

Taking part in your child's education

When parents take part in their children's education, the children achieve more and have a better learning experience.

This factsheet is for parents of children with additional support needs.

It explains:

- how your local authority (the local council) and schools must and should help you to take part in your child's education
- what rights you have and what you can do to be more involved.

This factsheet also gives tips for attending meetings.

What local authorities must do to involve you in your child's education

You can take part effectively in your child's education only if you are given the correct information and the opportunity to express your views and have them heard. Under the law¹, local authorities have certain duties to enable you to do just that, which we explain in the next section.

The duty to publish information

Under the law, local authorities must publish information about:

- their arrangements for identifying children and young people who have additional support needs, finding out what those needs are, and making sure those needs are met
- the role of parents, children and young people in these arrangements
- their arrangements for resolving disagreements, including free, independent mediation between parents of children with additional support needs and the authority
- the person parents and young people can contact for more information relating to additional support needs, including information about any NHS Board or other appropriate agencies.

This information must be made available free of charge in accessible formats and alternative forms.

¹ The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended)

The duty to seek parents' views

Under the law, when local authorities consider whether a child or young person has additional support needs, or needs a co-ordinated support plan, they must seek and take account of the views of their parents and any information or advice they give.

What local authorities and schools should do to involve you in your child's education

The law sets out what local authorities must do, and the Scottish Government has produced a code of practice that gives guidance on how local authorities should carry out the law. The guidance document, **Supporting children's learning code of practice**, encourages good relationships and partnership working, and gives some good practice guidelines for communicating with parents of children with additional support needs. This includes producing clear and accessible information, developing good working relationships with parents, holding meetings that work well, making decisions about what to do for a child and taking responsibility for agreed actions.

You should expect the people who work with your child to:

- value and take into account your knowledge of your child
- recognise you as a vital partner in your child's learning
- make sure you understand how things

work and what your rights are and give you the information you need so that you can participate fully

- seek constructive ways of overcoming differences of opinion
- cater for any support needs you have, for example if you need an interpreter or information in a different format.

How you should expect local authorities and schools to help you take part in meetings

If you need to attend meetings to discuss your child's progress, there are a number of things that the people who work with your child can do to help you to participate in a meaningful way.

The people running the meeting should also ask you what times and places suit you best and take account of other family responsibilities you may have.

The chairperson should send you, in advance, an agenda setting out what is going to be discussed and ask you if you would like to add any points to it.

There should be plenty of time at the meeting for you to express your views, and decisions should normally be made at the meeting when you are present. The outcome or minutes of the meeting should be sent to you at the same time as everyone else attending the meeting and should include your views.

What if your expectations are not met?

If the chairperson does not follow these good practice guidelines, you should contact them and ask them to do so in future. If they continue not to include you fully in meetings, you may wish to consider making a complaint to the local authority.

Take part in meetings

You are the person who knows your child best, so at meetings it is important for you to have a say about how best to support them.

Here are some tips that parents have given us about attending meetings:

- Remember that you are the expert on your child.
- Take a photograph of your child with you.
- Write down some notes about what you want to say before you go to the meeting.
- Take a supporter or advocate with you.
- Accept that it is OK to show your emotions.
- Take your time to express your views – don't feel rushed.
- Ask for a written record of the meeting's main points to be made or for the main actions agreed at the meeting to be written down.
- If you are not clear on what someone has said, say in your own words what you think they have said and check this with the other people at the meeting.

Bringing someone to meetings to support you

You have a right to have a supporter or an advocate (someone to speak for you) at meetings or any discussions with the local authority about the authority's duties under the ASL Act.

A supporter could be a friend, relative, voluntary organisation worker or other person who can give you any help you need. A supporter can also be a professional working with your family, as long as supporting you does not conflict with their professional duties or any responsibilities they have as an employee. They can attend meetings with you, take notes and give you advice if you need it.

The law also allows you to appoint an advocate to conduct all or part of a discussion with the local authority. They can also write letters to the local authority for you, complete forms, or represent you in any other way. Advocates can come from various backgrounds:

- They may have acted, or be acting, as a supporter.
- They may be from a voluntary organisation and know about education legislation or additional support needs (or both).
- They may be trained in advocacy.

The local authority does not have to provide you with an advocate or supporter, but they should tell you about your right to have one and how you can find one in your area. You can also contact Enquire – we can give you the contact details of any advocacy agencies in your area or you can look at www.enquire.org.uk/find-a-service.

What you can do to participate more in your child's education

Give the school as much information as possible about your child's needs

Local authorities have a duty to ask you for advice and information about your child, but you can also help by offering information yourself. You are the expert on your child, so any advice or information you give will be very valuable.

Communicate with the school

Effective communication with the school is very important in ensuring that you take part in your child's education. Whenever possible, it is a good idea to communicate with the school in an informal and relaxed way. However, for some more formal procedures, you may need to put your views and concerns in writing, for example if you are requesting an assessment, or if you think the people working with your child are not asking for or taking account of your views or helping you take part in meetings.

Follow these guidelines when writing to the school or local authority:

- Always date a letter.
- Keep your letter or email brief and to the point.
- Ask for a reply by a certain date.
- If you do not receive a reply by the date you have given, contact the person you wrote to again.
- If you still do not receive a reply, or if the reply is unsatisfactory, you can write to the person's manager.

- If you need to, get help from a supporter or advocate (see above).
- Keep a copy of all correspondence.

If you cannot write a letter or email, you can record your information or request on audio or video tape.

Where to get more information

Publications

The parents' guide to additional support for learning, Enquire (2017)

Enquire factsheet: Resolving disagreements (2017)

Enquire information sheet: **Steps to resolving disagreements** (2017)

Enquire factsheet: Who provides extra support for children's learning? (2017)

Supporting children's learning code of practice, Scottish Government (2010)
www.gov.scot/resource/doc/348208/0116022.pdf

Parents as partners – a Curriculum for Excellence factfile – is available from www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/cfeinaction/parents

ENQUIRE

Helping you understand additional support for learning

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. We provide independent and impartial advice to parents and carers, to practitioners in education, social work and health services, and to children and young people themselves.

www.reach.scot offers advice to young people struggling at school. With practical tips on what can help and young people sharing their views and experiences on all sorts of life issues, Reach offers a 'go-to' source of advice to help pupils make the most out of their education.

This factsheet has been awarded the Clear English Standard.



Contact details

Enquire, Children in Scotland, Level 1, Rosebery House,
9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

Helpline: **0345 123 2303**
(Access to interpreters through Language Line)

Office: 0131 313 8800

Email: info@enquire.org.uk

www.enquire.org.uk

Enquire factsheet: Being/getting involved in your child's education

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