

Topic of Importance – Education and Communication During COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown has caused unprecedented hardship for parent carers, many of whom have lost, or now have restricted access to, the support that they previously accessed in order to meet their child or young person's needs. The biggest challenge and adjustment for most parent carers has been the partial closure of educational settings, announced on 23rd March 2020 and subsequent confusion around who should, and could continue to attend. Government guidance allowed for "vulnerable" children to continue to attend settings, which includes those with a social worker, and those with EHCPs, however the messaging remained insistent that children should stay at home where it was safe to do so due to the risks of contracting the virus. In order to determine whether or not a child/young person would be safer at home or at school a risk assessment must have been undertaken, in consultation with the child or young person in question and their parent, and with holistic regard to their needs. The risk assessments were to be led and developed by each individual setting in the first instance, using a tool created by senior local authority officers with input at draft from other parties including the parent carer forums Pinpoint and Family Voice Peterborough (FVP). Parent carers are telling FVP that they are either not aware of the existence of a risk assessment, or that one has been completed without their input and that their child has simply been denied a school place.

From 23rd March to 30th April, Local Authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups retained a legal duty to meet the needs of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans via the provisions set out in Sections F, G and H, in addition to continuing to meet statutory timescales relating to EHCPs. From May 1st, these statutory requirements were eased in order to account for difficulties arising related to staffing and safety during the Covid-19 outbreak. During the easement period, Public Bodies are expected to use "reasonable endeavours" to meet provision and timescales, whilst maintaining a focus on co-production and keeping the child/young person at the centre of the process.

FVP have conducted a series of Facebook Polls, Discussions and Google Form Questionnaires during the past few weeks, culminating in this Tol. In total there have been:

- 67 FB poll responses
- 30 google form responses
- 14 parent carers have commented on risk assessment posts
- 5 comments on a Poll about communication relating to EHCp and LA letter

The above figures Equate to over 30 parent carers sharing their views in one form or another.

What are parents telling us?

Through a combination of online surveys delivered via google forms, discussion on Facebook and completed Facebook Polls parents are telling us that:

Communication and Support

1. Easements letter from the LA has been received, and in some cases this is the only communication that has been received.
2. Some LA surveys are being completed
3. Some settings have offered calls/ emails of support during COVID
4. Where support is available, communications have been received experiences are more positive

Risk Assessments and Placements

1. Not aware of risk assessments taking place
2. Not being involved in the risk assessment process
3. Being informed outcomes of risk assessments via email - CYP will not be going back to setting

Where we get our evidence from:

Google Form Surveys

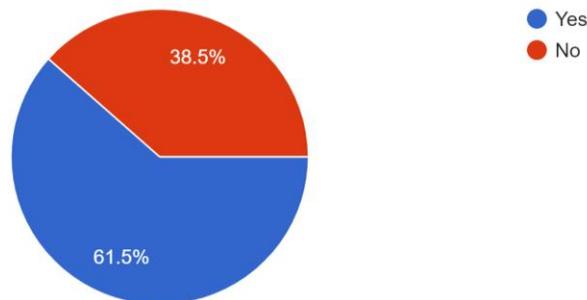
Communication and Support from Schools During COVID-19

General Communication/ Support

Views on communication between parent carers, the LA and Settings relating to educational support is mixed, but does demonstrate positive experiences.

Is your school making regular welfare calls to you, to check on the well-being of your child and the rest of the family?

13 responses



When asked to provide further information on support received the following responses were received:

Signposting additional support. SENCO and headteacher reassuring her 1to1 via phone

Accepted family breakdown and her brothers behaviour as not being able to keep her safe. But no other support signposted or offered just you'll get help when this is over.

Websites for alternative curriculum material have been advised.

City College has been really supportive. They call my daughter twice a week and set small pieces of work for her and call me twice a week as well on different days to check that I'm ok (I'm a single mum living on my own with my disabled daughter aged 19+)

General comments represent a mixed experience

GENERAL - COMMENTS

Could do with a plan to manage process moving from secondary to college and 6th form to Uni. No doubt this would be part of Year11&13 curriculum. Don't know where to go for info, if it exists.

