

WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2003 at 10.00 AM

PARENT PARTNERSHIP SERVICE

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member: Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This item was originally requested by Pat Cherry, in the light of the minimum standards outlined in the SEN Code of Practice 2001. In June 2002 the Scrutiny Committee requested a more detailed report for June 2003.
- 1.2 The report describes the findings of a questionnaire sent to parents who had contacted the Parent Partnership service between 1999 and 2002.

2. Summary and Key findings

- 2.1 Parents expressed satisfaction with the service through their ratings.
- 2.2 Parents welcomed the opportunity to express their ideas on improvements to the service through open text comments.
- 2.3 80% of parents who contact the service make repeat calls.
- 2.4 The majority of parents who contact the service have children in mainstream schools.
- 2.5 The menu of support offered by the team is helpful and supportive and made a difference to them and their child.
- 2.6 The quality of the existing service was not in question but the capacity of one individual in each quadrant to respond to the number and diversity of callers is inevitably limited.
- 2.7 Several respondents suggested that a follow up call one, two or three months after initial contact would reassure them that someone was still interested.
- 2.8 Services offered by the Parent Partnership team need to be promoted even more actively than at present.
- 2.9 A presence at school consultation meetings would be helpful in promoting the service to parents.
- 2.10 Booklets should be widely available at local information points such as libraries.
- 2.11 Posters should be used on notice boards in schools to promote the service.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Parent Partnership service has 5.4 full time equivalent staff. Parents who responded to the questionnaire believe they receive a high quality countywide service, which the majority feels needs little improvement.
- 3.2 The survey will be repeated every 3 years using the same methodology. In addition to the survey in paper format the questionnaire will be available electronically on our website so parents using the service can complete it on an informal basis when they wish.
- 3.3 The questionnaire will be amended in the light of feedback and experience and will be used as a basis of a further questionnaire to schools, CSF staff, other professionals and non-service users and to improve service on the basis of answers to questions.

1 Background

- 1.1 The originally SEN Code of Practice was revised and published in 2001. A whole chapter was included on working in partnership with parents, laying down minimum standards for LEAs, the Parent Partnership service and offering guidance on avoiding and resolving disagreements. In order to evaluate whether the service offered to parents in Hertfordshire was the of the high quality that the Code outlines a survey was undertaken to seek the views of parents who had used the service.
- 1.2 To help the committee consider the report against the requirements of the Code the chapter on working with parents is included as Appendix 2 with this report.

2 Financial Implications

None

3 Rural Implications

None

Background material

SEN Code of Practice 2001 published by Department for Education and Skills

An evaluation of the views of parents and carers who have used the Parent Partnership Service from September 1999 to December 2002

This report is the result of a survey carried out in the Autumn Term 2002 throughout Hertfordshire. 360 survey forms were sent through the post to a random sample of parents and carers who had contacted the service through one of the five helplines that operate at County Hall or in each of the quadrants.

**This report has been undertaken as part of the agenda of the
Children Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee**

**Author: Chris Goodwin-King, Parent Partnership Co-ordinator
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June 2003**

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1 Key findings

- ◆ Parents expressed satisfaction with the service through their ratings
- ◆ Parents welcomed the opportunity to express their ideas on improvements to the service through open text comments
- ◆ 80% of parents who contact the service make repeat calls
- ◆ Parents of children in mainstream schools mainly contact the service
- ◆ The menu of support offered by the team is helpful and supportive and made a difference to them and their child
- ◆ The quality of the existing service was not in question but the capacity of one individual in each quadrant to respond to the number and diversity of callers is inevitably limited
- ◆ Several respondents suggested that a follow up call one, two or three months after initial contact would reassure them that someone was still interested.
- ◆ Services offered by the Parent Partnership team need to be promoted even more actively than at present
- ◆ A presence at school consultation meetings would be helpful in promoting the service to parents
- ◆ Booklets should be widely available at local information points such as libraries
- ◆ Posters should be used on notice boards in schools to promote the service

Note

- 1 Chapter 2 from the SEN Code of Practice (pages 16 to 25) is included in Appendix 2 of this document. Minimum standards are included within the in boxes.
- 2 Direct quotes included by parents as part of the questionnaire are in italics

2 Introduction

2.1 This survey was undertaken as part of the minimum standards described in the SEN Code of Practice 2001 and at the request of Pat Cherry, parent representative, and subsequently the CSF Scrutiny Panel. The period that the survey covers is September 1999 to December 2002. The service, which is part of the Conciliation and Appeals Unit is made up of a full time Parent Partnership Co-ordinator, full time administrative support and four Parent Partnership Supporters employed on a term time only contract.

2.2 The SEN Code of Practice 2001 states:

An effective parent partnership service is expected to meet the following minimum standards and ensure the regular review of the effectiveness of the service they provide, for instance by seeking the feedback from users.

