



Access All Schools

Disabled Parents and Schools

Working Together

Access All Schools gives the views of Norfolk's Disabled Parents on better ways for schools and parents to work together to help our children learn.



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Awards For All and
Norfolk Community
Foundation



Norfolk Disabled Parents Alliance

- a voluntary group run by and for disabled parents in Norfolk.
- aims to provide information to disabled parents, their families and those who work with them.
- works for choice and equality, improved support for disabled parents and their families when needed, and provides a way for disabled parents to have a say about services.

Thank you to the many people who supported Access All Schools.

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The observations and recommendations for good practice in this report apply to all Local Authority schools, Independent schools, Academies and Free schools.

This report and a summary are available to download from
www.norfolkparents.org.uk

For other formats please phone or text 078 525 989 54 or
email: info@norfolkparents.org.uk

Access All Schools is for you if you

- are a parent with a impairment, disability or health condition.
- find it's hard to support your child to learn as much you'd like to.
- find it's hard to go into or work with your child's school.
- are a disabled parent's partner or family member.

Access All Schools is also valuable for head teachers, nursery, primary, secondary or higher education teachers, school governors, support or pastoral workers and others involved with:

- Schools, disability, family welfare or learning.
- Children and young people, young adults and adults with caring responsibilities.
- Additional educational needs and adult education.
- Disability and Equality agendas.
- School websites, curriculum and school resource design.
- Local Authority Children's Services, Community Services and Health Services.
- Government, partnerships and policy makers concerned with all parents, children, families and disadvantage in our communities.

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Access All Schools: Disabled Parents working with Schools

Executive Summary

Access All Schools responds to reports from Norfolk's disabled parents of difficulties in communicating with their children's schools and involvement in their education.

- One in seven of all parents has physical and/or mental impairments and may experience a disadvantage in encouraging their child's education due to social and environmental barriers.
- **There are seven children with at least one disabled parent in an average classroom of 25 children.**

The survey was devised and conducted by disabled parents to:

- research wider views from disabled parents in Norfolk on how schools support them to encourage their children's education.
- explore how Norfolk's Joint Adult and Childrens Services Protocol on Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long Term Illness supports disabled parents with school issues.
- support disabled parents to take part in school Equality Plan consultations.

Main Findings:

- **There is inadequate access to information, and poor opportunities for some disabled parents to encourage their children's education.**
Only half of disabled parents get enough information about their child in a way that suits them. Some have to rely on others, contributing to a cultural acceptance of inequality and potentially, extra responsibility for young carers.
- **A third of disabled parents want to support their child's school life more.**
Barriers are in travelling to school to talk to teachers and school events, and in accessing and understanding homework, especially from secondary schools.
- **A third of disabled parents do not know if their children are learning well.**
The presentation of this information is a common barrier.
- **Less than half of disabled parents use their child's school website.**
Websites often had poor disability access with limited, out of date content. Opportunities are lost to involve disabled parents who are isolated in rural areas, those with children in secondary schools, and to reflect good practice to students.
- **Two thirds of parents had asked school for individual support for their child.**
Only half of these found school supported them well.

- **Few schools have told all parents about parental support to prevent the impacts of young carer issues.**
Information is offered only to parents who are already identified, instead of to all parents as a preventive measure.
- **Most disabled parents want schools to offer a specific opportunity for all parents to say if they have any access, communication or support needs.**
Parents would like contact with a named member of staff trained to discuss issues including parental support if their disability, illness or disadvantage might impact on their individual child's learning or welfare.
- **We urge schools to offer ACES Options to all parents:**
Access, Communication, Equality and Support options, to signal school's commitment to support and equality for all pupils and disabled parents.
- **The challenge for schools management and Government is to create and resource whole school systems to give consistent delivery of support options and to integrate these with networks of support for disabled parents.**

The report also gives:

- a template school policy for **young carers**, emphasising early support to parents can reduce or eliminate pressures on young carers and improve their life chances.
- an analysis of **school websites** and gives suggestions for improvements.
- views on **how disability issues are taught** in schools.
- Information and resources for disabled parents on **how to get support**.

Main recommendations to parents:

- **Use all opportunities** school offers to tell them what you need.
- **Tell schools** if their system presents a barrier to you.
- **Get support** if you need it.

To schools:

- **Be proactive** in offering communication and support needs to all parents.
- **Develop systems** to consistently establish and deliver parental support needs.

To voluntary groups:

- **Consider disability and family access** when planning school parent-teacher groups, Friends of the school, out-of-school activity groups and disability group activities.

To Local Authority and partnership groups:

- **Promote good quality individual support** to disabled parents in all areas of Norfolk.
- **Provide information** about the support available to disabled parents and their children for schools to pass onto parents, and publicise it to the wider population.
- **Promote learning** through all divisions and service providers about working together and positive approaches to disadvantage, disabilities and illness that can remove barriers for parents in supporting their children's learning and welfare.

To Government:

- **Require and enable all bodies to recognise their duties** to support the parenting role of disabled or ill parents and the welfare of their children.
- **Require all Local Authorities to operate a disabled parents protocol.**
- **Recognise the additional costs carried by individual disabled parents** in their parenting role over parents who do not have disabilities and disabled adults who do not have children.
- **Recognise the additional costs of providing support** to disabled parents and their children in rural areas.
- **Promote greater capacity in disability advocacy**, information and advice resources
- **Promote resources to support the Equality Act** for individuals to exercise their rights and for providers to implement their responsibilities.
- **Require initial teacher training and INSET to include equality training that includes parental disability issues.**

The next stage of Access All Schools is to develop disability equality skills among disabled parents in Norfolk to support school Equality Plans.

If funds permit, this work will start in 2011.

Introduction: Disabled parents and Access All Schools.

In 2008, disabled parent members of Norfolk Disabled Parents Alliance voiced concern at mounting school associated difficulties. We decided to ask more disabled parents in Norfolk about their experiences, and ask for their views on how schools could work with them to encourage their children's learning.

This Access All Schools report presents the disabled parents' opinions given in the survey. It offers insight and suggestions for good practice for parents, schools and others involved in children's education, disability and family welfare services.

Disabled parents say schools can have a huge impact on family life. Some schools offer all parents easy ways of working with them to encourage children's learning. They help disabled parents to find extra support, if needed, which can improve the quality of life and prospects for all the family. Sadly, others present unnecessary difficulties to disabled parents and their families. Schools that show a general lack of awareness, unhelpful attitudes and/or poor accessibility for disabled parents can cause anxiety and frustration that impacts on children and family relationships.

Norfolk is one of the few Local Authorities to have a Joint Protocol between Adult and Children's Services and partner agencies to support disabled adults in their parenting role if needed. "Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long Term Illness"¹ provides a system by which disabled adults can get support for their parenting role through Community (Adult) Services. This includes support around involvement in their children's education which can be managed by parents themselves though a direct payment or personal budget.

Parent's involvement with their children's education is known to raise children's achievement, improve school results and increase community cohesion.² This can only happen for all children if the systems provided for involvement are easily available to all their parents.

Access All Schools was devised and conducted by disabled parents to:

- **ask Norfolk's disabled parents how schools support them to encourage their children's learning.**
- **ask for their suggestions on what would improve their experience and their children's education.**
- **explore how the Disabled Parents Protocol can support disabled parents around school issues.**
- **support disabled parents to take part in Equality Scheme consultations.**

¹ Joint Protocol "Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long Term Illness" 2006. Norfolk County Council. www.norfolkparents.org.uk/what-is-the-protocol.htm

² The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: C. Desforges with A. Abouchaar DfES 2003 www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR433.pdf

“Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People”³ set out the vision that ‘by 2025, disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life, and will be respected and included as equal members of society’.

Access All Schools takes place as the Equality Act 2010⁴ comes into force. This strengthens duties under Disability Discrimination Act to promote disability equality, and introduces important new considerations⁵. Public bodies must involve disabled people in developing plans to show how they are promoting disability equality.

Norfolk’s disabled parents and their children experience a rural disadvantage in comparison to parents nationwide. “Being a Young Carer in Rural England”⁶ describes the consequences of impairment on rural families, in particular the impacts of social exclusion. It notes “becoming disabled is not a random occurrence but rather entrenches and deepens pre-existing disadvantage”.

“Think Family: Improving the life chances of families at risk”⁷ stresses the importance of all bodies to work together in supporting families and to prevent the impacts and exclusion that come with social disadvantage. Central to the idea of “no wrong door” is that schools might become a resource not just for children’s direct learning, but also as an acceptable route to other universal or specialist services, particularly for parents who may be reluctant to ask for help to improve their children’s life chances.

Definitions, barriers and numbers.

A person is a disabled person (under the Equality Act, someone who has the protected characteristic of disability) if they have a physical and/or mental impairment which has ‘a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.’

Disabled parents are parents or people with parental responsibility who have physical and/or mental impairments, and experience disadvantage due to social and environmental barriers.

Norfolk Disabled Parents Alliance works to a social model of disability which defines disability as “a disadvantage experienced by an individual with impairment due to social and environmental barriers”⁸ and encourages the removal of such barriers.

³ Improving the life chances of disabled people. 2005

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/disability.pdf

⁴ Equality Act 2010 www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_act_2010.aspx

⁵ What equality law means for you as an education provider: schools.

www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/EqualityAct/schools_nsg_3.doc#_Toc271210696

⁶ Commission for Rural Communities. Being a Young Carer in Rural England: Summary Report 2010. www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/1709334

⁷ Think Family: Improving the life chances of families at risk. 2008 Cabinet Office www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social_exclusion_task_force/assets/think_families/think_family_life_chances_report.pdf

⁸ www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/PSD/22_ded_employment.pdf pge 8

What are the barriers?

Examples of barriers within schools are described by Kirsten Francis⁹ as including:

- “physical barriers (for example inaccessible areas of school sites)
- intellectual barriers (for example materials and resources that are complex and require a high level of literacy and numeracy)
- social barriers (for example inflexible arrangements for meeting with school staff)
- sensory barriers (for example lack of provision for parents with sensory impairments) and
- internalised barriers to do with prejudice (for example judgements made by school staff about parents not being interested in their children’s education).”

Francis continues “When services or involvement opportunities are offered in ways that are not accessible, or which disadvantage disabled parents, those parents will be disabled in undertaking their parental role and responsibilities in relation to being involved in the education of their children.”

“Unequal access undermines the family, the parent, the child, the school, the community and society in general.”

Parents need appropriate, consistent and flexible school systems which are likely to be created only if there is a whole school culture which promotes equality for all.

Numbers of disabled parents.

Disabled parents are often described as invisible. Different bodies identify parents, or disabled people, but few identify parents who are also disabled people or vice versa. The statistics of disabled people depend on “eligibility” for a specific purpose, e.g. those receiving a particular benefit, or those predicted to have a particular impairment in health statistics, but rarely include their parenting status.

In 2003, among the total of 14.4 million parents in the UK, over 2 million received both Child Benefit and either Disability Living Allowance or a disability related income benefit¹⁰ and are considered to be ‘disabled parents’. In Norfolk by this measure, there were 18,459 disabled parents with 29,791 children.

However, significant others are missing from this total. They include disabled parents who work but do not receive any disability benefits even though they may have impairments that disadvantage their involvement in their child’s education, for

⁹ Involving disabled parents and carers in their children's education at secondary school. Kirsten Francis. MA dissertation, De Montfort University 2009

www.norfolkparents.org.uk

¹⁰ Stickland, H. (2003). *Disabled Parents and Employment*. London: Department of Work and Pensions and personal communication with NDPA 2005

example those with mental health issues for whom mixing in crowds or just dealing with authority figures may present significant barriers.

One in seven of all parents has an impairment and may experience a disadvantage in encouraging their child's education due to social and environmental barriers.

