



...because **YOUR** child matters

Welcome

Welcome to the Bedford Borough Parent Partnership Service Summer newsletter. If your child's school has given you this and you have not heard about us before, please read on. We ask schools to give our newsletters to their children who have special educational needs (SEN). If you are not sure what this means, we are at the end of the 'phone on 01234 276 267 and we can explain it to you.

Local Authority Decisions Panel

Since January of this year, two of our IPS, Laura Sherwood-King and Helen Vandeveld, have been attending local authority panel meetings to represent the parental perspective in decision making for statutory assessment requests. This development places the Borough at the forefront of post-Lamb Inquiry initiatives for increasing parental confidence by ensuring that SEN decision making is as open and transparent as possible.

The Future of the Bedford Borough Parent Partnership Service

There have been big changes to the Parent Partnership Service (PPS) in recent months. Since 1 April 2011, the PPS has comprised a full-time coordinator, David Newbury, and a part-time adviser, Ruth Kerr. The PPS has transferred to a new service area within the local authority, Early Engagement and Development, which links us to other services directly concerned with advising parents and families, such as the Family Information Service. As part of the restructuring, we have relocated temporarily to the Town Hall, before moving into Borough Hall later in the year, although the exact timetable for this has yet to be finalised.

Ruth and I remain committed to ensuring that parents receive high quality advice and support for SEN. We will also continue to be helped by our small team of Independent Parental Supporters (IPS). Our priority will be to support the parents of children requiring support throughout the statutory assessment and statementing stages; those on the school-based SEN stages and those parents who believe that their

child has SEN but the school takes a different view.

We are very sad to have lost the services of Adele Norman and Elaine Taylor, and would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many messages we have received from parents thanking them for their hard work over the years.

As well as changes at a local level, there are proposals to shake up the whole SEN system at the national level. These proposals are set out in the coalition government's SEN Green paper. If you would like to find out more, please come along to an open consultation meeting for parents which will be held in Queen's Park Neighbourhood Centre at 6 pm on 22nd June 2011. We will tell you about the government's ideas for improving SEN, and you can discuss these ideas with other parents and put forward your own views on the Green Paper (see page 2 for further details)

David Newbury
Parent Partnership
Service Co-ordinator

Other ways we help parents

The Bedford Borough Parent Partnership Service provides a range of services to help parents of children with SEN. Our aim is to help give you the necessary information and support you need to make well informed decisions about your child's education. Our service is free, confidential and impartial so you can speak to us with absolute confidence that our advice will be unbiased and will not be shared with anyone else without your permission.

- A confidential telephone help line with advice on parents' rights
- Leaflets covering different aspects of special educational needs eg
 - the SEN Code of Practice
 - understanding your child's special educational needs
 - help in school for your child's special educational needs

- statutory assessment and statements
- Help with filling in forms and writing letters
- Advice on finding schools and school transfer
- Help with reading through and understanding reports
- Contact details of voluntary organisations and support groups
- Support for parents/carers in meetings with schools and the Local Authority
- Finding out parents' views on local SEN provision and services
- Help with preventing and resolving disagreements between parents and the child's school and/or the local authority
- Access to an Independent Parental Supporter when available

Events For Parents



We are planning to organise two events for parents during the summer term:

1. Training Course: 'How to Get the Best out of Meetings'

One of the key findings of the recent government report on SEN (the Lamb Inquiry) was that poor home-school communication can be the cause of misunderstanding and even conflict between parents and teachers. Parents often tell us that they find it difficult to put their views across at meetings. Sometimes parents can feel that they have not been listened to and that the meeting has not tackled their worries about their child.

This 2 hour training course for parents will look at some of the reasons why communication between schools and parents can sometimes go wrong, and offer a wealth of useful ideas and tips on how to prepare for and participate in a meeting and get the best possible outcomes. We will give you a copy of the Parent Partnership Meeting Planner which has been designed to help you get more out of meetings about your child.

2. Parental Consultation on the SEN Green Paper

In our last newsletter, we reported on the government's proposals for improving education, health and social care for children with special educational needs and disabilities. These ideas are set out in the government's SEN Green Paper and include:

- Statements to be replaced with a new Education, Health and Care Plan
- Parents of children with a new plan will have the option of personal budgets
- Local authorities to set out a 'local offer' of what support is available to children with SEN and disabilities and their families
- Simpler SEN arrangements in school and greater flexibility with budgets
- Removing the "bias towards inclusion"
- Replacing School Action and School Action Plus with a single school stage
- Special schools to have the opportunity to become academies
- Easier for children to move between mainstream and special schools
- Better transition opportunities into adulthood

The government is currently consulting on its proposals and is particularly interested in hearing the views of parents. We are planning to hold a consultation meeting to get your comments and suggestions on the Green Paper, which we will feed back to the government. The meeting will be held on Wednesday 22nd June 2011 at the Queen's Park Neighbourhood Centre, Marlborough Road, Queens Park, Bedford MK40 4LE from 6 – 8 pm. Please will you telephone or email us if you are interested in coming to this meeting, or the training course (or both), and we will contact you with further details.