No support at all and shocking to leave a family like that send £120 code for free school meal voucher redeemed it two weeks ago and still received nothing now on phone to Eden red after twice trying to email and address given was not valid and been waiting in queue for 1 hour 20 mins no answer. Jokes to me

I think because nene gate is such a small school they could have stayed open but very restricted and maybe had one year group in each day, they have they stuff to be able to offer one on one this way and they have the room to spread out in the school and minimise contact with others

This pandemic has drained me mentally physically and financially it has left me dreading the summer holidays that is rapidly approaching and will be another long period for us to navigate

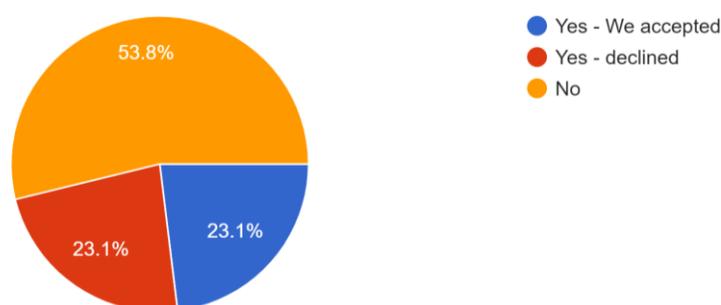
Some of the final comments reflect a more general sense of anxiety that has been detected across a range of data gathering methods, some of which were presented in the COVID-19 Tol

Placements

Another part of the survey related to whether a child/ young person has been offered a place in school during the lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses were varied.

Has your child been offered a place at a school?

13 responses



The majority at 53.8% stated their child/ young person had not been offered a place at school.

Where parents stated no, they were asked "If NO, what information have you received from your child's school regarding attendance during the COVID-19 crisis." The responses were:

None

That his school is shut and when I've asked why other children with ehcps are in school and he isn't I always get told I will get a call back so they can find out what's going on

No information regarding attendance

Very little

Awaiting feedback from VS about whether online tutoring available.

Stay at home where safe. Too few teachers to supervise.

Overall those who have a place in school seem satisfied, and communication is not wholly negative between parents, the LA and settings.

This survey was followed up by another survey looking specifically at the letter from the LA to parents about the EHCp easements and the risk assessments and school placements situation

COVID and Education

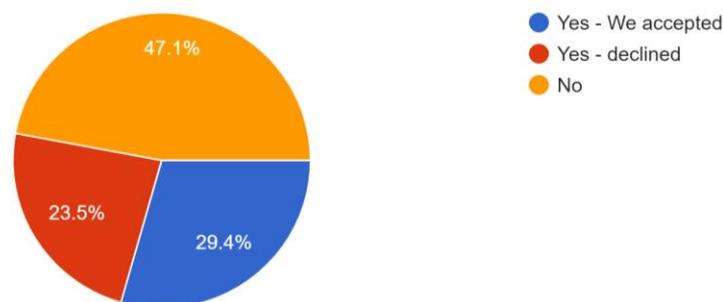
This survey as mentioned above picked up a couple of more specific themes, based in part; on the responses to the previous survey, information coming through via Facebook discussions and requests for further information from the local authority

Placements

A repeat question looked at the offer of a school placement, to which 47.1% stated they had not been offered one.

Has your child been offered a place at a school?

17 responses

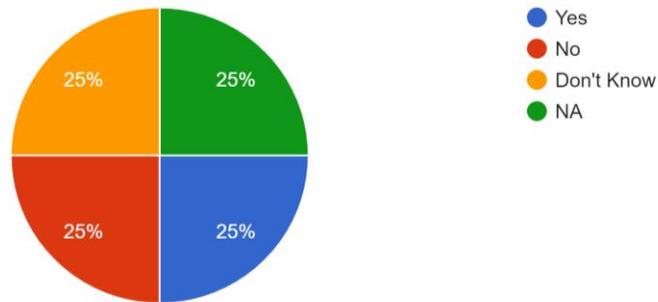


Risk Assessments

The following questions resulted from discussion being viewed on Facebook and anecdotal evidence being heard. They related to the use of risk assessments and the letter sent to all households where a child/ young person has an EHCp

If your child has an EHCP, have they had a risk assessment done to determine whether they should be at home or in school?