This represents seven children with at least one disabled parent in an average classroom of 25 children.

The Parental Opinion Survey¹¹ noted 12% of parents as disabled or ill, confirming that one in seven is probably a reasonably accurate overall number.

Invisibility comes about because organisations do not ask the right questions about the people they work with. Disability groups do not usually ask if members are parents of dependent children so their services may not be planned for families, while family welfare groups and schools may not consider if a parent has impairment related difficulties. This causes poor disability information for parents and sometimes very poor access to community services for disabled parents. But asking is not a simple matter, as will be discussed in a later section.

Many disabled parents have no disadvantage in accessing most school initiatives because what is offered is accessible to them or because they have already organised adequate support from various sources. Some experience disadvantage if information is not consistently provided in appropriate formats. Others may experience serious disadvantage because school processes and events present stressful intellectual or physical barriers that significantly impact on their involvement.

Schools are not responsible for providing all the support some parents may need, but they are uniquely placed to recognise if parental needs impact on a child's learning or welfare, and they can signpost parents to the support that is available.

This survey shows that some schools do present their services in ways that are more accessible to all parents, not just parents who have self-identified as disabled. Offering universal, non-stigmatising and inclusive services helps all parents to be more involved and to feel easier about talking about difficulties if needed.

We can remove barriers. We can teach more constructive attitudes and eliminate the oppressive emotional load about impairment and disability carried by so many children into adulthood.

¹¹ Peters, M. and others. (2009). Parental Opinion Survey. Research Report DCSF-RR194. TNS-BMRB Research.

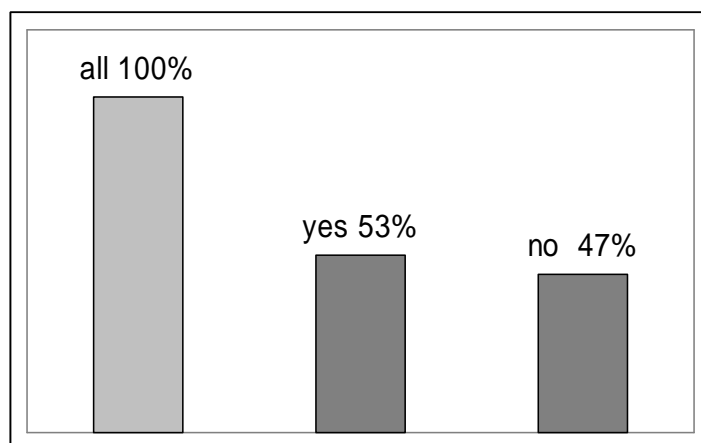
www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR194.pdf

Communicating with schools:

knowing about our children in school, letters, reports and websites.

Disabled parents want to be as independent in their dealings with schools as non-disabled parents. They want to express and practice responsibility for their children as each thinks appropriate for their family. Independence requires both choice and a way to control the management of that choice. Information is key to this process.

Does school tell you all you want to know about your child in a way that suits you? Yes 53% No 47%



Someone to tell me, not letters.

Regular communication about what school's doing in class. It's not predictable. I don't know if I'm missing anything.

Only around half of disabled parents get enough information about their child in a way that suits them.

Parents said:

"I need direct contact by phone or email. I can scan and read typed material, but not handwriting. I have to listen to everything before I know what it says. It all takes extra time."

"Inconsistent format. I need electronic, they often send print."

"They send text messages or letters even though they know I can't read or write very well."

"They send letters via child who doesn't give them to me. Would prefer through post as I can't get out to meetings. Would like text or email alert."

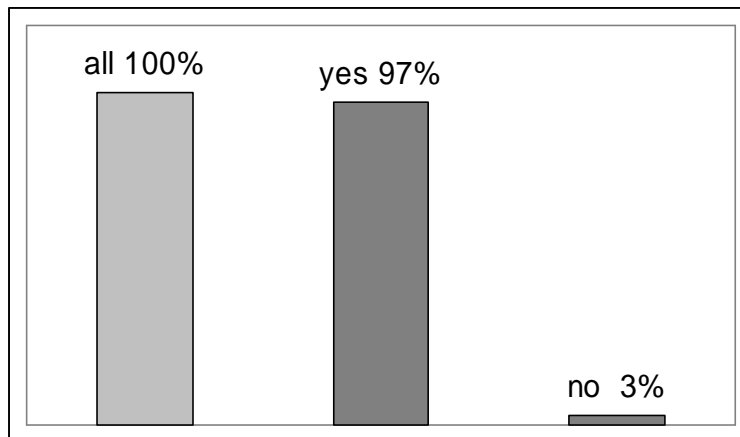
"School never tell me by phone, always send message through child. It's not always appropriate."

"They should think about grandparents as well."

"Inform parents by person or voice but I am sick of 4-5 text messages (a day). It is irritating."

"Most letters are generic and not about my child or his class. I don't know what he does day to day."

Do you read school letters and reply if needed? Yes 97% No 3%



Make more accessible so my child doesn't have to assist.

Almost all read and reply to letters from school.

Some have to rely on their partners, children, paid personal assistants or carers because letters are sent in an inaccessible format. This is a barrier for around a quarter of parents.

Parents said:

“Text system would make it easier to remember what action I need to take.”

“If I had a phone call.”

“Sometimes I only find out when I speak to other Mums, which isn't often.”

“My partner reads.”

“Emailed is better than print for me, with plenty of time to respond.”

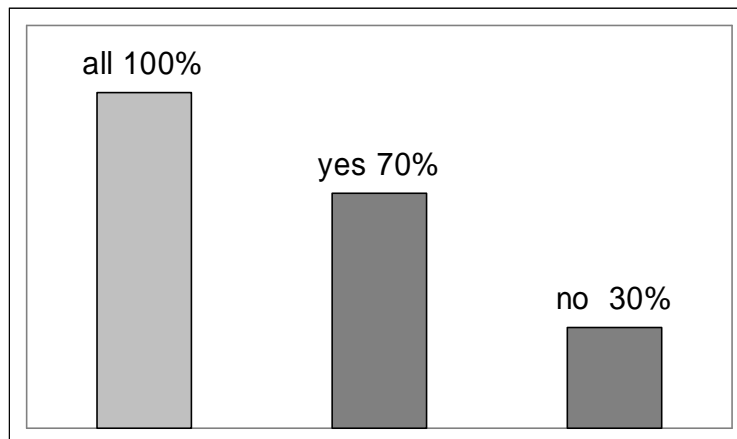
“I can read, not write. Audiotapes are not secure enough to reply, it makes child feel different to be handing them in.”

“I have overheard a conversation in school between office and a parent. He didn't know what was going on because he couldn't read, but (the office) kept giving him paper notes.”

“School is going over to Parentmail email system, and I was pressured to take part but I can't use email.”

“She goes to a wonderful school and thankfully we get all the help we need, which makes a huge difference.”

Do you know if your child is learning as well as they should? Yes 70% No 30%



Reports don't make much sense to me.

Around a third of disabled parents do not know if their children are learning as well as they should. The presentation of this information is a common barrier.

Parents said:

“I think they are (learning well), but have to depend on what their teacher tells me as I have nothing to compare it with.”

“Regular updates would be good especially for special needs children. It would help to know what to focus on at home.”

“They're doing well. Their grades did drop (when I was ill) but now better.”

“The teacher tell them, they come home to tell Dad.”

“I know he's not doing as well as he could. If I knew about things I could do better, be more hands on. He's totally dissociated, knows he's alone. Me being ill quietly affects him, he just turns up (to school) with other things on his mind, anything, not just about caring for me.”

“Reassurance that my child is doing well and that I am doing a good job as a parent would be nice.”

“Although teachers are good and explain what different items mean, e.g. present and target grades, I still have difficulty understanding them.”

An understanding of national standards would be good and where my child sits on those standards.

What does this tell us about disabled parents communication with schools?

With only half of disabled parents getting enough information about their child in a suitable form even though most have access in some way to school letters, it is relevant to look next at whether this is a common finding for all parents, or if disability issues have a particular impact on communication.

The Parental Opinion Survey ¹² shows 95% of the parents asked were content with the way they received information from support services, rising to 98% from schools. 12% self-declared as disabled parents in the Parent Opinion survey. Comparison between the dissatisfaction of 47% of Access All Schools survey respondents and half of the Parent Opinion Survey's 12% disabled parents is respectively 5% and 6%.

It is reasonable to consider Access All Schools respondents are representative of the "very small proportion" of 5% in the Parental Opinion Survey, suggesting it is likely to be disabled parents who are dissatisfied, due to their common factor of disability.

Some replies to our survey came from disabled parents with partners who take an active role in maintaining contact with school. Partner support disguises the impact of inaccessible buildings, letters or other initiatives on disabled parent partners, lone parents or where there are two disabled parents with similar disadvantages. Enabling both parents to participate is also likely to promote greater access for fathers.

Some disabled parents use their direct payments or personal budgets to employ personal assistants (PAs) to take children to and from school. Schools should not assume PAs 'stand in' for parents, or that they will always pass on or interpret messages. Parents should consider whether their PAs are to be involved in talking to teachers, and give specific instructions for this to both their PAs and school. Up to date communication books can help, but access formats also need to be considered.

PAs may be available for only a few hours one day a week or less. School may need a response within the week or parents may need to buy an item for their child quickly. For example, a one-piece swimsuit in the autumn term might take longer to find, and be more expensive from a specialist shop than in summer from a more accessible outlet. A reminder in good time allows all parents, especially disabled parents and those on benefits, to accommodate these extra purchases more easily.

It should not be assumed that a child who can read letters to their parent is happy or will do so, or that a parent will find it acceptable to be dependent on their child in this way, especially if the parent has asked for letters to be sent in a different format.

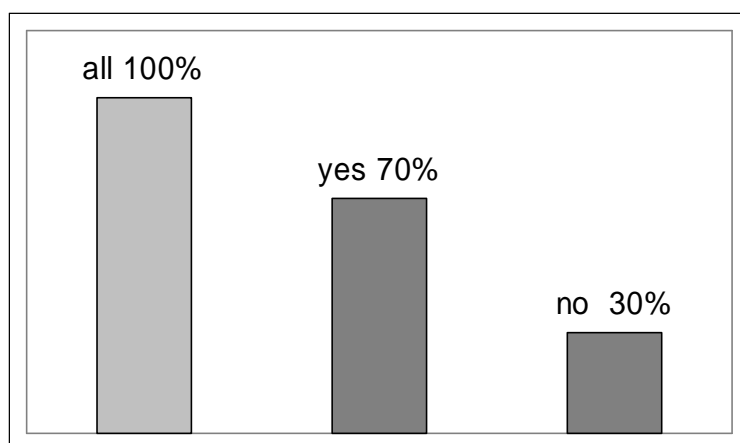
These are examples of system barriers that disable the parent. When children are closely involved, as in reading letters to a parent, these barriers contribute to a cultural acceptance of inequality, and an avoidable extra responsibility for potential young carers.

¹² Peters, M. and others. (2009). Parental Opinion Survey. Research Report DCSF-RR194. TNS-BMRB Research. Paragraph 22
www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR194.pdf

Supporting children's education:

homework, parent-teacher meetings, school events, working and volunteering in school.

Do you support your child's school life and learning as much as you would like to? Yes 70% no 30%



Car parking is a problem. The disabled space is often taken by cars that don't have disabled badges

A third of parents want to support their children's school lives more than they do. Parents face barriers in getting to school to talk to teachers and for school events, and in accessing and understanding homework, especially from secondary schools.

Parents said:

"Better communication from school about what they are doing in class."

"For me to learn to read so I can help my kids, but there are no courses that start at a lower level enough to help. I have tried."

