

9) Case Study: Parents needing additional support

This case study illustrates the fact that some parents need more help than others but their wishes and aspirations must remain at the centre of the process. The parents had learning difficulties themselves and did not feel able to contribute without significant assistance. On a practical level, due to a system that is still heavily reliant on paperwork and on an emotional level, when as well as the usual anxiety associated when a child has SEN but having to undergo tests for a potentially devastating illness. Even in these circumstances, it was important that the parents were empowered to do what they could do e.g. phone the LA and make appointments etc. and feel able to drive the process. It also illustrates that joint support from the school with the IS ensured best outcomes for the child and his parents.

Ross's story

Ross is 11 and was at School Action+ when he transferred to a new primary school a year earlier. Parents were unclear about how their son was doing at school and were very concerned about his transfer to secondary school.

Ross and his Parents Story

Ross's new primary school had concerns from the outset about his language skills and got the Transition Communication and Language Team involved, even though this was not usual practice for a child at this stage. They advised that Ross had severe language difficulties and was operating at a level at least 3 years below his peers and in addition his social and emotional development was similar to that of a 5 year old. His teacher was also very concerned how he would manage at secondary school as his needs made him very vulnerable. The LA agreed to carry out an EHCP assessment

The IS visited the parents to help with "Our Story". They had neither internet nor a computer and were not able to word process the Our Story themselves. The IS offered to help them, stressing that it would be their document and they would be deciding what was included and she would be writing it down for them. The parents did not have a clear idea of Ross's strengths or difficulties, particularly in relation to school. This made it difficult to complete the Our Story so the IS suggested they had a meeting with the school.

Both parents, supported by the IS, attended the school meeting with the SENCo and Ross's class teacher. This helped the parents put some of their concerns into an educational context. The school had very clear records of Ross's needs and were able to help identify what might need to change. The school admitted that although they'd tried some quite significant interventions, Ross was still struggling to make progress. The IS took detailed notes and combined these with the information provided by the parents to create the Our Story.

In the meantime, the class teacher and the parents visited a local mainstream secondary school and a special school to see which would be most suitable for Ross to meet his

9) Case Study: Parents needing additional support

needs. Both the teacher and the parents felt that mainstream would be totally wrong and that the secondary special school provision would be essential.

Ross's class teacher felt in a mainstream secondary school, he would be at risk of becoming a persistent absentee and being bullied because he is so different from others. He is vulnerable because he does not understand social cues or recognise when something is not a good idea - he accepts things without thought because he does not understand consequences. He would struggle to make and keep friends. She believed he required a nurturing environment where he could form genuine relationships and make real friends. He does not learn like others and needs a holistic or thematic approach, not one that is subject based. One local mainstream secondary school does have a nurture group in year 7 where children are taught in very small groups. However, if he could not cope with a normal classroom beyond this, their SENCo said that they would need to look at alternative placements.

Following these visits, Ross's father had written a page of information which the parents wanted added to the Our Story, which the IS duly did. The IS made a follow-up home visit to go through the final version of the Our Story to check that they were both happy with it.

Some weeks later the parents received a draft plan. They sent in the reply slip requesting a meeting with the LA. They also received a telephone call from the LA to discuss the school placement. They were informed that Ross could not have a place at the special school because there were others with greater needs than his and it was full. In the draft plan it indicated that Ross's needs could be met in a mainstream setting with 20 hours of LSA support. The parents did not think Ross would cope in a large secondary school even with support. The parents wanted the IS to go with them to the meeting with the LA. The IS arranged another home visit to go through the draft plan and prepare for the meeting.

Although Ross was not aware of what was happening about transferring to secondary school, he was aware that something was going on, and his behaviour had deteriorated due to the uncertainty. The 20 hours suggested would not cover the other times when he would need close supervision meaning the mainstream secondary environment is simply not suitable for him.

The IS received a message from Ross's family explaining they'd just had a phone call offering Ross a place at the special school they'd requested. They were delighted and felt that the process, although long, had helped them to achieve the outcome they wanted. The IS then helped the family secure transport which was agreed without any fuss – they were totally happy.

Without IS support Ross's parents would have been significantly disadvantaged. They struggled to read and understand the letters and other documentation. They also did not have the language to describe their son's strengths and weaknesses in terms of aspirations and outcomes, these needed to be teased out. It was important for the family to feel they had someone who was on side and acting for them and ensuring that their

9) Case Study: Parents needing additional support

wishes were properly represented. This meant their key objective was achieved - to get the right school place for Ross.