

NNPCF State of the Nation

May 2018

Introduction

At the completion of the implementation phase of the SEND reforms, the NNPCF have prepared this paper to offer a “State of the Nation” overview of the implementation of the Children and Families Act. It is a summary of the key issues that have been identified by the National Network of Parent Carer Forums. In preparing this paper, we have listened to the feedback we have received from our members and stakeholders in the following ways:

- We listen to our members through local and regional meetings. Our steering group attended over 60 regional meetings last year.
- Feedback from our conference and AGM in November 2017 attended by over 90 forums and 200 parent carers
- We conduct surveys of our membership to identify and understand their experience of key themes.
- We looked at the data that came from recent SEND surveys to analyse the key messages that these were giving us.
- We analyse the activity on our social media platforms.

Key themes being raised by forums

The impact of tightened local resources

- In the last few months we have seen an increase in concerns from forums that their local areas cannot deliver the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act with constrained resources. An increase in the number of children and young people with SEND, combined with new entitlements mean that many forums report that local areas are struggling. The failure of many areas to make meaningful progress with joint commissioning has amplified this situation. What resources there are have not necessarily been deployed in the most effective ways.

Education health and care plans

- The quality of plans is a key focus. Many forums have reported that quality has been sacrificed to meet the conversion deadline of March 2018. Forums

are reporting that Local Authorities are also struggling with ongoing requirements to review plans.

- The engagement from Health and Social Care agencies continues to be raised as a concern with reports that attendance at meetings is sometimes sparse and advice is not written in a person centred or outcome focussed way. In some cases, the required advice is not produced within the specified timeframes, or sometimes at all.
- Where families have good quality EHCPs they report that these do make a difference to their ability to achieve their child's outcomes.

Preparing for adulthood

- Families describe their young people approaching school leaving age as “the cliff edge”. Upon leaving school, the offer from many local areas is not clear. Families are unable to see how the services and provision available will serve to deliver the best possible outcomes for their young people. Part time education provision for their young person (often 3 days a week) is a major concern. Families report that frequently, no or inadequate provision is offered for the other days.
- Families are often thought to be behaving “irrationally” and insisting on young people remaining in education post 19. In the absence of a meaningful alternative, families will fight to hang onto what they know works.
- Employment opportunities are regarded as sparse, often of poor quality and with limited choice. Families report that the information and support for pathways into employment is confusing and inadequate.

SEN support (including exclusions)

- There is some concerns around the level of support for those young people on SEN support and the settings they are in. The level exclusions is increasing and a recent NNPCF survey found that over 90% of forums that responded had witnessed potentially illegal “unofficial” exclusion practices. Finally, forums are reporting that inclusion in mainstream schools is becoming more challenging for families with a marked drift towards specialist education for children and young people with SEND.
- We believe that adopting a whole school philosophy, a graduated approach, transparency of how notional SEND budgets are used and high quality information advice and support for families are the keys to addressing this. There are examples of good practice in almost all local areas and parents know which schools and headteachers “get it.” This suggests that this is a leadership issue.

Local area inspections

- These have been an overwhelming success from the point of view of forums and we would like to see them extended beyond the current 5 year period.
- Forums have raised some concerns about some aspects of the inspections, specifically, making suggestions on how they could be conducted differently to engage parent-carers more effectively and to minimise the impact on forums.
- Forums across the country report a renewed focus on the reforms as a result of the inspection regime and improved engagement from partners, notably CCGs as a result. We hope that similar benefits will result from the single route of redress national trial.

Engagement and co-production with Health

- We continue to work with our colleagues in the NHS to build strong relationships that will allow us to co-produce with them in a meaningful way. Whilst increased focus on parent carer forums from NHS England and SEND local area inspections have provided a boost to this engagement, many forums and regions still report that engagement with CCGs, NHSE transformation projects and providers remains sporadic and sometimes ineffective.
- **Individual co-production-** Parent carer forums up and down the country are reporting widely varying levels of individual coproduction with families from Clinical Commissioning Groups and providers. Often families report that staff remain very provision focussed, rather than outcome focussed.
- **Strategic co-production-**Parent carer forums still report that engagement is patchy with some areas still not working with forums and health services remaining detached from the SEND agenda, whilst we have seen great improvement with some Health agencies since introduction of LA SEND inspection framework.
- There are several significant NHS England change programmes under way. All of the following have a major impact upon the SEND agenda:
 - Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation Programme
 - Transforming care
 - Integrated Personal Commissioning (IPC)
 - Review of specialised commissioning
 - Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs)

- Each of these programmes has separate governance at a local, regional and national level which can be a challenge for not only local parent carer forum but also the Local area to engage with.

Conclusions

The Children and Families Act contains the right principles and ambitions. It is an aspirational piece of legislation that aims to sweep away the most pernicious aspects of the “old” system – co-production not confrontation, outcome focused not provision led services, joint arrangements not silo working. These are wide reaching and fundamental changes

In order, to deliver the benefits that we envisaged from the legislation, these changes need to be applied across the country by multiple agencies and organisations in each locality.

Given the scope, the complexity and sheer number of stakeholders involved in the changes it is not surprising that there have been challenges in its implementation. To deliver on the ambitions of families and on the requirements of the legislation, we need renewed focus, commitment and the right level of financial support.