"Felt excluded by school from my child's learning. Never sure what is happening with my son's reading books and why they move him on when he can't seem to read them."

"To be able to access all written material."

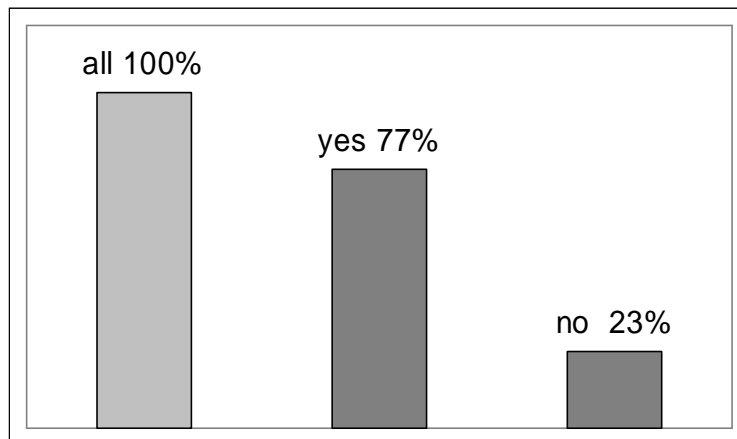
"Access issues. Renovations on car park made disabled access non-existent unless in a car. I fell down and have been asking them (for six months) to make the entrance step disabled friendly."

"I work within education so it's easier for me to know what is needed."

"In my view I am, but head says I should join in more with other parents. Aspergers makes socialising difficult."

"My children attend 2 different schools and both have a welcoming attitude and a reasonable understanding of my disability...you need to be proactive and positive and explain problems and issues. Of course, this is not easy."

Do you help your child with their homework? Yes 77% No 23%



I use different ways to the school, they say I'm wrong.

More than three quarters of disabled parents help their children with homework.

Parents said:

“Their written material is hard for me to follow.”

“My child never got any homework despite me wanting, thinking they ought to have some. Felt unable to approach school about the situation.”

“It’s beyond me now. (My child)’s very clever, but very disappointed at AS results, a real kick in the teeth and (my child)’s dropping out. Maths not good enough, but no help offered. Careers officer useless. There are no jobs for (my child) now.”

“I can’t really, beyond me now. Extra tuition in her weak subjects would help. I feel I’m letting my child down.”

“Accessible format would help a lot.”

“If whatever my child gets could be emailed to me at home. School agreed to do this, but it didn’t last.”

“Less of it, especially for the young.”

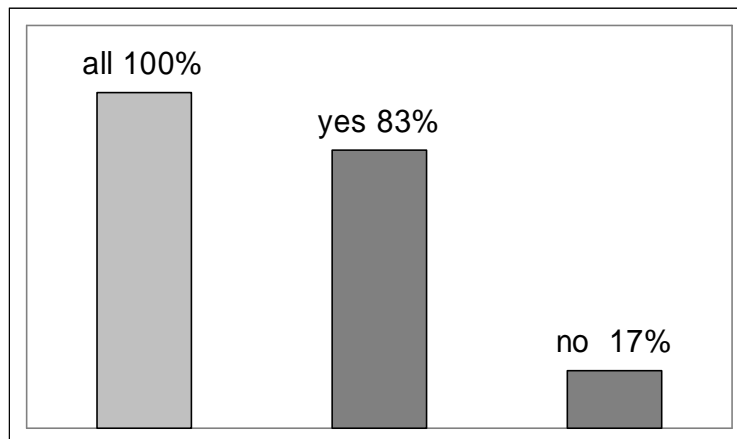
“I’ve written in her book four times about getting a dyslexia reading ruler replaced but it’s still not done.”

“I support and encourage, but not as hands on as some other parents I know.”

“Would like to do more but painkillers impair my memory and concentration.”

“Better knowledge myself of current teaching development.”

Do you go to parent-teacher meetings? Yes 83% No 17%



The school has no access for wheelchairs which makes it difficult to go to these meetings and hard to support my children

Most disabled parents do go to parent teacher meetings, but many have to solve problems first.

Parents said:

“I try. Getting there can be a problem. Some teachers talk down to me when they see the wheelchair, but other parents say they feel talked down to as well.”

“I asked teachers to phone me as I can’t get there. 3 did, very helpful. I can’t get child back home if he misses school bus.”

“More flexible system for appointments times and venues.”

“I had help from the school’s parent support adviser on parents evening (who arranged) for each teacher to write a small note about how my daughter was doing and any concerns they had.”

“Not all of them, it depends how the children are doing. The year head speaks to all the teachers and then I speak to one teacher who tells me what they all say. It works well.”

“Better disability awareness among school staff.”

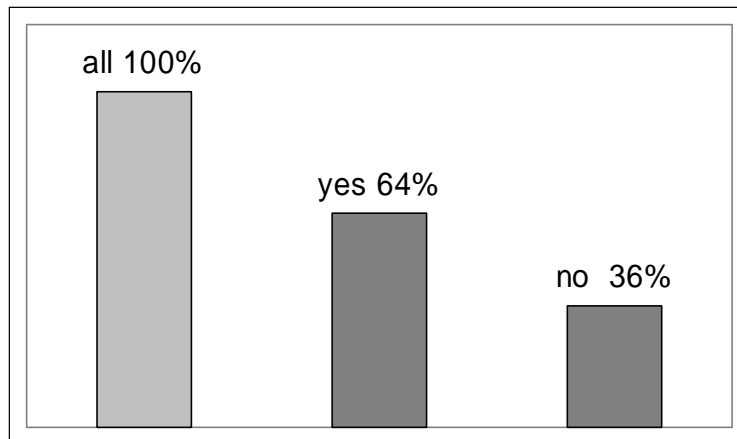
“More time, fewer people.”

“A supporter to guide me to the various teachers places.”

“I have to fight for a separate room and more time, there’s too much to talk about to do it in ten minutes. I have to keep asking – it’s a lot of work on the parent’s part. They react as if I’m an inconvenience, make excuses.”

“Make access easier. Big step at entrance and doors very hard to open without risking my balance.”

**Do you go to school concerts, sports days or parent group events?
Yes 64% No 36%**



If I did not feel so conscious as I don't understand what they are talking about.

Fewer disabled parents attended whole school activities than parent-teacher meetings. Decisions to attend were based on how much their presence mattered to their child.

Parents said:

“Only if very important for my child.”

“I don't get out much, and if the girls are at school I'm embarrassed to ask for help.”

“Occasionally, if possible I go to class assembly if my child is involved, I stay at the back. Otherwise not, as socialising is difficult.”

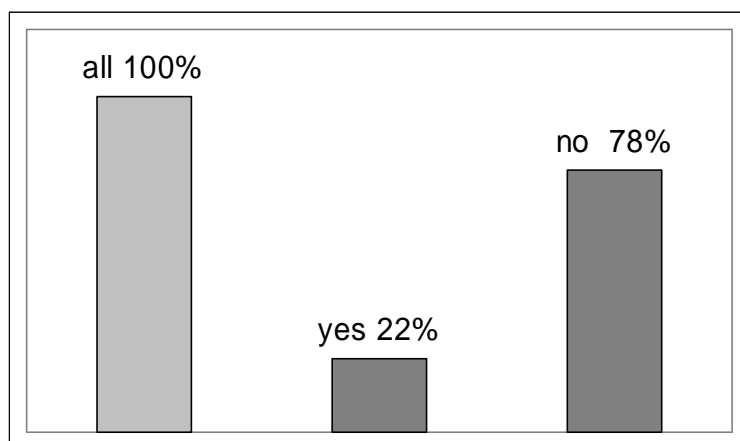
“I work during the day which makes it difficult to attend events then.”

“I am often too tired in the evening to attend performances although I will always attend if my child is involved in an evening event.”

“In our school the caretaker is in charge of assisting parents on open evenings and for concerts etc. We all meet up before events to make sure everything is considered. Nothing is too much trouble for him, car parking, getting through corridors and finding people, getting chairs out and getting them out of the way. He knows what we need and we know we don't have any worries.”

“Yes if I can get transport, not otherwise.”

Do you volunteer or work at a school? Yes 22% No 78%



**Deal with
access
issues.**

Despite barriers for many including work, nearly a quarter of disabled parents volunteer or work in schools. Disabled parents could be an underdeveloped resource, both as extra assistance and to raise awareness of disabled adults' contribution to the community.

Parents said:

“Would love to but too difficult to get there.”

“I'd like to but they declined when I offered.”

“Volunteered first, then had to get a job or risked losing my benefits, and school offered me a part time post.”

“Did help with listening children read but it was so disorganised I have given up. Used to go on trips with first school before my mobility got worse, don't feel able to go now.”

“Helped with craft work, but room changed to one that was too small to accommodate my wheelchair easily.”

“I am a member of parent's forum at Surestart centre. They provide special parking and a creche for me to attend meetings.”

“I'd like to be able to be at school more, but there's no help to get there.”

How did disabled parents volunteer or work in schools?

Survey replies included disabled parents who volunteer to hear children read and help with other classroom activities, some were active as school governors, in parent forums and in Parent Teacher Associations. Several disabled parents were lunchtime assistants, teaching assistants and teachers. Volunteering is subject to benefit restrictions which limit the time parents can volunteer before they lose money. Two parents from this survey were offered part time jobs as a result of volunteering. This allowed one parent to have resources from the Access To Work scheme, to provide computer equipment to enable a full range of activities.

What does this tell us about how disabled parents support their children's education?

Many parents develop personalised ways of engaging with teachers which work well, but recognising the benefits of accommodating such arrangements is not universal. This disabling barrier is a training and systems development issue for some schools.

For parent-teacher evenings in particular, noise, crowds and insufficient time allocation results in poor quality, frustrating discussions, especially when parents need calmer surroundings to concentrate. Major barriers remain in physical access for disabled parents travelling to, getting into and moving around schools. Sensory barriers can devalue meetings to such an extent that some disabled parents are severely challenged to integrate into these events.

Fixed times present a barrier for parents who have to fit parent-teacher meetings around limited times when assistance is available, or when exhausted after work, as well as the usual demands of other children in the family. While one-to-one meetings can be offered at other times, many disabled parents want to experience these events with other parents and for their children to participate along with their peers.

Parents understand that the purpose of engaging with teachers is to look at their child's present or recent performance, but discussing future prospects rarely goes beyond the next academic year. Much more could be done in secondary schools in particular to give all parents and children earlier information about potential career pathways, finance options including bursaries, scholarships and school funds as well as other parental support that can open wider choices for young people.

This would help to create a fundamental culture change in which all parents understand they can be supported to ensure their young people's prospects and full opportunities are not hampered by concerns around a parent's situation. Barriers in getting information and accessing support are as critical for disabled parents with older children and young people as for parents with younger children.

The support system for parents who are disabled or ill should be better known by schools and better publicised to all parents. Support needs to be an expectation for those who need it, not a random discovery.

All secondary pupils should have access to good quality out-of-school activities, outings and residential visits, work experience, college and university taster days, and opportunities to meet other people who can interest them in future work. This can pose barriers for some disabled parents, but they are predicatable and avoidable. Failure to address barriers of transport, costs and support results in an important minority of young people who support their disabled parents being left without real prospects.¹³ They can be forced to drop out of courses through poor attendance or grades, reducing their educational, employment and training prospects and hindering their social skills. Good support in the early secondary years is vital.

