completing homework hard and comments that it takes her a lot longer than her friends to complete it.

She would like to become an inventor and be the first person to invent a wheelchair that can climb stairs.

Outside school this student attends power chair football in Frome. She also supports Bristol City football team.

One student aged 14

This student identified the EHCP process as a plan that helps me in school and in the future. He receives support in most of his lessons with a personal assistant. He remembers attending his review and talking about his one page profile. He found it difficult talking about himself because it was hard to think about the things that he was good at. This student felt listened to in the review.

He plays rugby in his free time for Oldfield under 14's side. He does not receive any additional support out of school.

One student aged 17

This student identified EHCP's as discussing your needs, 'putting your life in order for education' and the support you need. Support was identified as full support in lessons and support when going to the toilet.

At her recent review she discussed wanting to leave 6th form or to drop a subject. She found that the current workload was too much and she felt really stressed. After the meeting she advised me that her parents talked her out of it. She does not know whether she can drop a subject or leave 6th form. She is still awaiting a decision on this.

She felt that she did not get the opportunity to talk about the future and there needs to be a section in the review where she could discuss her wishes to go travelling or living independently.

One student aged 11

This student receives extra support in the majority of lessons. He couldn't remember anything about his review. He doesn't attend any clubs outside school. He used to go to a club but he got thrown out because he used to 'wind people up'.

One student aged 12

This student remembers his review and remembers his parents attending. He identified support as being additional support in the majority of lessons, use of a laptop / iPad and a gadget that magnifies text. His favourite subjects are Maths and P.E because he is good at them.

Secondary School (Mainstream school) 11-18 years

The session was carried out in a group setting with 8 students aged 11-16 years

EHCP process was described as stuff they talk to you about at your review with regards to support needs. They talk to you about your future and how to achieve your goals. Students identified additional support in a number of lessons. One student described using the time-out card when he needed time to calm down.

Some people identified attending social groups outside school and included air cadets, Pokémon club, football, running clubs and going out shopping with friends. None of the students receive additional support when carrying out these activities.

Alternative Education – 14-16 years

One student aged 16 years

The student did not know what the EHCP was and didn't recall any reviews he has participated in.

This student carries out his work with a mentor. He did start working on a construction site under the project Rock Steady, which he was good at, but for some reason, didn't like doing it and stopped going. This student wants to attend Bath College because his brother attends the college and he likes the format of a 3 day week. He likes hanging at with his friend's house. He did apply to Boots for a job but was turned down.

Further Education 16-24 years

Gathering the views of young people was carried out in a group setting, consisting of 8 students aged between the ages of 16-24 years

The students that attend the college are generally enrolled on a three day programme and are encouraged to go and find work for the remainder of the week.

There were three students who contributed mostly to the discussion that took place with others adding a few comments throughout.

EHC Plans were identified as changing one page profiles and filling out My Future, My Choice' paperwork. One student remembers being asked whether the support they were receiving needed changing and that their mum was asked a number of questions. One review took place in Keynsham so that Nan could attend.

The students liked the review because parents could find out what you were doing. They listen to us, they are helpful and kind. One student didn't like the fact that people talked about the same things again and this became 'cringey'.

A few of the students attend the Time2Share dinner group and Saturday friends. One person used to go to youth club on a Wednesday but does not go now as they were arriving home late due to bus timetables. One person is moving on into supported living. One person is a volunteer at a charity shop. Another is undertaking a placement at Project Search and hopes to move into independent living at The Rockery. One person attends Swallows and hopes to move into independent living arrangements once she has learnt the skills she needs. One person is in paid employment at Sainsbury's.