



SEND Participation Strategy

Engaging and involving parents & carers

Introduction and context

This strategy has been produced in consideration of the significant government reforms to education, health and social care when working with and for children and young people with SEND (0-25) and their families and/or carers. This is known as the SEND Code of Practice. The Code of Practice states, *'effective participation should lead to a better fit between family's needs and the services provided, higher satisfaction with services, reduced costs (as long term benefits emerge) and better value for money.'*

Locally, we carried out a review of the approach to communication and participation with parents and carers and to implement a Parents Charter. Through engagement, parents and carers gave their views on communication and involvement and those have been used to co-produce the Strategy and Charter.

This strategy will explain what participation is and how best to implement it in your setting/service, by giving useful tips and highlighting practical examples of good practice.

What is participation?

Participation is the involvement of parents and carers in services to give them the opportunity to air their views and influence the design and delivery of services.



There are different degrees of participation but the main one every service should aim for is co-production. Co-production is the 'golden standard' of participation which everyone should strive to do, it gives a more person centred approach.

What is co-production?

Co-production is an equal relationship between people who use services and the people who are responsible for the delivery of services. They work together from design to delivery, sharing decision making. Co-production requires dedication and commitment to achieve and sustain, but the rewards are worth the effort.

Co-production should always be meaningful and not carried out as a tick box exercise. It's proven to have a positive impact on achievement and progress and overall reduces conflict.

How to implement co-production

Before co-production, effective participation must have taken place to build up the relationships and trust with parents and carers. Commitment to co-production should be central to the whole organisation and reflected in its vision with every member of staff reaching out to parents and carers at every opportunity. Services must be ready to receive and value feedback.

Develop a co-production checklist



Start small and build up to bigger projects, letting people lead, not professionals

Acknowledge that a range of skills are needed for co-production

It is important to have good facilitation and listening skills, and to reflect and act upon what is heard

Don't take responsibility for solving every problem – allow the group to find collective solutions

Enabling Co-production

Ensure appropriate and adequate resources are available to support co-production (service user expenses, easy read documents and access needs)

Ensure no one group or person is more important than another. Everyone can contribute given the right support

Ensure frontline staff have everything they need for work on co-production, including time and flexibility

Acknowledge and respect what people who use services and their families say

Accept that sharing power means taking risks. Take a chance!

Don't use jargon or acronyms, plain English is better for everybody

Learn to share power. Doing things differently means we can work across a whole range of issues that confront us

Enabling Co-production

Create the expectation that people who use services and their families will be involved in every aspect of service planning, design / development and delivery at every level

Work with the group to support a clear set of identified values with a collective sense of direction

Before you start the work, decide together how you are going to work and what will make it successful, then stick to it

Ensure everything in the co-production process is accessible to everyone taking part

Parents and carers know their child or young person better than anyone else and should be considered as the experts in their education, health and wellbeing. This makes their involvement vital. The more needs that a child or young person has, then the more likely a parent or carer needs to be continuously involved.

Please see appendix 1 for practical examples of how participation and co-production have worked well.

Top tips for engaging parents and carers in participation

- ✓ Make parents and carers feel welcome
- ✓ Encourage feedback and respond appropriately
- ✓ Be open, honest and friendly
- ✓ Have the 'you said, we did' approach to show parents/carers that you are listening
- ✓ Be flexible
- ✓ Make links with wider community and other services
- ✓ Have visual displays in reception or public areas showing co-production and good news stories
- ✓ Encourage feedback and respond appropriately
- ✓ Make co-production every day practice
- ✓ Have activities and training courses relevant to interest and need
- ✓ Personalise letters sent to parents rather than the same generic one
- ✓ Support Parent Led activities and groups
- ✓ Promote positives to parents and carers wherever possible
- ✓ Always say thank you

Please see appendix 2 for an audit tool to see where you are with participation and co-production.