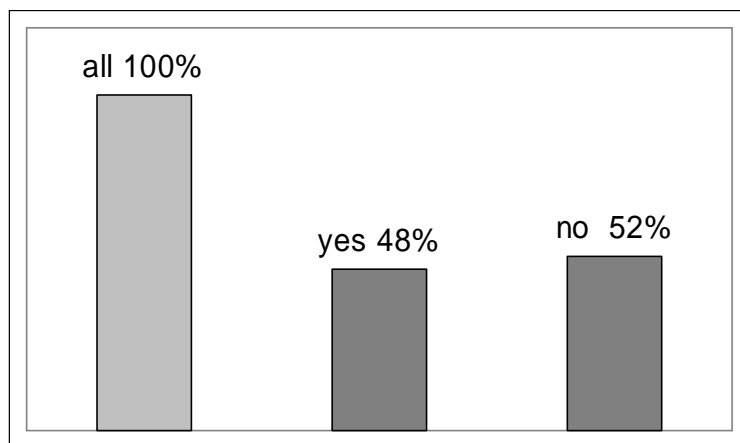
¹³ Against the Odds. Targeted Briefing – Young Carers. Audit Commission 2010.

School websites:

what visits to school websites say about parent-school communication.

Websites are accepted as important resources for information and interaction with communities. They present the school's image to parents and children. We asked parents for their opinions on their own child's school website, and looked at how well information was presented by a random survey of secondary school websites, with samples from their cluster group primary schools and some special schools.

Do you use your child's school's website? Yes 48% No 52%



Hard to find answers. It's easier for my partner to go in to speak to teachers.

Less than half of disabled parents use their child's school website. For some this was connected to their impairment but most simply didn't find them useful. More disabled parents have web accessible computers than use them to find information from or to interact with school.

Parents said:

"I didn't know they had a website."

"It's not good at updating info. If I need to know something I prefer to speak directly to school so I know I have the right answer."

"I can't use computers. I have epilepsy and the screen upsets me."

"Phone or laptop for parent on low income, loan them to the family."

"School website was very user unfriendly and inaccessible. Didn't include information that I wanted and needed."

"Parent's password not given after 2 years. My child uses it, but there's nothing much on the website for parents."

"Technically unable to access. Using tabs and links is hard. It might be technically accessible, but skills needed take too long to learn and not what I want to do as a working mother with a life! "

What did we see in our mini-survey of school websites?

- Some websites are very attractive, with friendly and reassuring head teacher welcomes. Others are not exploring their potential as remote school receptions.
- Many are not providing visual access or text size options. Many are not offering a page to explain how to change visual options or use site features in varied browsers, and few offered page maps of the website for ease of finding a desired page.
- Some use non-standard fonts, poorly contrasting colours for text and background which are barriers for many readers and some screen reading equipment.
- None we saw are set up to read text aloud which is useful for some parents with vision impairments or reading difficulties.
- Very few are using video to film staff introducing themselves or other information. This is useful for some parents with reading difficulties, and has the additional advantage of familiarising parents with staff. Poor broadband in some local areas can make downloading videos jerky, but despite this, there is a substantial improvement in the quality of interaction.
- None we saw are using video with audio-description to support visually impaired viewers or captions or BSL signed information to support hearing impaired parents.
- Few publish access details or their Disability Equality Scheme information.
- Many websites put all required information into one prospectus page that needs to be scrolled to find out what's on it. This makes locating information very difficult. Links at the top of these pages to information lower down would be useful, especially if the page has to be listened to rather than scanned quickly by eye. Separating information to individual links would be better.
- Many use unnecessarily complex language in school information as measured by readability scores¹⁴ of text. This presents barriers to some parents looking for relevant information, and their involvement.
- Few are giving information on how to contact Parent Support Advisers.
- Some are 'electronic stockades' which require passwords to access what's behind, with little on open access pages. This is not useful for parents who are trying to compare schools when choices have to be made.
- A significant number of websites are not keeping information adequately updated. In June, one had not changed its front page from snow pictures in January. Newsletters on some websites are more than a year out of date.

¹⁴ SMOG index of readability
www.niace.org.uk/misc/SMOG-calculator/smogcalc.php

Recommendations about school websites:

- Make information easier to find and keep it up to date.
- Include in Equality plan and assess for good practice in disability access.
- Use standard fonts, contrasting colours for text and background.
- Provide visual access and text size options and explain how to change site features in varied browsers.
- Set up the website to read text aloud.
- Offer page maps of the website and links at the top of long pages.
- Use video with audio-descriptions and BSL signed information or captions to film staff introducing themselves or tours of the school.
- Simplify language used.

Suggestions from parents about website content:

- School dates and contact information: phone, staff answerphones, fax, mobiles, text, minicom (textphone) numbers and email addresses.
- Access information and school site map, where to stand to collect children.
- Information about the school day and events for children, what they're doing in class, examples of work, films of them at school, award presentations etc.
- Staff and governors profiles, pictures and contact information, what governors do and their meetings.
- Accessible e-learning platforms to follow results.
- Who to contact with problems, how to contact Parent Support Advisers, and information about how school is prepared to help disabled parents if needed.
- Disability Equality Scheme information, Disability Equality duty plans and how to take part in discussions.
- Procedures and policies, links to Ofsted reports and school profiles.
- Information about school financial assistance for pupils.
- What to do if child has extra needs, and an equality statement.
- Newsletters, ways to subscribe to updates, keep them regularly updated.
- PTA events, virtual forums and parent's views.
- Curriculum information, what's expected and how to do new maths etc.
- Information on early years development, ideas for positive play, children's and adolescent's development.
- Information on choices available for careers and work placements.
- More input from the pupils would be good.

What does this tell us about school-parent communication through websites?

Few school websites are good examples of accessible information technology. Basic recommendations¹⁵ regarding all websites are not being considered. Although some disabled parents can't or choose not to use computers personally, perhaps because of access or broadband cost concerns, it is much easier to ask others to get information for them if it is available on a website. Web-based methods of paying for events and school meals were not mentioned at all by parents in this survey, although some thought e-platforms would be useful to follow child's work.

A culture of "gatekeeping" seems to govern decisions of what information will be made available to parents on school websites. Many carry barely more than a direct web version of printed information which schools are obliged to make available. Compared to the ease of finding other information on the internet, and because it would be so easy to offer more information, some parents may feel on the downside of a power imbalance that can compromise parent-school partnerships. Parents who can access background information easily are more confident, better able to ask questions and to make informed choices about their children when needed.

Opportunities are lost to involve and interact with many parents, especially those who are isolated by poor transport in our rural county who don't reach the informal school gate network, and particularly those with children in secondary schools. The potential is also lost for school websites to be leading examples of good practice to their pupils who are learning IT and communication skills.

Only a small minority of schools have published their Disability Equality plans on line. Some instruct parents to ask for Disability Equality plans at the school office, but this is a barrier for disabled parents who are worried about taking up staff time that may not have a direct relevance to their child. Some schools could interpret lack of enquiries as disinterest in Equality plans. A few newsletters invited parents to be involved in Equality schemes, but none offered up-front support.

Considerable resources are required to maintain interactive websites and their benefits are best achieved with relatively larger numbers of visitors than individual school websites might attract. Additional resources in terms of funding and quality of information might be achieved by shared cluster websites. More isolated parents could be encouraged into an online school community and supported by facilities in their broader geographical area. Such websites require resources beyond individual school budgets and it is reasonable to look to Government to support them, perhaps through the e-Accessibility Forum initiative¹⁶.

In the meantime, the design and management of individual school websites should be considered for their disability equality impact, and must remain an additional resource, not one that replaces other forms of communication.

¹⁵ RNIB Access Centre

www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/webaccessibility/Pages/web_accessibility.aspx

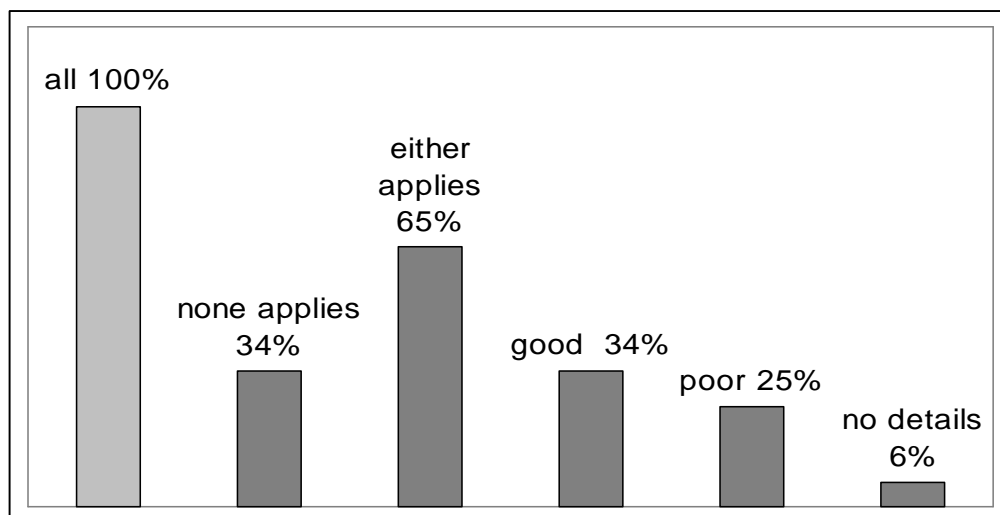
¹⁶ e-Accessibility Forum www.bis.gov.uk/policies/business-sectors/digital-content/e-accessibility-forum

Support for parents' involvement in children's additional needs.

Do you feel well involved in decisions about support for special educational or behaviour needs?

Have you been involved in attendance, discipline or welfare issues?

The replies to these two questions were brought together because parent's comments were similar for both. This suggests difficulties with involvement were due to problems in communications and systems rather than substantial differences in the nature of children's needs.



Two thirds of parents had been involved in some form of contact with schools around a child's extra support. Only about half of these found school supported them and their children well.

Parents said:

"He's doing badly. School supports them when they're younger and just up from primary, but it just fades away, doesn't carry through."

"Don't feel child is learning as much as she could. Dyslexia support not being kept up."

"Another child is leaving special school soon. They're good at the special school, come home to speak with me, but I don't know how I will cope with them at home."

"If they would listen to parents and child more."

"Child's special needs initially well supported, but then not followed through. Notices on walls are no use to my visually impaired child, but nobody bothers to tell him."

"I had to get over being thought an incompetent parent, had to get Aspergers advocate to help, otherwise just me and my mum as social worker abandoned us. School now aware I won't back off."

“Waiting to have meeting with ADHD team, been waiting 4 months.”

“My daughter had late diagnosis of dyslexia, and we changed schools to one with good support. Special needs were brilliant. They knew if I hadn’t been depressed and on painkillers I would have pushed school harder, but they responded well anyway.”

“There’s a good care plan in place for my child but they treated me like an idiot, talking down to me. Couldn’t accommodate me as a parent, teacher didn’t want me to be involved.”

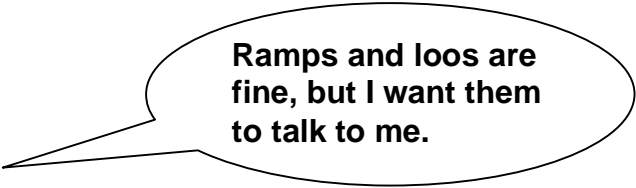
“The school’s Parent Support Adviser is amazing! She really cares and is always there whenever we need help!”

“When my child couldn’t get to school, Social Services helped out with transport.”

“They’re not the slightest bit bothered, even though they know about me. They don’t pick up on it as he goes in every day and doesn’t fuss.”

“Teachers just pass buck. Child at college not being supported with dyslexia in written work. It’s like beating against a wall.”

“I make sure I’m involved.”



Ramps and loos are fine, but I want them to talk to me.