Join us as a volunteer



Following the recent changes to the Parent Partnership Service, we will be reviewing how we work with parents and the types of support we offer. We want to ensure that we offer parents the best possible support around special educational needs so they can get the right help for their children. Many parents have really appreciated the chance to speak to one of our Independent Parental Supporters (IPS). All of our IPS are volunteers who are trained by us to help parents of children with SEN in Bedford Borough. If possible, we would like to add to our team of IPS and to broaden the range of work they do with parents.

“There is excellent training and support for parents in a friendly environment. There is great satisfaction from knowing that you have helped a family to move on with their child’s educational needs”

Present volunteers have said...”

It is an interesting and challenging role and you get to meet lots of different people. The support and training are excellent too.” At this stage, we would be interested to hear from anyone who may be interested in becoming an IPS.

All you need to do is’ phone us on 01234 276 267 to tell us about what you can offer and we will take it from there. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Helping parents help their child to be the best they can be

Parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) attended an East of England conference to have their say on what could be done to help them gain positive outcomes for their children.

They accompanied teams from the Eastern Region Network of Parent Partnership Services. The Parent Partnership teams at the event held in Cambridge on 6th April 2011 were from: Bedford Borough, Hertfordshire, Essex, Central Bedfordshire, Thurrock, Peterborough, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Southend, Luton and Suffolk.

David Newbury and Ruth Kerr from the Bedford Borough PPS attended the conference, along with Helen Vandavelde and Laura Sherwood-King, who are both Independent Parental Supporters. and have personal experience of the SEN system.

Feedback from the event has been 100% positive with agreement that there should be similar events held in future which would ideally include other volunteer groups who support families and schools as well as parents. There were very positive comments made about the opportunity for sharing of views, having parents involved, working with other people in the workshops and having a networking opportunity

Some common issues raised by parents include not feeling well informed about services available to their child, feeling intimidated by the education system and not feeling in control of decisions being made about their child. One parent said: “Parents don’t want to be educational experts; they just want to know that they have the information they need to be a good

parent and make the right choices for their child.”

Keynote speaker, Roy Leighton, author and education consultant, explained that all of us, from childhood through into adulthood, function best when we feel safe and valued as this allows us to carry on learning new skills and ways of solving problems. He said it was vital that parents and schools speak to each other in order to achieve the best outcome for the child. He said: “Every child matters as does every parent, every school and every teacher. If you’re a parent focused on your family, speaking to a school focused on results, how are you going to communicate? You have to remember that you have a shared goal.” One parent suggested the introduction of a “buddying system” for parents to help each other. Some of the other ideas put forward were:

- Working in partnership with families from diagnosis to ensure early opportunities are not missed
- Making sure parents know what their choices are
- More openness between schools, health professionals and parents
- Setting up a regional website for use by parents and schools
- More effective communication between schools and parents especially by improving the planning and running of meetings
- Trying to develop a more collaborative and adaptable approach which could respond quickly if a child’s needs or circumstances changed

The government has recently announced its SEN Green Paper which runs until the end of June and proposes a radical overhaul of the existing system. To find out more and to contribute views, visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations

Paralympic Training Camps for Bedford



London 2012 have just published ticket details for the 2012 Paralympics, with more than half of the two million tickets available priced at £10 or less. Tickets will go on sale on from 9 September this year.

Tickets for spectators who will be under 16 or over 60 on 29 August 2012 will start from just £5, and a London Travelcard is included in the price of tickets for the day of the event.

London 2012 say, 'The UK is the spiritual home of the Paralympic movement and with superb medal prospects for ParalympicsGB, we believe that the British public will come out in their thousands to watch. We have created a fair pricing structure, which we hope will encourage people to come along and create fantastic atmospheres at our venues.

Wheelchair spaces will be available in all price categories for every Paralympic sport, and the price of these tickets will include a companion seat next to it. Applicants who are deaf or have a hearing impairment, visually impaired people or people with limited mobility can indicate additional requirements.

In addition to opportunities to watch the paralympics, we are excited that there may be pre-games training camps locally. The following pre-games training venues have been approved in this area, but not agreed yet:

Archery - The University of Bedfordshire's Bedford Campus

Athletics - Bedford International Athletics Stadium

Athletics - Stockwood Park Athletics Track

Cycling - Bedfordshire Rural Roads and Bedford Autodrome

Equestrian - The College Equestrian Centre

Mountain Biking - Rowney Warren Woods

Table Tennis - Bedford Modern School

We hope that the build up to the games will provide exciting opportunities for children and young people with special needs and disabilities to enjoy themselves, and seek inspiration for their own future goals and aspirations. We will provide Paralympic updates for parents and schools in future editions of the newsletter.

School's out

Look out for the new School's out booklet for summer activities. It will be available in June in schools and other public places. Alternatively you can 'phone the Family Information Service on 0800 023 2057 to ask for a copy.

We want your views

Evelyn Godbolt, one of Independent Parental Supporters, has been busy 'phoning parents who have used our

service, to find out whether you were able to resolve issues for your child, with the help we gave. If you haven't heard from her yet, you may do soon.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to talk with her and to give really helpful comments. These comments show that we have made a difference to situations, so please give our telephone number to friends and family, if you think that we can support them.



Parents and professionals at the East of England Conference in Cambridge on 6th April 2011

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