Chapter 2, Paragraph 2.21

2.3 In June 2002 the Children Schools and Families Scrutiny Panel requested the Parent Partnership service to write a report of the views of their service users. The content of questions was prepared in discussion with Pat Cherry, Parent Representative on the Scrutiny Panel. When the Parent Partnership service team members devised the questionnaire, the Parent Partnership database was used to randomly select parents who had contacted the service since 1999. 360 questionnaires were sent to parents and carers who had contacted the service between September 1999 and December 2002. Questionnaires were posted with a stamped addressed envelope to facilitate easy return. A prize (family cinema ticket) was offered to encourage a good return. A sample questionnaire is attached to this report. The report is based on the 177 questionnaires, which were returned between September and November 2002. The figure of 177 represents a 49% return, which is a good response for a postal survey.

2.4 We assume that the majority of those who answered the questions in the survey are in fact parents and therefore this is how respondents are described throughout the report. Here and throughout the report 'parents' should be taken to include all those with parental responsibility. 90% of the respondents were female and 10% male. This is representative of the gender mix of callers we receive on the helplines.

2.5 We also asked respondents to indicate their ethnicity.

Indian	3.39 %
Pakistani	0.56 %
Black African	0.56 %
Black Caribbean	2.82 %
Mixed heritage	1.69 %
White European, including UK	88.70 %
Not answered	2.26 %

In the 2001 National Census, the county's minority ethnic population was recorded as 6.3%, compared to the national average of 9.1%.

3 Type of school

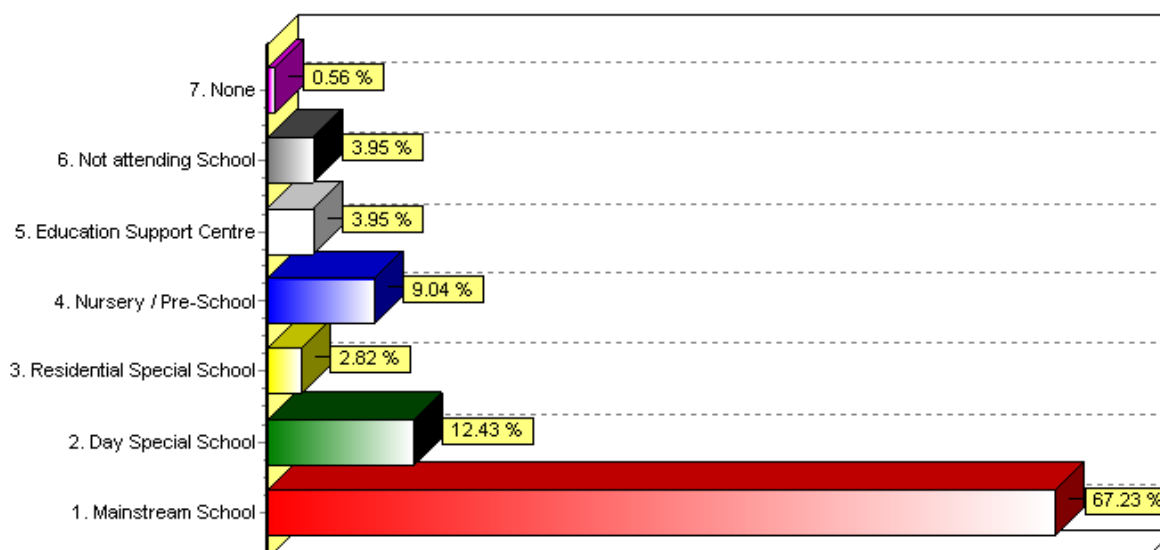


Figure 1: Type of School (Question 1)

- 3.1 Nearly 68% of callers are parents of children attending a mainstream school, with the next largest group of callers having children in a day special school. 5% of parents had children in nursery and pre-school settings, whilst the remainder were parents of children in residential special schools, Education Support Centres or not attending school at all. Generally there is good information and advice for parents of young children from health visitors, pre-school advisory teachers, the specialist advisory service and opportunity classes, which may account for such a low figure.
- 3.2 Parents in mainstream school often feel that they have no one to turn to beyond the school staff. Only one parent of a child in mainstream school suggested that her child received no additional support at all, so assume that all other children were receiving some extra help. Where the home school relationship is good then parents feel well supported but when there is confusion or disagreement, parents seek support from outside statutory and voluntary agencies. The conclusion from these figures suggests that even where the school is providing additional support parents may still have some concerns or they would like more information about the school's strategies to support a child's learning.
- 3.3 34% of parents who called had children with a Statement, closely followed by 30% of children receiving additional help in school which may or may not include the 10% of children receiving Earmarked Pupil Funding.
- 3.4 7.5% of children were receiving additional teaching from a private tutor and 3.5% of children received no additional help at all.
- 3.5 14% of callers had children in the process of statutory assessment. The number of callers enquiring about the statutory assessment process is potentially large as the 'Understanding Statutory Assessment' mornings that the team organises are held on a termly basis. This introduces parents to the statutory assessment process, they are able to meet their child's case officer

and we get the opportunity to promote the Parent Partnership Service and meet groups of parents all at the same stage of the process.

- 3.6 This is an opportunity for relationships to be built and previous surveys have shown that if difficulties and disagreements occur at a later stage there is potential for a resolution to be found as parents and officers have met and have some understanding of each other as people.