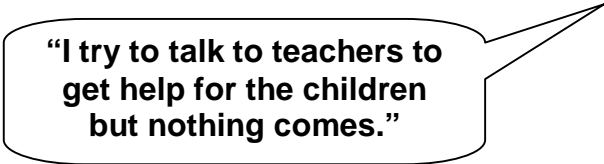
“It is an issue as my son is dealing with loss on many fronts and it’s affecting his relationships with peers. Waiting for meeting to see how school can help him.”

“School was really good at helping child who had been ill, gradually helped her back. They were brilliant.”

“Child was ill, late. Late is now considered unauthorised, even when I told school and was told it was OK. I was suddenly told to attend meeting with attendance officer, would have had to go to court if I couldn’t go.”

“They didn’t (support us). We were informed about discipline issues after they had come up and been dealt with as school thought best. There should be consultation before decisions are made or action is taken.”

“They gave me chance to say my views and listen to what they are doing for my child.”



“I try to talk to teachers to get help for the children but nothing comes.”

What does this tell us about support for parents' involvement in children's additional needs?

Major problems appear when disabled parents need to discuss anything other than standard provision in mainstream schools. This finding echoes reports from parents over many years regarding the special educational needs system¹⁷, whether in special or mainstream schools. Put simply, the system for negotiating a child's additional needs in school presents barriers to all parents in terms of the energy and persistence required to achieve a satisfactory response, but these barriers are especially difficult for some disabled parents to manage.

Some disabled parents find attitudes shown in schools are objectionable and discriminatory. Some remember and dread the very idea of conflict from their own school experience as disabled children, and many find the research, communication and financial skills that are needed to deal well with these issues present insurmountable barriers. For some, the resulting stress compounds existing health problems, creating a downward spiral of capacity. For others, new health problems arise.¹⁸ Yet, we owe it to our children to try.

There is inadequate discussion with many disabled parents who had to go to some lengths to be heard and have notice taken of their views. Once achieved, support can then fade away without consultation or a reason being given. Some parents had serious concerns that their child's progress or welfare was not being addressed as well as they expected.

Some disabled parents felt entirely ignored. Two disabled parents who were well into a process of discussing their child's absence through the child's ill health were summoned to interviews at school under threat of court action.

Two other families moved children to a school where the children's needs were better accommodated within mainstream, or where the school's attitude was more constructive.

Some disabled parents have no options at all to move their children if school's response to their child's needs is unsatisfactory. A disabled parent may be fixed where they are by transport difficulties and/or adapted accommodation which may be impossible to arrange in another school catchment area. At the same time, it may prove very difficult to get support with transport if the child is moved to another school outside the family's catchment area, the parent being considered obstructive by school authorities for moving the child at all.

Several disabled parents commented on a very enabling and constructive partnership with school and it is clear from this survey that some schools are more determined than others to uphold the right of all children to a good educational experience. Home visits by school staff were highlighted as good practice in the special education sector, once the provision had been arranged within the education system as a whole.

¹⁷ If I could change one thing... 2007 Parents booklet. Every Disabled Child Matters www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/if_i_could_change_adults.pdf

¹⁸ In Poor Health, Carers UK 2004 www.carersuk.org

Schools whose routine procedures reflect the best educational practice have good systems to effectively communicate with and involve parents at every stage. This automatically reduces parental anxiety and avoids conflict.

A single member of staff with enterprise and determination, often a parent support adviser, can make a positive difference to a family's experience of education, but staff, parents and children need schools to develop integrated systems that support and enhance positive processes for this to become the accepted standard.

Some disabled parents may find particular barriers to understanding systems and getting adequate responses. Norfolk Parenting Partnership supports all parents with the process of achieving their child's additional needs at school but some parents are not told about the service early enough.

There is no specific advocacy resource to support disabled parents who may have communication difficulties in negotiating with schools around for example, standard admissions, behaviour or attendance issues, if their child does not have a recognised additional need. Parent Support Advisers are the most likely supporters for parents in these situations. Where problems escalate and especially where there is multiagency involvement, independent advocacy can help disabled parents to understand the issues which are often very complex and to give their informed views.

As elsewhere, advocacy resources in Norfolk are very scarce and dependent on locality and impairment. Understanding what's happening to your child, and having your views heard are fundamental equality issues for all parents and their children. Advocacy services for disabled parents need more investment.

Parents in this survey sometimes interpreted "well involved" as "getting an effective result" for their child. Involvement is more than being present at school functions, turning up to parent teacher evenings or helping with homework. It's more than giving approval to plans after they have been formulated by others.

Involvement is about parents and schools being full partners in discovering a child's needs, knowing what can be done at home and in school through good practice, and creating a dynamic plan that is properly resourced. It's about a commitment to and belief in equality.

Looking in detail at disabled parent's experiences of supporting their children with additional needs was beyond the remit of this survey. However, disabled parents from our survey confirm the impact of frustration and stress so well voiced by parent's groups working in this field, and there is no doubt that disabled parents find significant barriers to negotiating this system in most mainstream schools.

Young carers

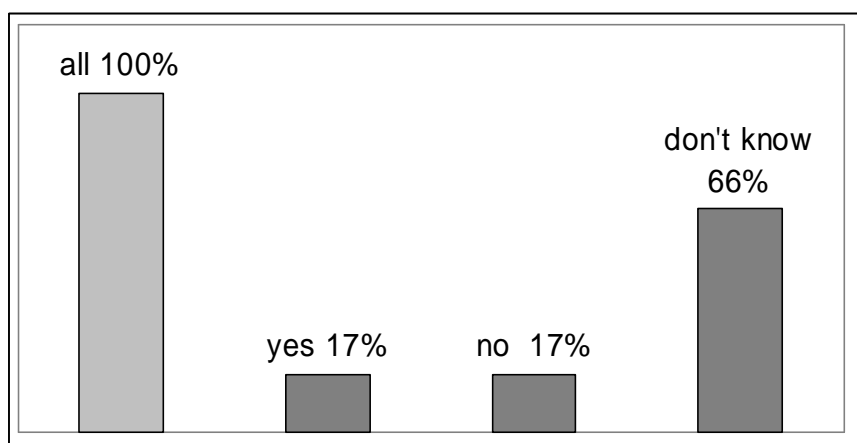
Young carers are children or young people who provide or intend to provide substantial care and/or emotional support for a parent, sibling or other family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled, or who has a substance dependency.

The impact of young carers having to assume an excessive level of responsibility should be avoided by providing adequate, appropriate and reliable support to the disabled parent or family member and all their family. NCC's Joint Policy and Protocol "Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long Term Illness" applies.¹⁹

Many children and young people whose families are affected by illness, disability or substance dependency do not become young carers. The school approach to a potential young carer and their family can be critical in helping them avoid or substantially reduce the impact of a difficult family situation. This section asked if disabled parents knew their child's school has considered how to support young carers and their families if the need arises.

Does school have a written policy to say how it supports and works with young carers and their parents if home life affects school life?

Yes 17% No 17% Don't know 66%



"Have a named member of staff to talk to."

Most schools have not told parents how to get parental support if it is needed around young carer issues. Particular barriers to information were found by parents with visual impairments, reading difficulties and mental health issues.

Parents said

"Have regular feedback on how the young carer is faring at school."

"State what support is available at school and how this is activated."

¹⁹ Norfolk County Council Joint Policy and Protocol. Enabling Parents with a Disability or Long term Illness 2006 Section 3.15: The needs of young carers should be recognised.

Parents were asked “What do you think a school young carer policy should say?” They said:

“Give more leeway - staff shouldn’t have to be reminded. Peer support would be good. Not enough young carer counseling or support in our area.”

“Keep in better contact with parent. Give more support in school and for out of school activities. Be more approachable by parents and children, have a named mentor for the young carer, or a good pastoral team open on a drop in basis for all children to avoid stigma.”

“Don’t know who to tell except social worker, it gets complicated if there isn’t someone named to talk to. I think school needs to know.”

“I have not seen one. My child always gets bullied with what he’s got.”

“Policy for children with learning help. Supposed to be good support but doesn’t seem like it. He spoke to young carers workers a few times, not always there if he doesn’t want to talk to me.”

“Young carer service is not made common knowledge. Minority info doesn’t go to all.”

“Not to be so hard on them. It’s hard for them to mix learning, try to talk to them, they have a different life.”

What does this tell us about disabled parents, young carers and schools?

Many disabled parents are able to organise family life to avoid situations that make them dependent on their children for practical or emotional support. If needed, the adequate provision and use of personal assistants and other support through Community Care (Adult Services), mainly via direct payments and personal budgets, and family if available, prevents difficulties developing in the home which impact on children and young people’s wellbeing.

More responsive and flexible systems for delivery of support are still needed for parents to be able to effectively exercise responsibility in protecting their children from inappropriate caring, especially when parents have fluctuating conditions such as MS and some mental health needs, or when family situations change.

But for all sorts of reasons, enough support is not always available to disabled parents when it’s needed. Sometimes in the most rural areas of Norfolk, there are just too few people willing to work as personal assistants or agency carers. Sometimes parents have not been told support is available, or how to get it. They may need advocacy support to help them give their views and understand the process, or even to negotiate the process of asking, without which appropriate support for their parenting role will not materialise.

Parents may be fearful to mention their difficulties in case they unknowingly reveal a need that others consider so serious that their children are removed and they lose control of their parenting responsibility entirely. Where these problems persist, advocacy support is vital to give the parent confidence to retain control, plan their support needs and restore family wellbeing.

Often, disabled parents have had recent contact with health or other welfare workers where focus is on the adult or child's own immediate medical needs, failing to take account of the social role of a disabled parent and its consequences for their children's welfare.

Solving this requires all bodies working with disabled or ill adults, families or children to consider if a disabled or ill adult has parental responsibilities, or if a child's parent is dealing with impairment related barriers. To comply with their duty to promote equality and child welfare all bodies should direct and support the parent towards relevant agencies. This requirement is still not fully observed by all agencies.

Traumatic situations can be created with potentially serious practical and emotional impacts for children and young people if the situation persists. Children and young people may slide into pressured timetables which do not fit well with school attendance, learning, achievement and long term wellbeing. They can miss out on play, rest and important opportunities enjoyed by other children and young people.

When asked about factors that affect their children's wellbeing, parents say the greatest impact on parent-child relationships is in the quality time parents are able to spend with them.²⁰ If parents have to depend on their children for inappropriate support, this quality time is even more difficult to achieve.

Disabled parents, and their children, have a right to be properly supported to avoid children experiencing the inequality of becoming young carers.

We have the highest respect for the children and young people who provide support to their disabled family members, but we do not accept they should be depended upon by communities which fail to offer them and their parents any better options.

As a body, disabled parents reject society's acceptance of the notion of long term young carers because this compromises our relationships with our children and our equality as parents. It is an equality issue that our children's lives, their perceived abilities and their ambitions are sometimes so seriously compromised. We look to the new provisions within the Equalities Act 2010 to support our children's freedom to enjoy their lives like all other children.

The impacts on children and young people of inadequate support to their parents is echoed by a very wide range of recent guidance and research. The Commission for Rural Communities report "Being a Young Carer in Rural England" points out that

²⁰ Childhood Wellbeing, Research Report DCSF-RW031 2008 Counterpoint.
www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW031%20v2.pdf

“The ways in which the disadvantages that accompany the onset of disability translate into social exclusion are complex. Access to services can be determined as much by the user’s socio-economic background as by the way in which service delivery is organised. It is also the case that many families pay a service ‘poverty penalty’, with those who most need services being alienated from exercising their entitlement to it. This may be because they are more excluded from information about the help that is available or are less demanding of services.”

The report gives a graphic account from a rural young carer:

“They were going to put me on depression...tablets, but then they said it’s easier to go for counselling, see if that will work better, ’cause they don’t like putting you on depression tablets when you’re under 18 [...] and I’ve got to go to anger management classes.”