Barriers and challenges

There are lots of barriers which prevent parents and carers from being engaged. Lack of time, negative experiences of school themselves, unfriendly or unwelcome encounters with school staff, finding participation intimidating and lack of knowledge of how to participate are all barriers. Co-production can sometimes lead to challenges and how these are dealt with is important as it can take parents and carers to build up a lot of confidence to challenge.

Barriers can be broken down if trust is built up with parents and carers. Feedback from parents and carers reported barriers being broken down and challenges being resolved when a person '*gets*' their child or young person, and wants them to succeed.

Other feedback from parents and carers include:

- Lack of communication impacting on the whole day – parents and carers not being informed of even the little things that happen at school which results in the child or young person venting their frustration at home to parents, carers and siblings.
- Respect – Not acknowledging that the parent and carer is often the expert on the child or young person.
- Flexibility – Not giving parents and carers a variety of options when it comes to time and accessibility.
- People not doing what they say they are going to do.

A lot of these issues are resolved when co-production is done meaningfully.

There are some instances where the support that parents and carers require is outside of your expertise. There has been overwhelming feedback from parents and carers who say they don't know where to go when they need help, therefore it is extremely important that parents and carers are signposted to other organisations that can offer support. There are also lots of organisations who can support parent and carers and these are detailed at the end of the report.

Celebrating success

Celebrating success plays a key role in co-production. It's important to do this and keep evidence as it shows parents and carers that their views and input has been valued. Parents and carers will be much more likely to engage again and recommend it to other parents and carers if they can see the value in it.

Support

The Local Offer is a site which gives a wide range of information for families of children and young people aged 0-25 with special education needs or a disabilities. Below is a sample of the information which you'll find on the Local Offer.



County Durham Local Offer
www.countydurhamfamilies.info/localoffer

SENDIASS – Information Advice and Support Service

Providing confidential, impartial support and advice for parents, carers, children and young people up to the age of 25 years in relation to special educational needs and disabilities.

Helpline: 0191 587 3541

Email: sendiass@durham.gov.uk

Website: www.durhamsendiass.info

Durham County Carers Support

Providing advice, information and support to carers. We also have a support group for parents of children with long term conditions, physical or mental health or learning disabilities.

Tel: 03000 005 1213

Text: 07624 818 403

Email: admin@dccarers.org

Website: www.dccarers.org

Rollercoaster Parent Support Group

Information for parents and carers who are supporting a child with emotional or mental health problems in County Durham.

Tel: 07415 380 040

Email: parentsupport@success.coop

Contact (Formally Contact a Family)

We provide information, advice and support to families caring for children and young people with disabilities or additional needs. We support families with disabled children, no matter what their condition or disability.

Helpline: 0808 808 3555

Email: northeast.office@contact.org.uk

Website: www.contact.org.uk

NEAS

We are one of the main providers of autism specific services in the North East. We support children, adults and families in a range of settings.

Head Office: 0191 410 9974

Website: www.ne-as.org.uk

Appendix 1

Celebrating good practice

Many parents and carers are really keen to be involved in their child's education. Those who feel cut off are nearly always prepared to believe the worst and be the most critical.

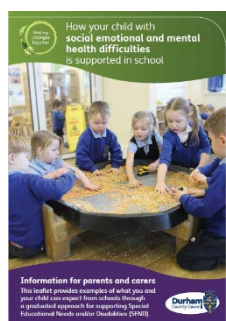
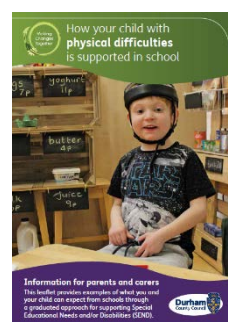
The [SEND Toolkit](#) is also detailed on the Local Offer in the '[For providers](#)' section. The Toolkit explains the responsibilities on early years providers, schools and post 16 providers for meeting the special educational needs of children and young people. The Toolkit also advises on developing a family centred approach in the planning and reviewing process.