4. How had parents heard of service?

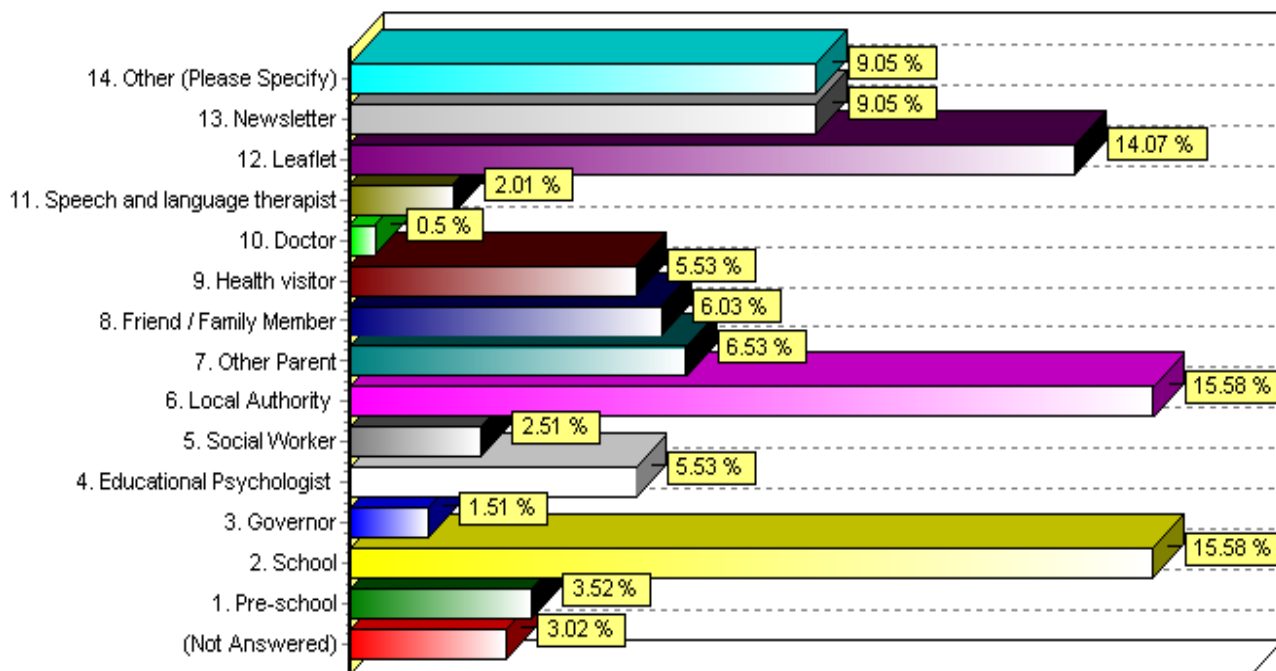


Figure 2: How had parents heard of the service? (Question 4)

- 4.1 When asked how parents had heard about the service there appeared to be no dominant source. Nearly 16% had heard about Parent Partnership from school and a similar number from the local authority. This number was closely followed by 14% of callers who had picked up a leaflet as part of the service’s own promotional literature. A further 9% had heard of the service via the newsletter. Health professionals totalled 8% whilst 12% had heard about us through friends and family members. This would suggest that word of mouth and personal recommendations are an effective way of promotion.
- 4.2 Service leaflets are also produced in community languages and on tape, with alternative methods of communication such as Braille and CD available on request. Written information is sent out to all parents who request a statutory assessment. For those parents who have access to the Internet all our information including past copies of our newsletter are on the HCC website www.hertsdirect.org/parentpartnership.

5 How do parents contact the Parent Partnership service?

- 5.1 Team members based in each area working closely on a face to face basis with parents, schools and the local authority experience conflicting pressures on their time when parents telephone for advice. The telephone is the predominant form of contact, with e-mail or letters being a less favoured form of communication.
- 5.2 There is a central help line in CAU at County Hall, which is answered by experienced staff, 52 weeks a year during office hours. We also ensure that parents are aware of the Customer Services number if they require general information.
- 5.3 As a service we have started to collect data on the meetings we attend. For the year April 2002 to March 2003 the team made:
- Home visits - **152**
School visits - **106**
Other visits e.g. Health centres - **14**
Other meetings e.g. post exclusion panels - **93**
Talks and presentations - **44**
- 5.4 These figures should be considered alongside the number of phone calls and other contacts the service receives, which in a twelve month period (April 2002 – March 2003) totalled **3560**.

