



...because **YOUR** child matters

Welcome

Welcome to the Bedford Borough Parent Partnership Service Spring 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. 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.



Moving premises and moving forward

We're excited to be moving to our new base on London Road (pictured below) in south Bedford on 15th March 2010. We will be sad to leave Westfield Middle School where we have worked happily for the past 6 years. We would like to say a huge thank you to the head teacher and to all her staff and pupils for making us so welcome.

The move to 109 London Road coincides with the official launch of the Bedford Borough Parent Partnership Service which will have with its own distinct identity and offer an improved range of services. The new accommodation includes space for at least one meeting room which means we will be able to offer a 'drop in' facility for parents for the first time. We will also be recruiting our own Independent Parental

Supporters to help us improve our telephone advice service, run coffee mornings and increase our capacity to support parents on a 1:1 basis. We are planning to develop a number of training courses aimed at helping more parents engage as partners with schools and the local authority. Finally we want to ensure that as many parents as possible can influence the future development of services in Bedford Borough for children with special educational needs.

At present our big initiative is the first Annual Parents Conference on Saturday 20th March 2010 at Beauchamp Middle School. There are more details about the conference later in the newsletter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or ideas relating to the needs of parents and children with SEN.

David Newbury, Parent Partnership Service Co-ordinator

The Lamb Inquiry

Following a House of Commons Select Committee report on Special Educational Needs, the Lamb Inquiry was established to look at ways of improving parental confidence in the SEN system of assessment and provision. The final report of the Inquiry was released on 16 December 2009. It has 51 recommendations centring on securing better outcomes for children with SEN, parents having a stronger voice, a more strategic local approach and a more accountable system.

Good News...One of the main findings to come out of the research for this Inquiry is that most parents (85%) of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are satisfied with their child's current school placement in either a mainstream or special school.

Some of the key recommendations of the Lamb Inquiry are:

- Parents should have direct access to multi-agency teams based in schools or partnerships of schools
- There should be further investment in approaches to prevent bullying of children with SEN and disabilities
- New measures are needed to tackle the over-representation of SEN and disabled pupils among children who are excluded, with new guidance on exclusions to be given to schools and governing bodies and independent appeals panels.
- Principles should be developed for improving engagement by schools and children's services with parents
- Schools' SEN policies should be simplified and include parental consultation; pupil referral units are now required to have these policies
- Parents should be more involved in annual reviews of their child's statement.
- The government should commission and promote a dedicated helpline for SEN
- Parent Partnership Services to be relaunched so that all services provide expert, high quality advice and are appropriately deployed
- Improved training to educational professionals for working with parents/carers who have a child with special educational needs.
- A second round of parental confidence projects to be commissioned on a regional basis
- A new right of appeal for parents following interim or annual reviews if the local authority decides not to make any changes to the statement, and rights of appeal to be extended to children and young people
- Guidance and training for SEN and Disability Tribunal Chairs on telephone and face to face contact.

The government has indicated that it plans to implement the Inquiry's recommendations in full.

Join us in a new challenge!

We want to add to our team of volunteer Independent Parental Supporters to help parents of children with SEN in the Bedford Borough. We will train you and involve you in a variety of ways, including working with us on our new drop-in and group sessions for parents. You will have the opportunity to become experienced at individual support for parents, for example by looking through paperwork, or going with them to meetings if you are able to.

Present volunteers have said...
"There is excellent training and support for volunteers in a friendly environment. There is great satisfaction from knowing that you have helped a family to move forward with their child's educational needs"

and... " it is an interesting and challenging role and you get to meet lots of different people. The support and training are excellent too!"

Training begins in April at our new offices in London Road. All you need to do now is phone us on 01234 276 267 to talk about what you can offer and we will take it from there. We look forward to hearing from you soon.