A Transition Plan has also been developed which highlights good practice. This will be available soon.

Celebrating good practice

Example 1 – SEND Advisory Team

Making Changes Together had received feedback to say that parents would find it useful to have information leaflets on different special educational needs. MCT, the SEND Advisory Team and an Educational Psychologist came together to look at the content and design of the leaflets. [Ten leaflets](#) have been co-produced and are extremely useful for parents.



Example 2 – Education Health and Care Plan development

In light of the SEND reforms it was necessary to produce an Educational, Health and Care Plan. It was important that this was done in co-production with professionals, parents and carers to meet the level and type of support required. As things moved on if changes are needed to be made then parents and carers always have their input.

Example 3 – Education Health Needs Team

The Education Health Needs team identified the need to clarify relevant partners' responsibilities when making a referral to them. They worked in co-production with parents, carers and schools to develop a target sheet detailing everyone's responsibilities which has been found to be very useful for all partners.

Example 4 – Secondary school – Parkside Academy

Parkside academy aim to do everything in co-production with parents and carers and do things with parents and carers rather than to them. One specific example involved the SENCO and parents and carers from the parents' forum reviewing the Accessibility Policy. Changes were made to the policy and an action plan followed to make sure specific actions were addressed.

A good example of engagement is the SEND parents and carers evening. Parents and carers looked at the schools' Wellbeing Provision which supports the wellbeing of children and young people. Engagement and co-production is embedded in everything that Parkside Academy do with parents and carers. Parents and carers appreciate the chance to be able to have the open dialogue with the school.

Example 5 – Primary school – Moorside Primary School

Moorside Primary School hold 'stay and play' events three times a year where parents and carers are invited into the school to be involved in an activity. This is an informal way to build up relationships with parents and carers and to be able to show what the children have been working on. It is a good opportunity for teachers, parents and carers to have discussions and informally raise any concerns.

Example 6 – Special school – Walworth School

Walworth School engage with parents and carers regularly but are most successful in engaging when they hold an open day which usually goes alongside a charity day. One open day was an agricultural day and the children had a week of activities in school around sewing, making scarecrows, art work and handwriting. These were on display for all the parents and carers to see. There was an activity for the parents and carers to do with the children where they decorated a ginger man biscuit. This gave the parent and carers the opportunity to chat with the class teachers and see what work their children had been doing. The school also offer a pick-up service where the Parent Support Advisor will go out and pick parents and carers up who cannot get to school, making more parents and carers able to access the day.

The [transport policy](#) for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities can be found on County Durham's Local Offer.

The School Places and Admissions team strive to work together with families more to ensure that children and young people have access to education or training. They have begun to work with [Making Changes Together](#) and set up a Transport Focus Group to take this forward.

There are two Clinical Commissioning Groups and four NHS Foundation Trusts who provide services in County Durham. They all have their own Engagement Strategies which can be found on their own websites or by contacting them individually.

- Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield Clinical Commissioning Group
- North Durham Clinical Commissioning Group
- County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
- North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust
- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust

Mental Health

Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust - CAMHS

Celebrating good practice

One of the very positive examples of CAMHS co-producing with parents and carers has been through the Rollercoaster Parent Support Group. The group has been running for three years and was initially set up by a parent who was going through a hard time with her daughter and was appalled by the lack of support for parents and carers of children and young people with emotional or mental health issues. Parents, carers and CAMHS came together to form the Rollercoaster group where it was thought that CAMHS would come along to the groups for half an hour. The need was so vast that they decided to stay for the full session and provide an information and support clinic. There has been such a need that after the group ran for two years without funding, it is now funded by Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning groups. As well as being a support group the parents and carers have a voice and are influencing the design of services.



Wendy Minhinnett (right) and Nicky Harmer (left) speaking about Rollercoaster at MCT 10th Anniversary meeting.

You will find the contact details for Rollercoaster in the support section of the strategy.