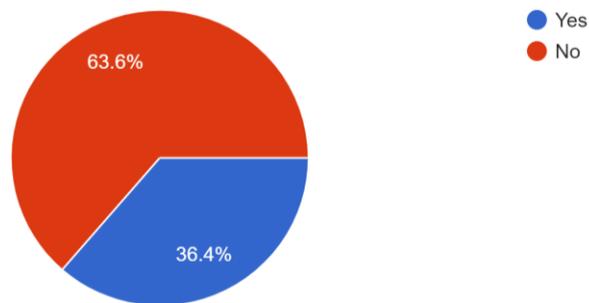
16 responses



Only 25% stated they had been aware their child/ young person had had a risk assessment to determine whether they should be in school or not. A concerning number of parents either stated no their child/ young person had not had a risk assessment or they did not know; this equated to 50% overall.

If yes, were you involved in the completion of the risk assessment?

11 responses



Only 36.4% of parent carers stated they had been involved in the risk assessment process.

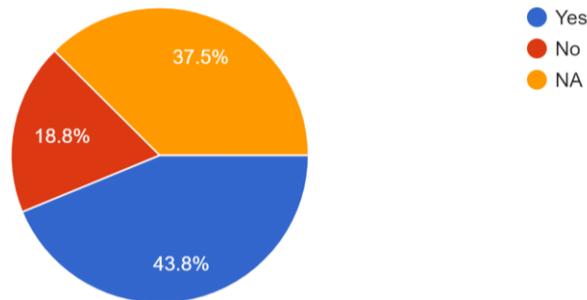
LA Easements Letter

In response to guidance from central government and in a drive to ensure all CYP with SEND would have their needs met where reasonably practicable it was decided to write to all households where there was a child/ young person with and EHCP. The letter was co-produced and accompanied by a survey being overseen by the LA. The survey was in part to establish if parent carers felt their CYP needed support and what that might look like.

Some questions looked at whether the letter had been received and more general views:

If your child has an EHCP have you received a letter and survey from Peterborough City Council regarding changes to provision at this time?

16 responses



Generally speaking though the letter has been well received and parent carers where support is offered responded more positively as evidenced by responses to the final question "Do you have any further comments you wish to add?"

*The school have been very supportive and kept me up to date
The school have contacted regularly, gives my child live teaching three times a day and the SENDCO always answers my messages quickly. The school teacher sees my child everyday online and gives easier level of work if it's too hard for him*

The school has been very supportive

Has been outstandingchecks in with us all the time and has helped with sorting daughter post 16 placement and very Supportive

Facebook Polls

Parents of a child with an EHCP - have you had any communications from the Local Authority during lockdown? Please comment with what if any you have had.	Yes	14
	No	8
Has your child been risk assessed to determine whether they are safer at home or at school?	Yes	26
	No	4
For those whose child/ young person has an EHCp. Have you received a letter about EHCp support and request to complete a survey from Peterborough City Council	Yes	9
	No	6

Facebook Posts

Well my experience is being told the school had done a risk assessment and deemed it too high for

my child to go, no input from me at all. I was told through email that this had been done and they would not be offering a place! I also know of a few parents this has happened to at the same school.

Academies don't have to use this.....I was told by social care, Academies and Independent schools do not have to use the local authority template risk assessment or involve children and parents in the discussion around returning to school if they choose not to.

I think this is a very difficult situation - schools/SENCOs are trying to manage an almost impossible situation, but likewise us parents with children with an EHCP feel somewhat abandoned. On a health and safety level, one can see why our children are difficult to integrate/manage under the current rules etc, but saying they can't come back because "it's too risky" is also bordering on discrimination. Unfortunately there's an awful lot of "passing the buck" and it seems that once again schools are being left to pick up the pieces and the responsibility. Btw - we've not been asked about risk assessment either.

How have FVP responded

1. FVP responded to the initial survey by conducting the second survey and setting up a phone line and email address for families to seek support.
2. A food support programme has also been established by FVP which links to free food supplied by Fare share
3. The responses to all surveys and polls have also been shared with Peterborough City Council Senior Officers

Where FVP have shared this Topic of Importance

1. FVP Website
2. FVP Social Media Channels
3. Peterborough City Council Commissioners

Next Steps and Areas for Consideration

1. Following up with parent carers to see if they have been involved in the risk assessment process
2. Checking if parent carers whose CYP have not been offered a place are satisfied with the decision
3. Ensure risk assessments have parental input

Timescales

1. FVP will endeavour to pass the Topic of Interest to the LA within one weeks of completion and they will look to respond within four weeks. The timescales have been shortened in response to the pandemic