

## **Working with your child's school**

### **Making a link with your child's school**

Find out who is the most appropriate person to contact about your child. For questions and concerns about your child's special educational needs, the school SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), Class Teacher or Form Tutor may be the best person. You may need to ask at the school office, or check the school's website.

Find out when and how it is best to contact school staff. The School Secretary may be able to help you with this. Most teachers are not available to come to the telephone during the school day, but it may sometimes be possible to arrange a time to call.

If you have a child in primary school and need to have frequent contact with the school, you may want to ask if a home-school link book or diary would be useful. This enables you to send a brief note to school, and for school to send a brief note back.

If you are worried about being kept informed about events or meetings, you may want to check that letters and information sent by the school are reaching you. Some children find it difficult to remember to pass on letters. The Class Teacher or the School Secretary will be able to let you know whether your child has been given letters to bring home. If this is a real problem, speak to the school and ask about arranging a different way of communicating with you. Some schools put information on their website.

### **Keeping school informed**

Let the school know about important developments in your child's life. These may include:

- new medical diagnoses
- the results of health investigations or tests
- changes in family life which may have an effect on your child's behaviour or mood
- new behaviours you have noticed at home and which you think may be important.

Remember to let them know about the positives as well as the negative changes.

## **Meetings**

If you are worried about the meeting, don't go alone. Choose someone supportive to take along with you, it can be helpful for them to take some notes of what is discussed and agreed. Let the school know you will be bringing a friend or relative with you.

Take time to prepare for the meeting in advance. Think about questions you want to ask, or points you want to raise. Make a note of these to remind you.

Make sure that any paperwork you need to take with you is sorted and easy to find, you may want to use a loose leaf folder. Make sure you have paper and sometime to write with so that you can make a note if necessary.

Ask to be introduced to anyone at the meeting you don't know.

Don't be afraid to ask for any jargon or abbreviations to be explained.

Try to stay calm and polite as this will help you to get your point of view across. If you think you may need them – remember to take some tissues.

At the end of the meeting, ask for somebody to sum up what has been agreed and what will happen next.

When you get home, check and tidy up any notes you made, so that you can refer to them in the future if necessary.

## **If you disagree with your child's school**

Even where everyone is trying to work together, there may be times when things go wrong.

Here are some ideas which may help you to manage the situation. Remember that you can contact the Information, Advice & Support Service for help.

Keep talking and try to keep your discussions polite and calm.

Make clear notes, with dates, about anything that happens or conversations that you have, and keep any documents together and in date order.

You may feel comfortable and confident about managing any disagreement yourself but do contact us if you would like information, advice or support from us.

Remember that children and young people may not always understand or recall situations or conversations clearly, so always make sure that you check out all the facts before acting on something your child has told you. You may want to speak to a member of staff. Try and keep an open mind until you have heard all the details.

Once you are clear about the facts, check on whether the school has followed its own policies, or national guidance. You may want to ask for a copy of a school policy (e.g. on bullying, behaviour, special needs).

You should also consider whether the school was following guidance on special educational needs, exclusions or disability discrimination (including what happens in the classroom, what happens at lunchtime and break time, after school clubs and school trips).

Ask to meet with the school staff involved to talk through the situation and try to resolve the problem. Find out who is the best person to speak to about your child:

- at primary school this may be the Class Teacher, SENCo, or Head
- at secondary school this may be the Head Teacher, SENCo, Head of Year, or Tutor.

If things can't be sorted out at a meeting, ask for a copy of the school's complaints policy. This should include:

- a clear description of what you need to do
- what the school should do for your complaint to be heard fairly.

Usually you will need to write to the Head Teacher first, and the complaints policy should tell you how soon you should get a reply. If the Head Teacher's reply does not resolve the situation, then you should be able to complain to the Governors. If this still does not resolve things, then you are able to send a complaint to the Secretary of State for Education.

## **Disagreement Resolution**

If you feel that after having discussed your concerns with school you have been unable to reach an agreement – then you can ask your Local Authority for information about going to a disagreement resolution service.

This is an independent service which:

- helps when there is a disagreement about meeting the needs of a child with SEN
- manages discussions fairly to help people to communicate and to explore options
- helps both sides to reach an acceptable solution (which is then binding)
- keeps the child's needs and interest at the heart of the discussions.

Disagreement Resolution will be run by an independent facilitator who has had special training.

Disagreement Resolution is free (although you will have to travel to a meeting).

An Information, Advice & Support Officer will be able to prepare you for Disagreement Resolution.

### **Where can I get further information, advice or support?**

Contact the IASS team on:

**Phone:** 01743 280019 (Open 10am-4pm Monday—Friday)

**Web:** [www.cabshropshire.org.uk](http://www.cabshropshire.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/IASSShropshire](https://www.facebook.com/IASSShropshire)

**Email:** [iass@cabshropshire.org.uk](mailto:iass@cabshropshire.org.uk)

**Address:** Fletcher House, 15 College Hill, Shrewsbury, SY1 1LY