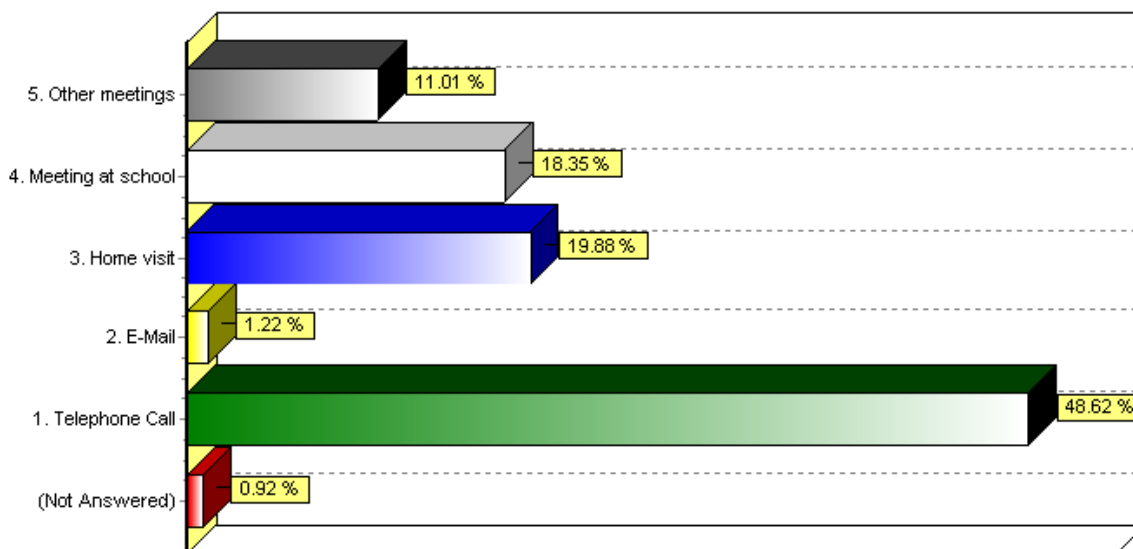


Figure 6: how do parents contact with the service? (Question 5)

6. Why contact the Parent Partnership Service?

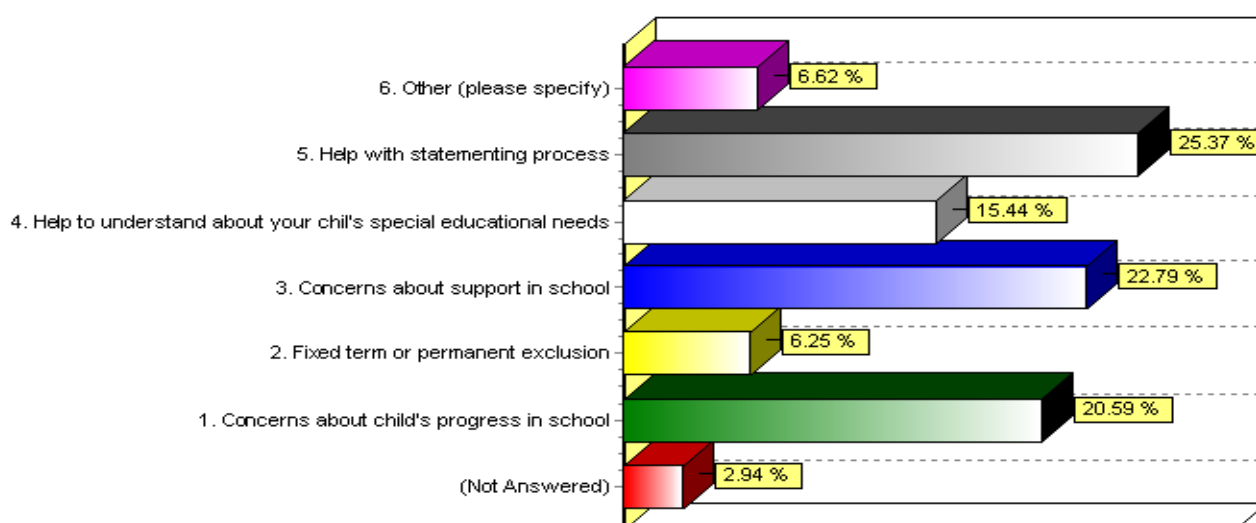


Figure 3: Why do parents contact the Service? (Question 6)

- 6.1 When asked why they had contacted the service a large number (44%) of parents contacted us because they had concerns about their child's progress in school and the support that they were currently receiving. 16% of parents were hoping to gain a better understanding of their child's special educational needs whilst 6% of callers were parents of pupils who had been excluded from school.
- 6.2 We have a wealth of useful information about a variety of special needs and disabilities that we are able to share with parents and schools. This is especially useful if the child has a recent diagnosis, which is unfamiliar to the parents or school staff.
- 6.3 In the Summer term 2003 eight roadshows have been organised in different towns in the county, meeting the demand for more local events and informal opportunities for parents to meet a range of professionals, including SENCOs in early years settings, and representatives of voluntary organisations.
- 6.4 We are also able to signpost voluntary organisations whether locally or on the Internet and are closely involved with self-help groups. We also work with groups such as Contact a Family to put parents in touch with each other for the rarer diagnosis.
- 6.5 A surprisingly high number of callers contacted the service up to 5 times (nearly 50%) or up to 10 times, which suggests that we provide much more than a 'one off' service for parents. 99% of callers found the Parent Partnership staff friendly while 94% thought staff were caring and supportive.
- 6.6 When asked if they would be happy to recommend the service to a friend an overwhelming 98% confirmed that they would be.