One Point

The majority of contact One Point have with parents and carers is through a First Contact referral. One Point is engaging with parents and carers more and more throughout the Education and Health Care Plan process. They are increasingly supporting parents and carers whose child or young person does not have a diagnosis. This involves giving emotional support and signposting to other agencies such as the Local Offer, other Local Authority services and those in the voluntary and community sector.

Celebrating good practice

Children and Families Wellbeing for Life Worker engaged a parent who was looking for a parenting course. The parent attended the course and she knew from the reaction that other parents were having to strategies, that her child was different. The One Point worker gave the parent information and support on where to access help. This then gave the parent the confidence to know that they were a good parent and what was happening wasn't their fault. It also gave the parent the confidence to challenge services if need be.

Short Breaks

A short break is something that a child or young person can access which provides parents and carers with a break from their caring role. This can range from a couple of hours taking part in a local activity with friends, to holiday schemes or specialist overnight hospice care. The type and length of a short break can vary to meet the needs of each family.

Celebrating good practice

The Short Breaks Commissioning Lead reviews, designs and arranges (commissions) short break services jointly with parents and carers and children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

A parent and carer led short breaks focus group meets regularly and, amongst other things, looks at where the needs are, write tender questions and write service specifications.

When the services are going to be reviewed, all parents and carers are written to in order to see what their views are about short breaks. A consultation is currently underway to gain those views.

The commissioning team build it into providers' contracts that they must gather the views of families before they organise activities. They are required to gather a file together showing initial engagement, how the services are developed and how they're reviewed and this can be asked for on monitoring visits.

Co-production is embedded in this whole commissioning process and has become every day practice which works extremely well and is highly praised by those parents and carers involved.

To find out more about Short Breaks please follow the link below.

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/media/22515/Short-breaks-statement/pdf/ShortBreakStatement.pdf>

School/service:

Name:

Appendix 2

Special Education Needs and/or Disability Audit Tool for Participation

Audit of participation						
School/Service:		Completed by:			Date:	
Priorities		Where are we?			Required actions	Next steps
		Embedded	In progress	Not started		
Example: We start every new project together with parents All staff have an understanding of parent engagement and co-production Engagement is built into and takes place at all levels of the organisation The first contact with the school/service that parents/carers have is friendly and welcoming	Tick if priority is not applicable ✓		<i>Teams are engaging parents and carers in projects</i>		<i>Work in co-production with parents and carers not just engaging them</i>	<i>Next new project invite parents and carers to come along and start together from scratch</i>
If you have developed anything in co-production with service users, please provide evidence here						

Priorities	✓	Embedded	In progress	Not started	Required actions	Next steps
There are varied communication methods used which are adapted to parents/carers needs						
Information is available to all parents/carers including those with a home language that is not English, with sensory impairment or SEN						
Parents/carers are encouraged to engage on a regular basis other than specific events						
The fears/anxieties that parents/carers may have about meeting with professionals are recognised and addressed						
There is flexibility in timing of appointments to accommodate parents/carers						
The room where review meetings with parents/carers of children and young people with the SEND are held is comfortable and welcoming						

Priorities	✓	Embedded	In progress	Not started	Required actions	Next steps
There is appropriate seating for parents/carers during meetings						
There are systems for feedback in place and parents/carers views are sought actively						
Parents/carers' views are acted upon and feedback on action is given regularly. E.g. You Said We Did						
Parents/carers are contacted individually when things are going well						
Parents/carers know how to raise concerns when they feel they have unresolved issues						
Parents/carers are given information on where they can get support (e.g. SENDIASS, Contact and Durham County Carers)						

Priorities	✓	Embedded	In progress	Not started	Required actions	Next steps
Parents/carers are involved in any decision making around their child or young person						
Parents/carers know what resources have been allocated to their child						
Parents/carers/carers are clear how they can support their child at home						
Parents/carers reported that they've gained something new from their involvement e.g. skills, confidence, knowledge						
Parents/carers are thanked and recognised for their contributions						