

2) Case Study: Building trust

This case study shows how the IS was able to build a trusting relationship with parents by making them aware of their rights and outlining their options each time they hit a stumbling block, which eventually meant they achieved the level of support and school place they wanted for their daughter.

Fiona is 4 and has complex but (so far) undiagnosed learning and behavioural difficulties. She also has severe communication difficulties and several physical and sensory issues.

Fiona's Story

Fiona is happy at nursery although it had taken her a long time to settle and is uncomfortable around her peers. Fiona's mum is Hungarian and her dad travels a great deal for his work. The paternal grandmother helps with childcare.

Fiona was placed at a local private nursery, receiving 9hrs LSA support; the setting was very understanding, and was effectively making up the support to 15hrs. The family wanted a place for Fiona at their local primary school but had been given a cold welcome. They were panicked by this, and confused by the forms and sketchy information regarding EHCPs, which the LA had provided. They were confused over their rights and options.

I reassured Fiona's mum about her rights and the timescales involved, and arranged a home visit for the following week. We looked through all her paperwork, discussed the importance of Section A, filled this out together, and spent the morning discussing the processes involved in an EHCP needs assessment. We talked over the nature of aspirations and outcomes, and I signposted her to services which could help her to choose suitable provision. This initial meeting seemed to calm her greatly, and give her renewed enthusiasm; knowledge of the system definitely strengthened the family.

I offered to attend the meeting with the family and they were keen for me to do so; the date was changed twice, and several therapists were unable to attend, which greatly unsettled the family. The meeting was constructive and friendly but the mother in particular was agitated at the LA's hesitancy in identifying levels of support or available mainstream provision, and I was able to reassure her about these issues and to explain the process and timescales.

Panel came back with an offer of 15 hours, which dismayed the family; at the same time, their preferred mainstream setting told them that they could not accommodate Fiona. They were extremely upset, and I was able to calm them by explaining their options at this point. Within two weeks they had an agreement for fulltime support and a place at a local primary school, which they were delighted with.