Barriers to communication

Following the final report of the Lamb Inquiry, we at Parent Partnership feel we are uniquely placed to help implement the recommendations aimed at ensuring good communication between parents and schools so that there is even greater parental confidence with the educational system.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." (George Bernard Shaw)

In an age where instant communication around the world via television, radio and the internet has never been easier, it may seem strange that for many of us developing good relationships on an individual level is harder than ever. Effective communication is all about making sure that we send messages to other people and receive information from them as clearly as possible. This is much harder to do in a world where there are so many things which can interfere with good communication. Elaine McEwan, a distinguished head teacher and school leader, has listed the following reasons why some schools and parents sometimes struggle to have good relationships:

- today's world is stressful, fast paced and fragmented – many of us are short of time, suffering from communication overload and often feel 'disconnected' from other people
- we can feel swamped with new plans and policies which seem to overlap with one another and use confusing language
- despite the constant flood of information, somehow we never seem to find out what we really need to know
- political correctness and health and safety sometimes appear to have replaced common sense in the classroom
- we worry that our child is being left behind and it seems that no one has the time to respond to our concerns
- we are asked for advice but can feel that it has been ignored

We all know that 'good, honest and open communication' is important for building good relationships. But where should we begin? Perhaps the single most important step we can take is to learn how to become better listeners.

Hear what people are really saying

"I know that you believe you understand what you think I said but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

(Robert McCloskey)

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your effectiveness, and on the quality of your relationships with others.

Most of us are not good listeners and we only properly take in and remember a small amount of what we hear. That means that when we talk to our friends, colleagues or family for 10 minutes, we probably only really hear 2 – 3 minutes of the conversation. Fortunately there are well established methods for improving listening skills which can help us create good impressions with others and avoid conflict and misunderstandings.

In the Summer edition of our newsletter we will share some techniques on how to become a better listener.

Sportstraid

Britain's first Charity Sports Shop with **new** and second-hand sportswear and kit. Sportstraid is a youth-focused sports organisation offering young people the kit and support they need to get into sport.

Through the UK's first sports kit shop, they will make specialist clothing and equipment affordable to children for whom such items would be an inaccessible luxury. SportsTraid will fund coaching, access to

facilities such as sports clubs and gyms – and even the transport required to get talented but disadvantaged athletes to training. Their shop sells new and second-hand sportswear and kit with prices from £1. They are located at 23 Greyfriars, Bedford, MK40 1HJ and open from 10am to 6.30pm.

Examples of excellence

In the last issue we asked for parents to write in with "Examples of Excellence", basically good news stories. Here is one of them

"I used your service 6 years ago when my sons were at the beginning of the statement process and found it very helpful and reassuring that we 'weren't alone'. I have experienced the highs and lows of being a parent to children who require extra help to support them through school - it can be very difficult at times to deal with. After both being granted a full statement in Year 2 of their lower school my sons are now in Year 7 at Newnham Middle School, and have had their statements completely removed!! It has taken a lot of commitment from their school(s), us as parents, and ultimately themselves to overcome the barriers they were facing! But they did it and now they are thriving. Both my sons passed all their SATS last year and continue to make steady progress in school, academically, socially and in sport!

I believe that the key to our success is simple - all of us ensured that we worked together, communicated openly and honestly, and tackled the goals and targets as a "partnership" and the successes speak for themselves. I hope this inspires other parents to keep working with their children and the schools because it really can make a positive difference."

We at Parent Partnership are really pleased to hear how good communication and hard work have brought real benefits for these two children with SEN. It is also really good to hear that these boys no longer need the extra funding from the statement and this money is now available for other more needy children to benefit from.

Conference

Bedford Borough Parent Partnership Service is organising a free day for parents and carers of children with additional needs. Our 1st Annual Joint Conference with Families United Network and Family Voice is to be held on Saturday 20 March 2010, 9.30am – 2pm at Beauchamp Middle School, Hawk Drive in Brickhill, and includes a free buffet lunch.

This event will provide you with relevant information to support you as parents. The day will begin with an update by a speaker from the Department of Children, Schools and Families, on the recent Lamb Inquiry. This will be followed by your choice of two free parenting workshops which include:


- 1-2-3 Magic
- Empowering Ways of thinking, feeling and behaving
- Wills & Trusts
- Developing Language and Communication
- Transition
- Annual Reviews
- Speak Easy
- One Stop Parenting

The conference will finish with a short presentation by Bedford Borough on their vision for children with additional needs. Local organisations will be invited to provide you with information and details of the services on offer. During the morning and at lunchtime you will have the opportunity to talk to a variety of professionals about your individual

needs. Please phone 01525 636 680 or email familyvoice@live.co.uk to find out more information about this free day or if you want to book yourself on a workshop.

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