17 year old female, cares for her mother, market town, South Holland

Norfolk’s Young Carers describe school experiences in their “Young Carers Survival Guide to School” 2010²¹. They say

“I have so much going on in my head, I can’t concentrate and do my work.”

“Sometimes when I try to explain to the teacher, they say I’m making it up.”

Providing support in a timely way is a significant factor in reducing the long term impacts for young carers and improving their life prospects. Effective and sensitive ways for children, young people and disabled parents to discuss their support needs are vital and schools have an important part to play in helping pupils and parents become aware of support.

Information for parents, young carers and young adult carers should be simple, obvious and repeated. It should be phrased in a direct and clear manner, giving the contact details of the best person to approach at the school or elsewhere.

Identify a Young Carers Support Link or pastoral worker for children or young people to talk to at school, and a Parent Support Adviser for parents. Some parents interpret “you are welcome to speak to your child’s teacher, or the head teacher about any problems” as referring to a child’s educational progress and not parental support needs. Using both titles in information will increase perceived relevance to both children and parents, even though in some schools, the same person will undertake both jobs. The posts should be referred to in a suitable statement in the school prospectus. An example statement follows.²²

²¹ Young Carers Survival Guide to School 2010. Norfolk Carers (tel: 0808 808 9876)

²² Adapted from “Supporting Young Carers: a resource for schools: A strategic approach” 2010 The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and the Childrens Society.

An example prospectus statement on support for young carers

- Our School will provide a safe and supportive environment in which all children and young people can enjoy learning and achieve to their full potential, and ensure they have a good foundation for life in the future.
- We invite children, young people and their parents to tell us at any time if caring responsibilities may affect a child or young person's welfare or learning. We will respect their situation and support them to find ways to manage these difficulties.
- Our Young Carers Support Link is available for children, young people and their parents to contact for information or advice. (Add details – name, phone, email, fax, textphone, hours available, and use an answerphone out of hours).
- Our Parent Support Adviser is (Add details – name, phone, email, fax, textphone, hours available, and use an answerphone out of hours). We invite parents to tell us if they have access, communication or other support needs. We will support them to take a full part in their children's education and the community life of the school.
- We have developed a disability equality scheme and a detailed policy to support young carers and their families which are available at the school office or from our website.

Equality plans should include providing information on support and training for school staff in young carer and disabled parent issues.

In addition to a prospectus statement, a whole school Young Carers policy will help to ensure all school processes have been examined for their impacts on young carers and their families. Healthy Schools has a good resource about young carers and disabled parents²³ from which a policy approach can be devised to ensure school activities take note of their needs.

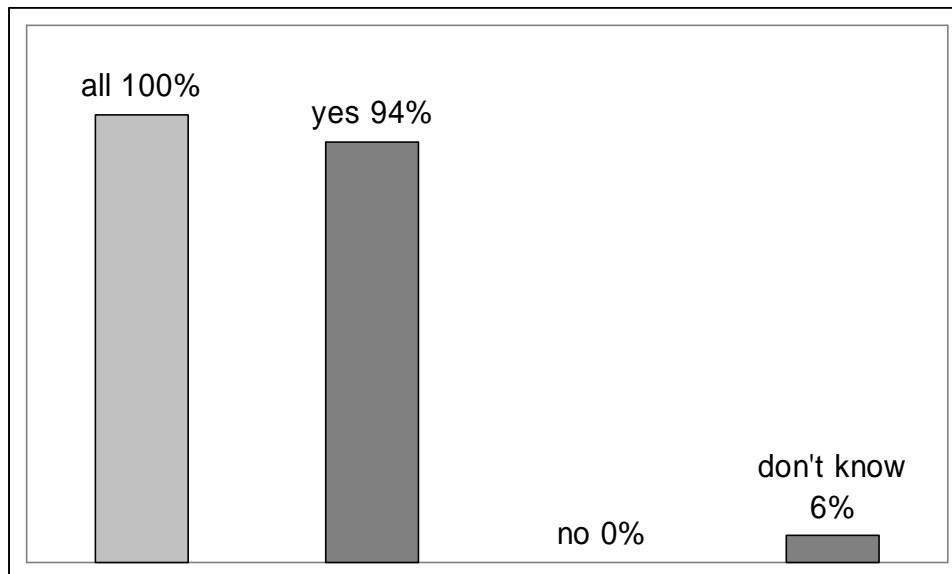
An example Young Carers policy for school Governing bodies is presented in Appendix 3.

²³ Guidance for schools supporting young carers. Healthy Schools November 2009
www.healthyschools.gov.uk

ACES Options: Parents and schools knowing about each other's needs.

This survey shows that disabled parents feel it is easier to encourage children's learning when schools know how to support equality for each individual parent, in whatever way it takes. There needs to be a process in school to accommodate this conversation that disabled parents can recognise and be confident in using.

Do you think schools should ask ALL parents how they'd like their school to contact and work with them? Yes 94% No 0% Don't know 6%



Almost all disabled parents want schools to offer a specific opportunity to every parent to discuss if they have any access and/or support needs. Most thought this should be updated every year.

Parents said:

“I feel silly telling them - if everyone was asked it wouldn't seem such a big issue.”

“It would help make sure all families can have good communication with schools.”

“It's important to get communications right from the start.”

Child very upset once when teacher laughed at him, they should know more about children's circumstances and sensitivities.”

“An option on the child's entry form where a parent can offer information about a disability voluntarily.”

“Have a named contact who knows my family and is aware of my access needs.”

What would make this easier? Parents were offered four options for preferred ways to tell schools about their support needs.

- Choice on a form: preferred by 12 respondents
- Person to person at school: preferred by 9 respondents
- Person to person at home: preferred by 7 respondents
- Other ways: email 3, mobile phone 1 and text 1

Suggestions from parents included:

“Offer a one-to-one orientation visit. It doesn’t need anyone specially trained - I prefer to ask questions.”

“Text system so you can contact them as and when needed.”

“Liaise with Parents Support Worker. They are very informative as they have access to information that may not be known to parents.”

“Be able to speak to teachers not secretarial staff.”

“Talk with every new parent who comes to the school.”

What does this tell us about how parents and schools find out about each others needs?

Sensitivity in talking about our own support needs is drawn from absorbing a wider social message that disability and illness are private, considered to be associated with personal inadequacy and usually socially taboo.

A further assumption persists, drawn from the traditional power imbalance between schools and parents, that discussion of parental support is irrelevant. It is still widely thought among parents that only factors concerning the direct teaching of children are of interest to schools. While this attitude remains, so will barriers for both parents and schools. Children’s learning and outcomes are served more efficiently by well supported parents working in communities that have recognisable means of working together.

Recent studies²⁴ have explored the sensitivities of parental “disclosure” and given many worthwhile recommendations. However, “disclosure” is a word loaded with implication. We ‘disclose’ crimes on insurance claims and job applications. It implies a power imbalance, something blameworthy, or that a personal choice to be in social deficit must be exposed. This approach will not encourage disabled parents to get in touch. It is also discriminatory to ask parents to declare if they are disabled or ill, or if they have impairments, unless school has an intention to provide support.

Almost all disabled parents who replied to our survey said they would value private contact with a named person who has received disability awareness and equality

²⁴ Disabled parents’ involvement in their children’s education: an examination of good practice. R. Maguire and others. 2009 CfBT www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/maguire/2500_DPReport_5.pdf

training, and who has developed good communication skills with disadvantaged parents. Along with this, the named person should be aware of the local systems of support and how parents can access them.

We recommend a change of language from “disclosure” to a proactive ACES option.

ACES Options:

Access, Communication, Equality and Support

An ACES option introduces connotations to both parents and staff of

- A professional recognition of a parent’s expert knowledge of their own situation.
- The first and best way to a mutual win in helping children learn.

A combination of information and prompts on the enrolment form, appropriate to each individual school, together with a yearly consolidation on the home-school agreement will provide an adequate signal by which all parents will know they will receive a constructive response from school if their family situation becomes hard to manage.

It is not difficult to devise an offer composed of various options of communication formats and supplementary support to discover needs that might impact on children’s learning.

The challenge for management is in creating a whole school system to support consistent delivery, especially in larger secondary schools.

ACES Options: Finding out about parents access and support needs.

Offer a specific opportunity for all parents to routinely discuss if they have any access or support needs. The majority prefer to be asked in the paperwork that they fill in (for example at the beginning of every school year) or asked person to person.

- Use enrolment forms to establish the preferred format for communicating with each parent and to give an outline offer of support.
- The enrolment form should carry all contact details of the school including fax, a mobile phone number and textphone number.
- Use home-school agreements to confirm parent’s choice and to consolidate the offer of support and repeat the offer of ‘support for parents to make it easy to encourage your child’s learning’ at every opportunity.

What to offer on the enrolment form.

- Consider describing your offer as ACES Options for Access, Communication, Equality and Support, or describe the offer as ‘support for parents to make it easy to encourage your child’s learning.’
- List the alternative formats which you can offer reliably, which might include:
standard print, large print, braille, email, text, fax, phone, typetalk.

Simple English is essential. Consider an option of easy read words and pictures to signal that you are aware of literacy and cognitive needs and can accommodate them, but this could be difficult for a child in class if their letter home is seen to be different to other children’s. In these cases, parents may prefer a phone call unless printed information has to be signed, for example.

- A language translation access statement and details of how to obtain alternative formats not listed in your main offer should be included.
- Ask if one or both parents would like information sent from school. Offer space for a second adult to request an alternative to the main option.
- Offer a named contact for parent support and a meeting at school or at home with this parent support worker.

On the home-school agreement, confirm the choice on the enrolment form.

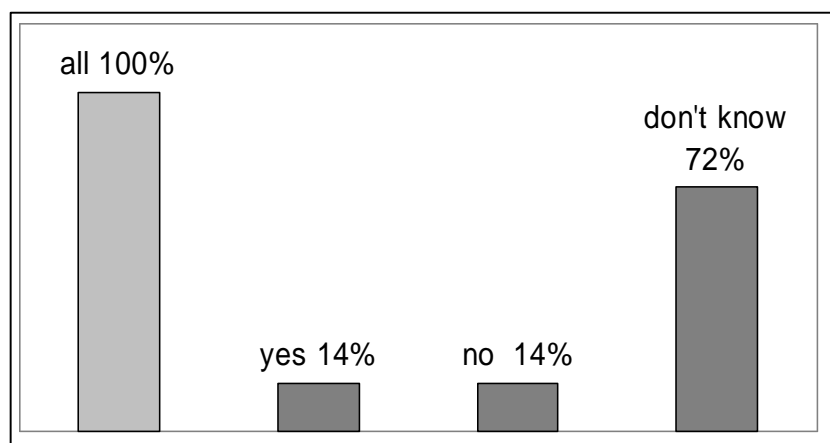
- Acknowledge that there can be difficult home situations that make it hard for children and young people to learn, and that these can have long term effects for the child’s future.
- State that the school is committed to supporting pupils with any type of difficulty at home. Give the Young Carer Link contact name.
- State that the Parent Support Adviser can help parents to get support which can ease difficulties for the family. Repeat the offer of a home or school visit with the Parent Support Worker.
- Follow up sensitively on home-school agreements which are not returned.

Teaching about disability – where our attitudes begin.

Concern about how disability issues are taught in schools is not new, but schools now have a duty to promote the equality of all disabled people. This section takes a brief look at parent's observations.

Do you like how your child's school teaches children about disability?

Yes 14% No 14% Don't know 72%



We need more disabled people to teach them.

Most parents don't know if or how disability issues are discussed in school but many think it should get more attention.

Parents said:

"I don't think they do. They include disabled children but don't tell them adults have disabilities too."

"I teach my child about disability and I think he teaches the teachers when and if the subject comes up."

