

Suffolk: IASS back to school collaboration and the value of co-production

The context

Suffolk Sendiass is currently facilitating the co-production of a “Back to School” project aimed at supporting parents and carers of CYP with SEND who have concerns about returning to school after lockdown. This case study is offered to show how, although time consuming, co-production can promote valuable understanding between services and service users.

The story

Initial discussions within the Suffolk SENDIASS team, regarding the levels of concern parents, carers and CYP were experiencing about returning to school, broadened to a wider conversation about how schools and LA services might be working to allay fears across the county.

Following up on this, the SENDIASS Training and Development Officer, Sian Monteith, contacted a number of relevant parties, the Head Teacher for Specialist Services at the LA, the PCF, the Engagement Hub Lead (working with CYP with SEND and LAC) and the Psychology and Therapeutic Service Lead at the LA, to see if there was an appetite for joint working on the issues being raised. Sian suggested that it might be helpful to work together to explore the production of resources or online training/events which might help parents to support their children with the transition back to school in Suffolk.

There was immediate interest in this project.

An initial online meeting was held to discuss the first steps in gathering the views of parents, CYP. In addition to the agencies listed above, a representative from the Elective Home Education team also attended. Anecdotally there was a feeling that more parents were considering this option of EHE going forward, having experienced home learning.

It was agreed at the meeting that SENDIASS would host two informal online Teams meetings for parents and carers, supported by specialist services. It was hoped that this would enable the gathering of family views and explore ideas on how to make transition back to school easier for both CYP and their parents and carers.

In order to identify good practice, a letter was sent to all schools in Suffolk inviting them to share what approaches and resources they were already using in helping pupils to make the return to school.

In addition, Sian identified a large number of resources which could be used to support any online sessions going forward and collected them so that they could be shared.

On the 30th June a very productive session was held, via Teams. In particular, the bringing together of LA services and parents and carers was informative and helpful in moving forward with responses that would be relevant and most likely to meet need.

Professionals commented that:

"It is so easy to judge what they (parents) might be thinking and it was clear that some of their worries were not on my radar at all."

And

"I found it really useful to hear the parent views, it enabled some really interesting discussion."

A second virtual parent/carer session was held on the 2nd July 2020, once again with a sense that the conversations facilitated in these meetings will lead to outcomes / responses which will be relevant and timely over the summer and into the Autumn term.

The outcome

As a result of the meetings, key issues and some quite detailed concerns were captured including;

- Transition support and planning
- What school will be like in September
- Worries over friendships and bubbles
- Concerns over mental health
- Anxiety about COVID 19 itself and being safe
- How PPE will work in school setting
- Social distancing rules
- Getting children to re-engage with school after such a long break
- Support for parents ongoing
- How schools will make the provision set out in EHCPs
- Transport
- Support over school holidays
- Social care support

As the project moves on over the summer, it is envisaged SENDIASS will go on to develop its website pages alongside an offer of online workshops, although this is still in discussion with all parties involved.

However, for the purposes of this case study the service feels it has already achieved an important outcome in enabling a more accurate understanding of parental concerns around COVID 19, by key staff within the LA, through the facilitation of the co-production approach.

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