

Case Study: Examples of disparities in SEND services

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The following are not a blanket judgment of success or failure, nor are they a finger pointing exercise, they just provide a snap-shot of the inconsistency within the SEND service provided and available

Example A: Three families I have recently worked with across the County all have experienced less than satisfactory provision for their child in primary school, yet these children were all identified as children who struggled with concentration and were deemed low achievers, especially in relation to mathematics and literacy. Their difficulties were put down to limited concentration and a poor attitude to learning. Although internal educational assessments highlighted slow progress in attainment in year 1, it was claimed by the parents that the schools did not take proactive action to scaffold future learning through increased or specialist support, and inter-agency specialist advice was never requested to identify any specific reasons that could mentally or physically impact on learning.

It was only in year 5 that parents took action themselves and asked for their GP to make a referral to their community paediatrician for an assessment that a formal process began. All these children after assessment were identified as having ADHD and all met the criteria for an EHCP support plan. Although an EHCP was then put in place for secondary school entry, these children and their families were not provided with the early intervention support that would provide them with the opportunity and support required to achieve to the best of their abilities both in education and later life. These children were therefore already disadvantaged in education due to proactive action not being established through early intervention. The reasoning for such poor intervention remains open to debate, yet regardless of what barriers we face as educationalists personal morale accountability and high-quality leadership is questionable.

Example B: Prior to my current role I worked as a member of the inclusion team for 10 years in a large secondary school. The secondary mainstream school was seen as a beacon for inclusive practice for children with less complex needs and also those with profound, complex and multiple support needs. Still to this day I believe I was very fortunate to have had such great role models who ensured the school was a bastion of inclusion. Moral accountability was infectious because it was driven from an exceptionally talented school Head and SEND coordinator. As a result, ethical and proactive SEND practice was embedded and delivered within the school and every effort was made to keep children in mainstream schooling through carefully resourced and planned provision. Parents and carers were actively involved in decision making and provision planning, ensuring that it was coproduced and designed around the unique needs of the child. I have little doubt that this was not always a popular decision amongst the education community and the implications of providing high quality provision came at a cost that meant the school walked a tightrope financially on occasions.

Example C: Within voluntary and private early years settings, unlike schools there is no government funded allocated SEND budget unless a child is in the formal assessment process and meets set criteria for need. It may be argued that these are businesses. However, they are part of the delivery of the statutory curriculum for early years but constrained by the financial implication of underfunded 2,3,4 year old provision by the government. Financial constraints also have an impact on service delivery and like all sectors the quality of provision is not equal. Many children have identified needs from birth, or they are identified as they progress through age and stage development.