"They have dolls in various ethnicities but not disabled images. They may have books with disabled characters but I've never seen them."

"Much more training needed for teachers to teach about social impacts of disability rather than just medical facts. Fellow students who are disabled children should not be the only way children learn about disability."

"PHSE (Personal Health and Social Education) is wide. There's a visually impaired student and good adaptations. I spoke in assembly once on visual impairment."

"Not sure they do teach about disability. I would like to know if they do and how. I would like to help them teach about disability awareness. I am concerned that children are not being shown positive images of disability and this has an impact on discrimination."

“I think it is beneficial for children to be introduced and in contact with disabled persons. I am prepared to be that person for our school.”

“This needs to be improved and better disability awareness among staff to promote inclusion.”

What does this tell us about how children learn about disability?

Much attention is rightly paid to access to the curriculum for disabled pupils, and to access to school for disabled staff and the wider community, but what do we teach about the social impact of disability and experience of impairment?

Various PHSE programmes include disability as a cultural issue expressed through aspects of equality and citizenship, but it is not considered to be an important element of subjects other than PHSE. This makes it difficult for teachers to convey to children and young people that successful coping strategies for impairment and constructive attitudes to disability need a substantial knowledge base drawn from many areas of the curriculum.

All areas of the school curriculum are relevant. Examples include:

- writing skills in preparing plain English and easy read versions of complex texts.
- technology in creating alternative formats using media, drama and speaking skills.
- languages to learn British Sign Language.
- website design to include making them properly accessible both technologically and intellectually.
- literature, media and philosophical studies to consider how cultural ideas around impairment and disability are generated and conveyed.
- art to consider inclusion of positive disability images, e.g. in children's picture books as described in the Children In the Picture project²⁵.
- maths to consider life skills economics.
- sciences to understand the biological causes of impairment.
- history to reveal how our cultural behaviours towards impairment and disability have developed, and much more.

The isolation of disability issues in schools, as elsewhere, reinforces in pupils a culture that considers impairment and disability equality to be of relevance only to others. Embedded teaching is likely to reduce fear and raise an expectation of appropriate life skills for all. It is important that curriculum resources and material from visiting guests are examined for negative bias to avoid presenting contradictory messages, of for example, a tragedy/burden image without interpretation or a balancing promotion of equality

²⁵ www.childreninthepicture.org.uk/resources.htm

Children's understanding of disability, and the views of teachers in some mainstream English primary schools in promoting 'disability equality' among mainly non-disabled children was examined in the DEEPS²⁶ project. An important finding was that teachers can be unsure how to avoid introducing a new idea of 'difference' between disabled and non-disabled children where none seemed apparent before equality lessons.

Many people have to deconstruct their misunderstandings about disability before they can begin to address the reality of managing life with an impairment, either their own, in their family or in their work.

Some approaches may concentrate too closely on explaining impairment as a 'difference', rather than voicing disability in terms of understanding social barriers and equality. Children need straight answers to their observations and curiosity. They also need to know that most impairments are not readily visible, but that the social consequences of impairment and inequality affect everyone.

What next?

The next stage of Access All Schools is to develop disability equality skills among respondents to our survey and other disabled parents in Norfolk.

This aims to develop a resource for disabled parents and schools to use when revising Equality schemes and also to support school staff to consider these issues more widely so that disability issues can become increasingly embedded throughout educational settings. If funds permit, this will start in 2011.

Conclusion:

Alone, no parent, school, local authority, voluntary group or Government can ensure children learn well and thrive as we hope they will.

It takes us all, working together with our children, including all disabled parents. We must have equal opportunities to play our part.

These recommendations from disabled parents are for all parents, schools, local authorities, voluntary groups and Government, all working together.

And the last word to disabled parents:

Always remember how important it is to your child that you are involved and how rewarding it can be to you as a parent. You are not alone, there are many thousands of us, so be confident in asking for the same chances as all other parents.

Good luck to you and your children!

²⁶ Disability Equality in English Primary Schools (DEEPS)
www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/deeps/

Recommendations from disabled parents to all parents:

- **Use all opportunities school offers to tell them what you need.**
Access All Schools should help schools be more aware of what you need to be involved in your child's education. But you might have to remind them.
- **Tell schools if their system presents a barrier to you.**
Other ways can always be found. Talk to your child's teacher or form tutor. The Parent Support Adviser is another good person to start with. Consider making a formal complaint if you are not satisfied with the reply.
- **Ask** what support is available to help you in your parenting or to encourage your child to learn, if you need it. Don't delay until a crisis develops. Family difficulties always affect your child's ability to learn and may affect their long term future. See Appendix 1 for how to get support.
- Ask for your needs to be accommodated in all situations where something can be put in place. For example:
 - Ask the school for information in the format that suits you, and be persistent.
 - Ask for seating to be reserved in an accessible space to allow you to attend school events, performances, assemblies and sports days.
 - Ask for a guide to make sure you can find where you need to go.
 - If you are invited to a meeting of any kind remind the school if you use a wheelchair or crutches or have any mobility issues.
 - If you find its hard to go into the school when you have been invited, tell them what would make it easier for you, for example speaking to teachers on the phone, meeting somewhere else or at another time. Always feel able to take someone else with you if it would be easier.
 - If you would like to volunteer at your school, talk to them about any access needs you may have that would make it easier for you.
- If you don't understand something, ask, particularly if it's about your child. Don't be embarrassed, there will be other parents who don't understand too!
- When provision for your child or yourself is promised, then fades away, ask for it to be restored. Don't be fobbed off. If you are not satisfied, consider making a formal complaint to the relevant body. These are equality issues and service managers need to know if you don't think your family's equality is being served.
- Think about the support you may need to manage a complaint. Find out about your choices from an advice or disability rights service. If needed, ask them to help you find an advocacy service to help you understand the system and to give your views. Appendix 2 gives some helpful groups.

Recommendations to Schools:

- **Be proactive in offering communication and support needs to all parents.**
- **Develop internal systems which consistently establish and deliver parental support needs. Tailor individual access arrangements so that every parent can be independent in their dealings with school.**
- Only half of disabled parents get information in a format which is accessible to them. Remember that if things aren't accessible then parents will not have the information you want them to have, and it may place pressure on their child.
- Fully review disability access for parents annually including looking at:
 - 'paperwork' and newsletters – check what formats parents need, don't make assumptions.
 - ensure access to the school site, including disabled car parking spaces are available at the start, end and all through the school day, and not abused.
 - meetings and events – offer flexibility and options like talking on the phone or having a trained school guide to navigate between rooms in the school.
 - ensure progress reports are explained clearly and as accessibly as possible. This is the information that parents say they find hardest to understand.
 - website and Virtual Learning Platform / Environment (VLP / VLE).
- Ensure all staff, especially those in reception areas and answering external phones, have disability awareness and equality training and know the school system for supporting parents.
- Provide a convenient private area in school receptions for parents to discuss their child's or their own needs in private, and invite parents to use it.
- Consult with all parents about school policies and practices and ensure consultations are accessible. Make special efforts to seek the views of parents who have communication and/or support needs who are most likely to be affected, and less likely to respond.
- Assess new forms of communications such as mass email or texts for their disability impact/accessibility and levels of annoyance to parents. Ensure staff and commercial providers stick to what the school policy considers to be appropriate guidelines for their use.
- Events should be positively planned to include disability needs. Give as much notice as possible. Ask parents if they have support needs on the event invitation, and make sure these needs are fulfilled by staff or pupils who have had appropriate training.
- Provide accessible training for parents annually on how to support children with homework appropriately.
- Assess the potential of all curriculum materials for embedded learning about disability and negative disability bias, including resources from visiting bodies.

- Ensure materials recommended for home use from commercial or other outside bodies are accessible to all parents.
- Encourage disabled parents to volunteer and support them, making reasonable adjustments to make sure they find opportunities accessible.
- Think about how you can make it as easy as possible for all parents to know about the support available from school and your network agencies, including providing information frequently on support for parents who are having difficulties, or who are disabled or ill, along with all other mass mailings, on the website and prospectus and as fictional case studies in the school newsletter. Signpost all parents to other services e.g. for adult literacy and numeracy and self esteem.
- Provide more detailed information about how to manage the process of supporting a child's additional needs for all parents, not just those already identified in the system.
- Help disabled parents to identify people already known to them and independent advocates who can ease the communication process, including ensuring all disabled parents with children with special educational needs are aware of the Norfolk Parent Partnership.
- Give as much advance notice as possible of purchases needed e.g. swimming kit or activities that require a payment. Always offer information on the financial support available from the school and a confidential contact other than the class teacher, preferably the Parent Support Adviser.
- Be sensitive about the reasons for lateness and absence if a child has caring responsibilities or if a parent is disabled. Always offer information on the support available and encourage parents to use it. Explain clearly and sensitively about any meetings with the attendance officer that may become necessary.
- Make information easier to find on your website and consider sharing better quality website resources with other schools in the local area.
- Provide training and accessible information for parents annually on the use of the school website's Virtual Learning Environment.

About young people with caring responsibilities in school:

- Effective and sensitive ways for children, young people and disabled parents to discuss their support needs are vital.
- Create internal systems and external networks that enable all school staff to respond appropriately to young carers and their parent's concerns. Ensure all staff have training in young carer and parental equality issues.
- Present a front door that provides parents and children with easy information and non-stigmatic access to support. Information for parents, young carers and young adult carers should be simple, obvious and repeated. It should be phrased in a direct and clear manner, giving the contact details of the best person to approach at the school or elsewhere.

- Identify a Young Carers Support link or pastoral worker for children or young people to talk to at school, and a Parent Support Adviser for parents. The posts should be referred to in a suitable statement in the school prospectus.
- Provide a safe, confidential place for young carers to go which recognises their situation and works with them and their families to reduce negative impacts of caring. Listen to them. Take notice of them.
- Provide support as early as possible in a child's school career to reduce the long term impacts for young carers and improve their life prospects.
- Consider a wristband or identify card system for young carers to conveniently identify themselves to unfamiliar staff, if needed.
- Include a Young Carers statement in the school information brochure or prospectus.
- Adopt a whole school Young Carer policy. See Appendix 3

About School Equality plans: Ensure Equality plans include

- the inclusion of all disabled children, staff and parents.
- providing information on support to all parents.
- providing information on homework support.
- parental access to all school areas, including access to site and activities.
- review of school's Young Carer statement and policy.
- support for children, young people and young adults with caring responsibilities.
- training for school staff in young carer and disabled parent issues.
- support for all parents of children with additional needs.
- the school website.
- curriculum issues around teaching about disability equality.

Recommendations to voluntary groups:

- **School parent-teacher groups or Friends of the school and out-of-school activity groups should pay regard to making their activities accessible for disabled parents and their children, and disabled parents who may have children with additional needs.**
- Disability and/or impairment groups should consider family-friendly activities.
- Hold activities in venues which are both family and disability-friendly. Raise problems of finding suitable affordable venues with local councils and/or voluntary sector community action forums.
- Review your websites for accessibility and content.

Recommendations to Local Authority and partnership groups:

- **Promote good quality individual support to disabled parents in all areas of Norfolk through Community, Children's and universal Services.**
- **Provide schools with information about the support available to disabled parents and their children to pass onto parents, and publicise it to the wider population.**
- **Promote learning through all divisions and service providers about working together and positive approaches to disadvantage, disabilities and illness that can remove barriers for parents in supporting their children's learning and welfare.**
- **Promote systems and joint training that enable all workforce divisions and the voluntary sector to work together in the interests of all parents and children.**
- Review the impact of school premises for disabled adults.
- Review the financial impact on disabled parents of transport to attend parent's school activities.
- Review and clarify the impact of school transport policy on disabled parents and their children.
- Promote better information about all support services to all parents.
- Promote better information for all parents around children's special needs at school.
- Promote more independent advocacy for disabled adults and children to ease the communication process.