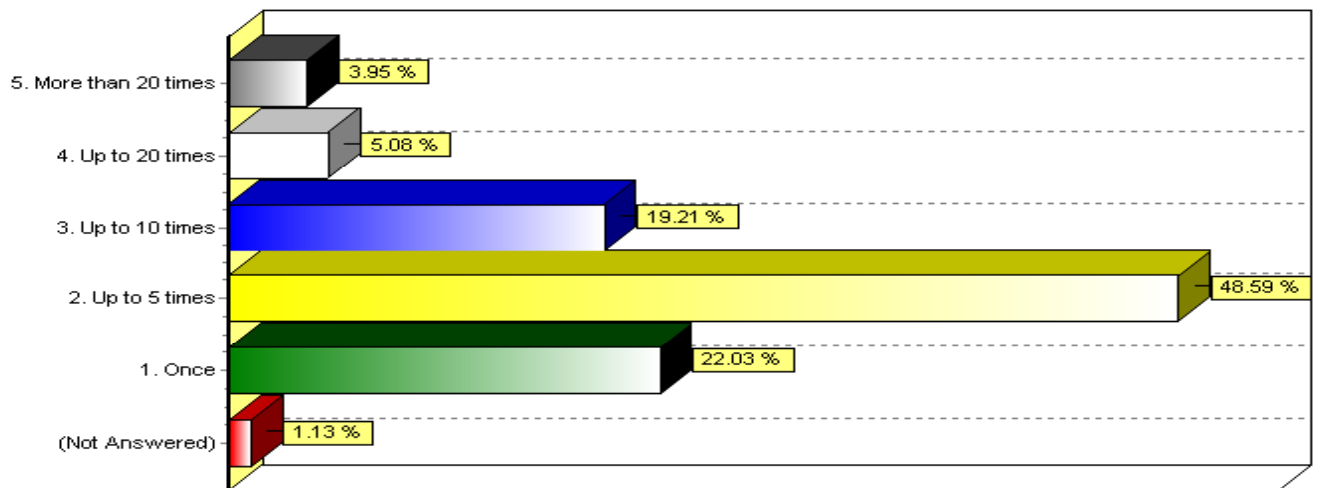


Figure 4: Number of times a parent had contacted the service (Question 7)

6.7 When the question was posed about the ease of understanding of the information offered to callers, 85% of parents thought the way information was presented was easy to understand alongside 91% of callers who felt staff were knowledgeable about the subject they were speaking about.

7 Service standards

7.1 As the service builds a reputation with parents as a high quality service the demand on the menu of services offered begins to bring tensions. The number of calls to the helplines rises each year. This promotes a reactive work pattern but at the same time the team is developing proactive opportunities such as the 'Understanding Statutory Assessment' meetings, county information days and local roadshows.

7.2 Over 82% of callers confirmed that we met our service standard of answering a call within two days.

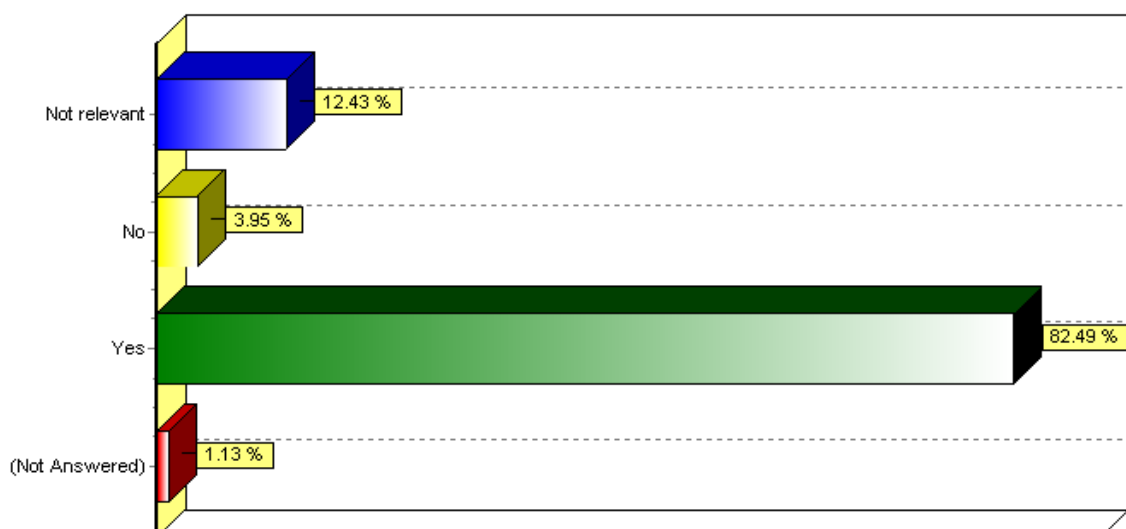


Figure 5: Service standards for returning a call (Question 8)

8 Impartiality

8.1 This is a potentially difficult state to achieve, particularly as a County Council service. However there is a clear view by parents that the team are most successful in presenting themselves and the information they provide in an impartial way.

