



National Network of Parent Carer Forums

'Our Strength Is Our Shared Experience'

NNPCF Response to the Lenehan Review of Experiences and Outcomes in Residential Special Schools and Colleges

The National Network of Parent Carer Forums is a network of over 150 Parent Carer Forums in England. The forums are arranged into 9 regions and these follow the same regional breakdown as the Department of Education; each of the regions has a regional representative. All regional representatives' work together to form the national steering group. The NNPCF is a network of local forums meeting in regional settings, working together to effect local and national service improvement through participation and co-production with parent carers. Our current membership is in excess of 85,000 parent carers.

The NNPCF welcomes this review and its focus, in line with the Children and Families Act 2014, on improving outcomes for all children and young people with SEND in residential schools and colleges. We also have to keep in mind, as one Parent Carer Forum said in their response;

“One of the main concerns for us, and demonstrated by many conversations at local, regional and National level is the element of communication and remembering that the child and family are at the centre of all this work.” - This is very much what section 19 of the Children and Families Act requires.

We have chosen to focus our response on 4 key areas.

1. The process of getting a residential place

Parent Carers find the process variable. Some make a choice based on their young person's needs and outcomes and that points to a residential place. This may or may not involve a fight with the Local Authority depending on the extent of agreement and support from services, including schools, within the local area. Some parent carers do not feel they have a choice but it happens either in a planned way or unplanned from a crises (or many crises). These crises will usually stem from lack of local services, including local schools, being able to meet the child or young person's needs. There may also be issues about lack of services to meet needs including from social care (short breaks). These crises may quickly escalate to a point where a residential option is the only option being discussed.

The process can involve families going around to look at residential schools and colleges on their own, after undertaking internet searches. They may talk to other parent carers in the same situation or who have made the journey before. Sometimes families are given a list of places based on local approved commissioning preferences. It can be a lonely and difficult time for families.

The Panel and wider local decision making (including funding) processes may not be clear or transparent to families. There is also a lack of understanding of how Continuing Health Care and the Care Act relate to decisions about residential special schools and colleges. The same applies to decisions about 38/52 weeks, residential short breaks at the school or college, unless there is very



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clear parental/carer or young person choice expressed and they can pursue this. Families do not feel they understand decision making and funding and it remains an ongoing concern even after a placement has started. As one Parent Carer Forum said;

“Families tell us that there continues to be an ongoing battle to secure funding for these placements.”

2. Good quality support

All the elements of good quality local support are defined for all children and young people through national early intervention and prevention programmes and policies. That includes the public health, community health, early years, mental health, short breaks, schools and related service offers and policies. We welcome the focus in Local Area inspections in examining the extent to which these areas are identifying and meeting needs early and improving outcomes in local areas. In cases where placement decisions to residential schools and colleges come from a crisis and breakdown in local provision, this may have been contributed to by the particular needs of individual children and families not being identified or understood and families feeling unsupported and sometimes vilified.

The NNPCF has been involved, with others, in developing additional guidance and support papers to make the case for more targeted and specialist support for certain groups of children and young people with higher levels of need such as those with challenging behaviour, [Ensuring quality services](#) (LGA/NHS England 2014¹), and those with SEND going through transition², [What Good Integrated Care Looks Like at Transition](#) (NNPCF 2013), a paper that was subsequently reflected in the CQC's Transition report [From the Pond into the Sea](#) (June 2014)³. The NNPCF and its members have also consistently raised the importance of short breaks to local quality support for families and it remains in the top 5 of local priorities for Parent Carer Forums. The NNPCF also wants to see Transforming Care implemented effectively at local levels for children and young people. These are all areas where there is more work to be done.

In residential schools it is clearly important that local community and family links are maintained, keeping in touch is possible and that families feel part of their young person's life when they are away from home. This needs to be made clearer for families, including through the SEND Code of Practice.

The NNPCF was also involved in developing the [Children and Young People's Health Services Data Set](#) (CYPHS)⁴ and this is essential to understanding needs and comorbidities and to effective local and wider commissioning.

¹ <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/12137/L14-105+Ensuring+quality+services/085fff56-ef5c-4883-b1a1-d6810caa925f>

² <http://www.nnpf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/NNPCF-What-good-integrated-care-should-look-like-in-transition-Final1.pdf>

³ https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/CQC_Transition%20Report.pdf

⁴ <http://www.bacdis.org.uk/policy/dataset.htm>



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It is a concern that much of the available data in Local Areas, including information about outcomes does not extend to out of Borough placements including residential special schools and colleges. This must be resolved in the national data collection system going forward.

3. Workforce

Workforce locally and in residential special schools and colleges are essential to good outcomes. Workforce issues locally may contribute to crises. It would be good if families could be involved in workforce planning in local areas including in social care if crises are to be avoided going forward. There is a need for all in the workforce to be aspirational and to be familiar with the Children and Families Act and for staff in schools and Children's homes to be equally well trained to support children and young people to achieve their potential.

This may also require changes to the national inspection frameworks to ensure they align with the Children and Families Act and to ensure that children and young people are not disaggregated into different parts for different inspection arrangements in the same residential special school or college.

4. Experiences and outcomes and how they can be improved

Little is known formally about these. We know there are good examples that should be shared and learned from. As one Parent Carer Forum who has submitted evidence said:

"All families that we spoke to are extremely happy with their child's placement."

Another parent carer shared a letter sent to her son's residential special school on his leaving:

"It is hard to believe just how far our son has come. His achievements are down to the love, commitment and hard work of all the staff. When he joined your school he was a very stressed and unhappy nine year old. He leaves your school a confident, fun loving and caring young man."

Families can also have concerns and may not know what to do. It is unclear how these might be picked up through formal mechanisms. There can also be exclusions from residential schools and colleges. Where is the national guidance about what to do if this happens and how does this relate to wider national policies such as Transforming Care?

The experiences of all families and outcomes for all children and young people should be good in terms of the Children and Families Act and Preparing for Adulthood.

Strong transition planning will be essential for good outcomes and experiences to happen. There is concern about lack of effective planning and decisions being resource and not needs led. Families and Young People should feel that the transitions are well managed and choices are being made that are in the best interests of all. Given the nature of the placements good transition planning is also



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likely to take longer and it is therefore essential that the statutory arrangements on transition are followed.

Little is also known about destinations. We welcome the work being done by the Tizard Centre to look at this. We also need improved data collection, mandated nationally, for this.



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Annex A – The NNPCF

The National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) was launched in 2011, and is funded by central government.

We became a formally constituted Group in November 2013. The NNPCF membership is made up of Parent Carer Forums of which there is one in almost every local authority area in England. Each parent carer forum in receipt of the Department of Education participation grant is a member of the NNPCF.

The function of the NNPCF is to develop cohesive good practice and effective participation and a solution focused approach at all levels, locally, regionally and nationally.

The aims of the NNPCF are to:

- Ensure that good practice, knowledge and shared expertise about parent participation continues to grow and strengthen.
- Develop a cohesive and coherent structure to sustain and develop the effectiveness of parent carer forums across England.
- Strengthen the pan disability, parent/carer led model of local forums and boost our collective voice.

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