About young people with caring responsibilities:

- Ensure all agencies have training in young carer and parental equality issues.
- Promote effective resources for disabled parents, young carers and young adult carers which recognise their situation and works with them and their families to reduce the immediate and long term negative impacts of caring.

About information technology:

- Promote good quality, relevant information in a central resource with narrative pages that explain systems, in addition to lists of parent-interest contacts.
- Include web access equipment and software in packages for those with impairment related difficulties.
- Provide incentives and resources for school cluster group websites.

Recommendations to Government:

- **Require and enable all bodies to recognise their duties to support the parenting role of disabled or ill parents and the welfare of their children.**
- **Require all Local Authorities to operate a disabled parents protocol.**
- **Recognise the additional costs carried by individual disabled parents in their parenting role over parents who do not have disabilities and disabled adults who do not have children.**
- **Recognise the additional costs of providing support to disabled parents and their children in rural areas.**
- **Promote greater capacity in local disability information, advice and advocacy resources**
- **Promote resources for individuals to gain their rights under the Equality Act.**
- **Promote greater capacity for providers to implement their responsibilities under the Equality Act.**
- **Require initial teacher training and INSET to include equality training on parental disability and young carer issues.**
- **Require meaningful and accessible statistics to be kept by health and social care agencies on the coincidence of disability and parenting among those for whom they provide services.**
- **Include web access equipment for families with disabled parents when providing free computers to families on low incomes.**
- **Provide incentives and resources for school cluster group websites and hasten better broadband coverage to all areas of Norfolk.**
- **Require community transport schemes to have vehicles available for non-contract use in peak travel times, during normal school hours and for evening activities.**
- **Require voluntary car schemes to have child safety seats available.**
- **Clarify volunteering limits in literature for disability benefits.**
- **Promote information on specific benefits of Access to Work schemes more widely.**
- **Promote adequate support for all parents and children involved in additional or special educational needs as a basic equality issue for children and parents.**
- **Promote curriculum content and materials which have potential for embedded teaching of disability equality, and promote the skills to use this in all subjects.**

Appendix 1: How to get support if you are a disabled parent.

Disabled parents in Norfolk can get information about support through Community Care (Adult Social Services) by

- Phone: 0344 800 8014.
- Fax: 01603 762445.
- Textphone: 01603 763585.
- on line: through www.norfolk.gov.uk/Adult_social_services/index.htm
- in writing: to Adult Social Services, PO Box 3210, Norwich, NR7 7AB.

Say you are a disabled parent and you need support in your parenting role.

In Norfolk, disabled parents are always entitled to a Community Care assessment of their needs. This assessment looks at your personal care and social needs, and what support you would like to look after your children.

You will be asked for your contact details and some information about your support needs. You can ask for support for yourself, or to help you do what you need to do for your children, or both. A social worker may come to see you, or you will be sent a questionnaire to fill in about your needs.

You will be asked about your own personal care and social needs such as housing, equipment, transport, work, education and training, help to manage money and leisure needs.

You can include support for you to look after your children, such as preparing meals, laundry, supervising bathtime, keeping your child safe, helping your child play and exercise, shopping for family needs, and having a social life with your child.

You can include support with taking children to school, helping your child with homework and talking to your child's teachers.

You will be asked if anyone is helping in the family and if this is working well, and if you provide care for other relatives besides children. You can ask for support for children, family members or others if they provide care for you.

If Community Care can support you, your support will be described in a care plan which says how and when you will have support as a disabled person and/or as a disabled parent. Then you can organise it yourself through a Direct Payment or Personal Budget, with help if you wish from ILN (Independent Living Norfolk). More details: phone 01508 491222 or email: iln@ncodp.org.uk
Website: www.ncodp.org.uk/our-services/independent-living-norfolk

If your support needs are not so great, you will be given information about services that anyone can use, so you can get the support you need without a care plan.

There is more information about getting support if you need it from

Norfolk Disabled Parents Alliance on www.norfolkparents.org.uk

Phone or text: 078 525 989 54 or email: info@norfolkparents.org.uk

Appendix 2: Resources.

Disabled Parents Network: Phone: 0300 3300 639

email: information@disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk

www.DisabledParentsNetwork.org.uk

- DPN Information handbooks (2010):
 - Getting the help you need – a guide to social care assessment.
 - Personal Budgets and support plans.
 - Express yourself – Advocacy, legal help and making a complaint.
- Peer support, publications, research.

DPPi guides 2007 www.dppi.org.uk

- Information for schools working with deaf parents & parents-to-be.
- Supporting children in school: a guide for visually impaired parents and education professionals.
- Choosing and applying for schools: a guide for visually impaired parents.
- Education resources and contacts: a guide for visually impaired parents and education professionals.

SCIE www.scie.org.uk

- Supporting Disabled Parents. Literature Review and Good Practice Survey.
- Knowledge review 11: Supporting disabled parents Nov. 2006.
- Resource guide 9: Working together to support disabled parents 2007.
- Several impairment specific good practice guides.

Disabled Parents and Schools: Barriers to parental involvement in children's education by Jenny Morris 2004 www.jrf.org.uk

Children In The Picture: www.childreninthepicture.org.uk/resources.htm Curriculum resource promoting more images of disabled children and adults in children's picture books. Includes how to use children's books to explain the social model of disability.

Norfolk Parent Partnership Phone: 01603 704 070 Fax: 01603 704 072

email: parent.partnership@norfolk.gov.uk www.norfolkparentpartnership.org.uk

West Norfolk Disability information Service Phone: 01553 782558

Email: jt@wndis.org.uk www.wndis.org.uk

Dial Great Yarmouth Phone: 01493 856900 www.dial-greatyarmouth.org.uk

Young Carers Christine Comacle-Smith, Senior Project Officer

Phone: 01379 676194 Fax: 01379 676194

email: norfolkyoungcarers@crossroads.org.uk

www.norfolkcarershelpline.org.uk/YoungCarers/youngcarersproject.htm

Family Voice Norfolk is a collective of parents and carers of children with special and additional needs. Phone: 07950 302937 or email admin@familyvoice.org.uk

ASK support for families of children with special needs in Norfolk.

Phone: 07546 574927 email: ask@information.fslife.co.uk www.askinfo.co.uk

Appendix 3: An example Young Carers policy for schools²⁷.

The aim of this young carers policy is to support young carers currently in our school and to encourage a culture of community awareness in which the future numbers of young carers and their level of responsibilities are reduced.

The concepts expressed in the school statement on support for young carers and their families will be implemented as below:

- A named member of staff will have lead responsibility for young carer issues within the school.
- A named Young Carers Support Link will be available for children, young people and their parents. All children, young people and their parents/carers will be made aware of the functions of the Young Carers Support Link whose details will also be clearly publicised in newsletters for parents, on notice boards and on the school website.
- A named Parent Support Adviser will be available for all parents, including those with disability or illness.
- A whole school approach to young carer issues will include consideration of their particular needs in all school policies.
- Training on young carers' issues and disability equality will be included in ongoing professional development for all staff and training for governors.
- The school's admission policy will include among the priority categories children or families where there is a social or medical need to attend our school. (School Admissions Code 2010, paragraph 2.28).
- The school will use the yearly enrolment process to provide a statement offering support to parents and families where there may be illness, disability or substance dependency which may affect the child's education or welfare. The statement will include details of the school's Young Carers Support Link, Parent Support Adviser and a choice of options for parent-school communication including home visits.
- The annual home-school agreement will repeat details of the school's Young Carers Support Link, Parent Support Adviser and a choice of parental options for parent-school communication.
- A system to register and consistently implement parent-school communication preferences will be created. A confidential register of pupils who are identified as young carers will be kept and will include details of their identified needs and support offered.
- The school will use and evaluate data effectively to monitor the progress made by young carers. Where young carers are at risk of falling into the Not in Education,

²⁷ Adapted from Healthy Schools young carers and disabled parents

Employment or Training (NEET) category the school will take appropriate actions to address this.

- Young carers, with their agreement, will be referred or signposted to support agencies and professionals, including young carers services.
- The school will work in partnership with parents, and where appropriate with other agencies such as (Adult) Community Care, Health and General practitioners, Young Carers services, Behaviour and Education Support Teams and relevant voluntary bodies.
- The school will offer additional support if needed for parents to attend parents evenings or other school events with their child so that they can be fully engaged with the education of their child and community life of the school.
- The school will allow young carers to use a telephone to call home during breaks and lunchtimes so as to reduce any worry they may have about a family member. If necessary, support will be offered to ensure the young carer can return home safely and is supported in dealing with an emergency.
- The school will consider alternatives if a young carer is unable to attend out of school activities due to their caring role. The school will work proactively with parents and family to avoid these situations.
- The school will develop a process to support the young person and their family during transition to their next school or college to ensure adequate support continues without interruption in the changed situation.
- No disciplinary measures will be applied to any pupil for poor attendance, delayed homework or unacceptable behaviour without first establishing if these may be due to caring responsibilities. If a young carer is involved, reference will be made to the Young Carers Support Link who will explore if additional support is needed.
- Alternatives to detention or other sanctions will be considered, including mentoring sessions with appropriate staff. If detention is considered essential it will be held at lunchtime in preference to after school. Before they are actioned, potential detentions will always be actively discussed with the young carers parent in acknowledgment of the young carer's role.
- Absence from school of young carers will be notified to the member of staff with lead responsibility for young carer issues within the school.
- Our Equality Plan will identify and remove access and communication barriers for parents and others with disabilities and/or illness.
- Consideration will be given to delivering a consistent and coordinated approach to disability issues across all subject areas. Curriculum resources will be reviewed and where appropriate, used to promote a full understanding of and respect for issues such as disability, impairment and caring in all pupils, teachers and staff.
- Policy revision date.

Appendix 4: About the Access All Schools survey.

The Access All Schools survey ran for 12 weeks to May 2010. It was available in print, by phone and on line, with other formats if requested. There were 13 local meetings for disabled parents and others.

Information about the survey was sent to over 600 local bodies, voluntary group newsletters and local newspapers. There was a wide distribution through Norfolk's disability and child welfare networks, school clusters, Governors, parent support workers, young carer groups, advocacy groups, Children's and Adult Community Services etc.

In July a survey focus group of disabled parents and others met to decide what the report should look like, resulting in the publication of this report in November 2010.

Wording of the introduction to the survey:

This is for you if

- your child is at any Norfolk school from nursery to college AND
- if you're a parent who finds your child's school isn't always easy to work with.
- or if it's just hard to go into school or support your child to learn as much you'd like to.
- or if you have a health condition or impairment.

We say "disabled parent" to describe all of these parents, step-parents and grandparents etc.

- Partners and other family are included.
- Staff, volunteers and others involved in Norfolk schools, disability and learning are included.

The questions were as given at the beginning of each section.

The monitoring section was prefaced with the statement:

"We think looking at how schools work with parents is more important than asking about parent's private health conditions and impairments. But this survey needs to show parents in all sorts of situations have had their say. You don't have to fill in this part, but it will help us if you do." All respondents filled in this part. There were

34 respondents, 27 female and 7 male. All but one was a disabled parent. Parents had 46 children: 6 in nursery, 16 in primary and 24 in secondary schools. 2 replies suggested children attended special schools. A small number of respondents did not reply to all questions. For simplicity, percentage results are given of all those who responded to each question.

Parents were asked to indicate their conditions. 15 had a single condition, 11 had two conditions, and 8 had three or more. These included:

physical impairment	22	deaf	3
long term condition	15	learning difficulty	3
mental health	6	reading difficulty	3
visual impairment	4	something else	2
writing difficulty	4	don't want to say	2



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