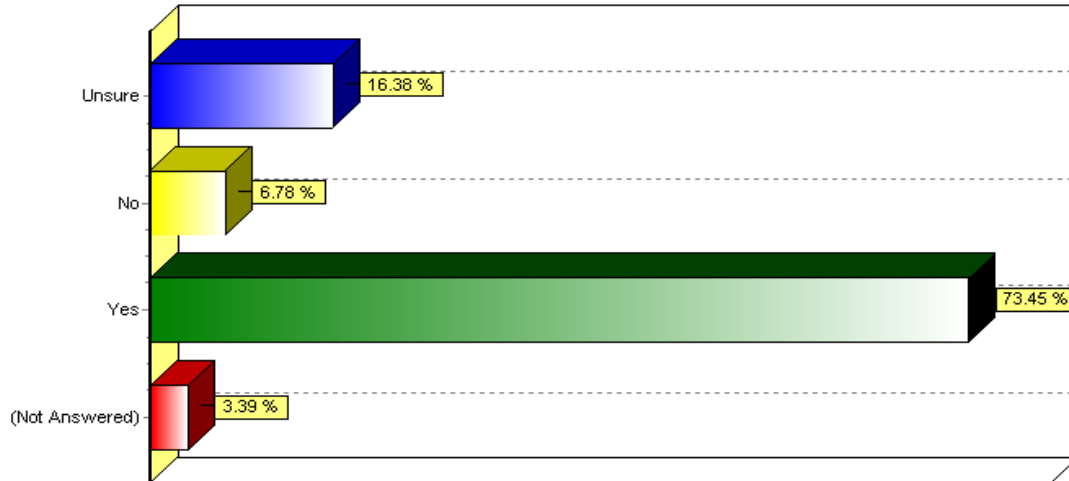


Fig 7 Perceptions of impartiality (Question 10)

8.2 Clearly the majority of those parents who contacted the service believe that the information and guidance received was impartial.

9 Empowerment

9.1 88% of callers felt that staff had listened to them. Only 1.5 % of callers felt that this was not the case and the remainder was unsure. It is important for a small service that we can empower parents to move on, otherwise there would be capacity issues as the client base increased. Some parents have a high level of dependency on support agencies and will use this support for other areas of their life apart from issues around their child's education. We endeavour to network with other agencies and professional groups to ensure that parents are aware of other sources of support.

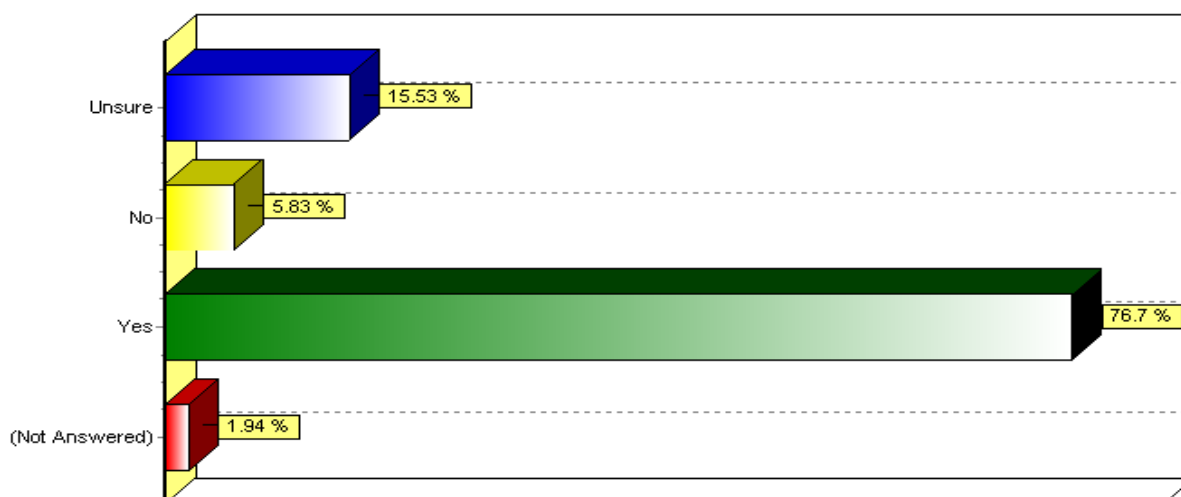


Figure 8: Confidence and Empowerment (Question 12)

9.2 77% of parents confirmed that they did feel confident and empowered while 6% did not believe they did, and the remainder were unsure. We went on to ask service users if, following contact with the service, they believed they had greater confidence and were more empowered to take an active role in their child's education.

10 Newsletter

10.1 Each term we produce 23,000 newsletters, which are distributed throughout Hertfordshire. We received a disappointing response of 54% of parents who received a copy of the newsletter, even though the bulk of copies are sent to schools for distribution to parents. This left 46% of parents who did not receive a copy on a regular basis if at all. Only 10% of callers had heard of the Parent Partnership service via the newsletter promotion. However 56% of those who did receive a copy found the contents helpful whilst the remainder were unsure.

10.2 The newsletter is also published on the Parent Partnership website.

11 Information days and roadshows

11.1 In order to create effective ways of meeting large numbers of parents we hold county information days and local roadshows. As part of the survey we asked service users if they found these events useful. An overwhelming 75% believe we should continue to organise such events and although 21% were not sure only 1% gave a negative response.

12 Avoiding and resolving disagreements

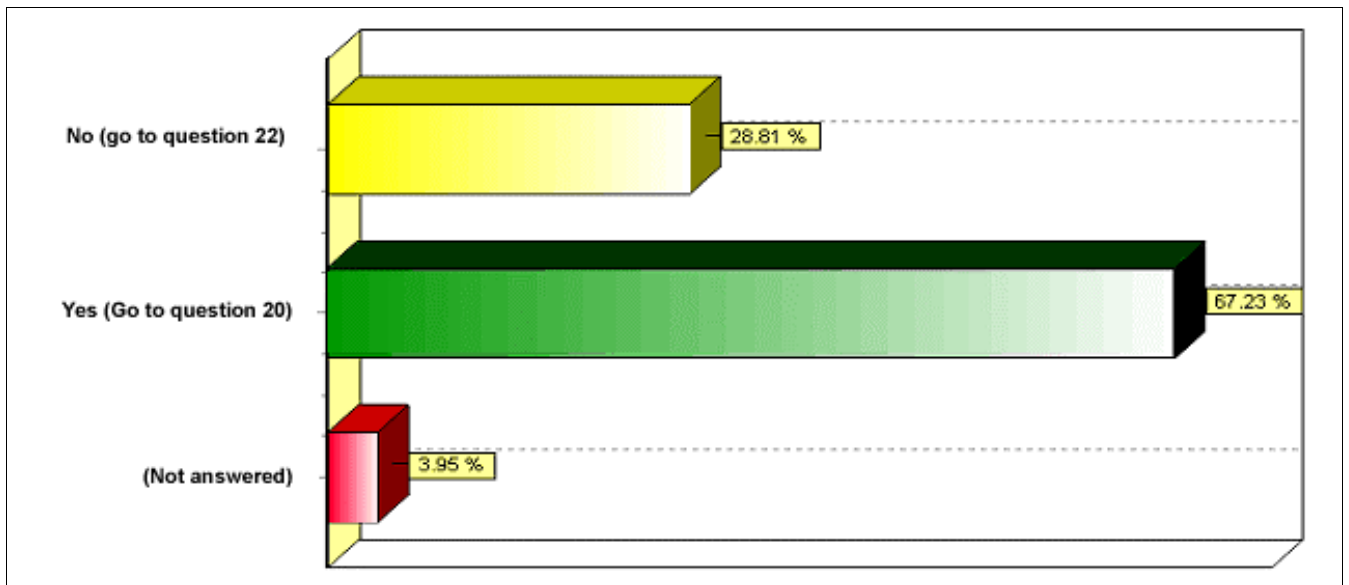


Figure 9: contact because of a disagreement (Question 19)

- 12.1 Much of the work of the team involves the avoidance or resolution of disagreements between parents and schools or parents and the local authority. 68% of callers did indeed contact the service because they disagreed about the way their child's needs were being met. 62% of callers who had contacted us for this reason felt that the service had fully or partly helped to resolve the disagreement, 8% felt that the service had not been able to help and 30% had not answered the question. Of those who felt that the Parent Partnership service had been helpful at this time just over 58% of parents agreed that they had been offered strategies which helped them to work together more effectively with their child's school.
- 12.2 To develop our work in this area the team is undertaking two distinct pieces of training in the summer term 2003. Firstly a training the trainers programme 'Conciliation skills training for front line staff in the SEN sector', which will be rolled out in the future to CSF and school staff. Secondly the team are undergoing an intensive training programme to be able to add mediation to their skills. This is a certification course accredited with the Open College network. It is hoped that by offering courses to schools and front line staff there will be less need to have recourse to formal mediation schemes, or Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal.

13 Suggestions by parents for improvements (Question 21)

13.2 Finally we asked parents to suggest improvements in the service, a selection have been included which reflect the majority of views:

13.3 Communication

'Providing workshops to parents on specific conditions, running coffee mornings or afternoons for parents to attend.'

'Possibly meetings could be arranged to enable parents with similar aged/similar special needs to meet to exchange ideas/information or just support each other locally (if not already provided?)'

'Actually the leaflets are one of the real strong points. Very well laid out and comprehensive.'

'Being able to contact them [the team] at different times.'

'Making all schools, health centres display a poster about its existence and what it can offer - the newsletter is not sent to schools in great enough quantity and only goes to those on SEN Register and is not available to others who may have concerns about their child.'

'I don't have a problem, every time I have had contact with PP I had been dealt with to my satisfaction. Some calls have not come back quickly but I have never been forgotten.'

13.4 Impartial and Supportive

'Very satisfied with the support from parent partnership - my Parent Partnership Supporter was extremely supportive and helpful.'

'I don't think any improvement is needed. I found the advice and the help given very useful.'

'We are very pleased and satisfied with the help given to us by the parent partnership service.'

'I feel you all work very hard for the child and parents. I could not have done it on my own. We need more of you.'

'Having special packs about the service for playgroups, health visitors, CDC etc so that people can know early on about this wonderful service. Also producing packs in ethnic languages, promoting confidentiality and that it is free.'

'Increasing the number of staff and making them completely impartial of county. I have had tremendous support from Network 81.'

'An excellent service. Very supportive, knowledgeable and practical approach. I would have no hesitation in contacting again and recommend 100%. Perhaps more publicity, as many parents I spoke to had never heard of it. I picked up the leaflet in the library.'

13.5 Some parents may confuse the service with the SEN Advisory Service, which gives strategic advice on SEN and school improvement to schools:

'I think it is already a well-informed body and is making itself known and available to parents. I wonder if schools new to a special needs child in their midst eg. Down's Syndrome, would value an initial visit, to help them have confidence early on, to know who to call if education problems. Our new school admitted it was a learning curve.'

13.6 **Clearly there are issues with supporting schools in partnership working and parents recognise this:**

'The service you provide is excellent, it is the schools who need re-educating with SEN inclusion. Education should be for all students, no matter what their needs are.'

'Getting parents' views across to school and other department when parents are struggling to do their best for the child and when others are finding it difficult to see the problems.'

'Maybe at parents' evenings at school, Parent Partnership could be mentioned when headteachers are giving their talk (i.e. in the special needs section).'

'I think the PPS needs to make school visits and meet at the actual school the parent of children attending the school who have special needs.'

'More staff - making information about PP available to ALL parents so those who do not know where to turn get information and support sooner, therefore the children get help sooner.'

Appendix 1

A
Hertfordshire
**Parent
Partnership
Service**

Help us improve our service to you by completing this questionnaire

Are you the parent/carer of a child with special needs? By answering these questions and returning this form you have the chance to win our prize draw of



We would like to improve our service to parents and carers who contact us in the future. We appreciate your time spent in answering these questions.

Q1: What type of school does your child attend?

- Mainstream school
- Day special school
- Residential special school
- Nursery/pre-school
- Education Support Centre
- Not attending school

Q2: Is your child

- Receiving additional help from school?
- Receiving additional help in school from someone who is not on the school staff?
- Receiving extra funding (known as Earmarked Pupil Funding)?
- In the process of a statutory assessment?
- Statemented?

Q3: What stage of the Code of Practice was your child at when you first contacted the Parent Partnership Service?

- None
- School Action (help from school)
- School Action Plus (help from the local education authority)
- Statemented
- Unsure

**Q4: How did you first hear about the Parent Partnership Service?
(please tick one only)**

- Pre-school
 - School
 - Governor
 - Educational Psychologist
 - Social Worker
 - Local Authority
 - Other parent
 - Friend/family member
 - Health visitor
 - Doctor
 - Speech & Language Therapist
 - Leaflet
 - Newsletter
 - Other (please specify)
-

Q5: What type of contact have you had with the Parent Partnership Service?

- Telephone call
- E mail
- Home visit
- Meeting at school
- Other meetings

Q6: Why did you first contact the Parent Partnership Service?

- Concerns about child's progress in school
 - Fixed term or permanent exclusion
 - Concerns about support in school
 - Help to understand about your child's special educational needs
 - Help with statementing process
 - Other (please specify)
-
-

Q7: How many times have you contacted the Parent Partnership Service?

- Once
- Up to 5 times
- Up to 10 times
- Up to 20 times
- More than 20 times

Q8: Our service standard is that a call will be returned within two days during term time. Did we achieve this?

- Yes
- No
- Not relevant

Q9: Did you find the Parent Partnership Service to be:

- Friendly** Yes No Unsure
Caring/supportive Yes No Unsure
Knowledgeable Yes No
 Unsure
Easy to understand Yes No Unsure

Q10: Did you feel the information you received was impartial?

- Yes
 - No
- Unsure

Q11: Did you feel your views were listened to?

- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure

Q12: Did you feel the Parent Partnership Service helped you feel more confident and empowered to take an active role in your child's education?

- Yes
 - No
 - Unsure

Q13: Have you received a copy of the Parent Partnership Service newsletter?

- Yes
 - No

Q14: If yes, was the newsletter

- Helpful
- Unhelpful
- Neither

Q15: We held a Special Needs Information Day in March this year. Do you think we should continue to organise events similar to this?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q16: Did the Parent Partnership Service give you details of any other organisations or services who might be able to help?

- Yes
- No
- Not relevant

Q17: Did the Parent Partnership Service suggest any ideas on how to work together with school or other education staff?

- Yes
- No
- Not relevant

Q18: Would you feel happy to recommend the Parent Partnership Service to other parents?

- Yes
- No

Q19: Did you contact the Parent Partnership Service because you disagreed with the way your child's needs were being met?

- Yes (go to question 20)
- No (go straight to question 22)

Q20: Did the Parent Partnership Service help you to resolve the disagreement?

- Fully
 - Partly
 - Not at all

Q21: The Parent Partnership Service can be improved by:

To help us meet the needs of individuals and communities we ask you to complete the section below. Thank you.

Q22: Are you? Female Male

Q23: To which of these groups do you consider you belong?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi | <input type="checkbox"/> Black African |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Black Caribbean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Black other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed heritage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sikh | <input type="checkbox"/> Traveller |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> White European, including UK |

We would like to thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Please return it **by Friday 15th November** in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. Only a small sample of people have been sent this questionnaire, so your answers are important to us. If you prefer not to fill in your name and address, we would still like to have your views.

The prize draw will take place on Monday 2 December and the winner will be notified by letter.

Please post back in the envelope provided as soon as possible, using the pre-paid label. There is no need to use a stamp.

Name:

Address:

Post code:

Telephone:

Should you have any queries about this questionnaire, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Parent Partnership
Conciliation & Appeals Unit
Herts County Council
County Hall
Hertford SG13 8DF
Telephone: 01992 555847

This questionnaire is available on request in large print, Braille computer disc, audio tape and other languages.

Appendix 2

Extract from SEN Code of Practice 2001