

A parent's guide to:

discussing concerns about your child's progress or SEND support.



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Co-produced with



**OXFORDSHIRE
PARENT CARERS FORUM**

The Voice of Parent Carers in Oxfordshire

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It is not always easy to know how to approach a school or setting when you are concerned about your child, their progress or their behaviour. It can be tempting, when things are worrying you, to try to speak to the teacher at the start or end of the school day but these are busy times and you will probably not get their full attention.

If you are concerned, you should ask for a meeting with their class teacher or form tutor, if they are at secondary school. If your child has already been identified as having SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), you could ask to meet with the class teacher, or form tutor, and the SENCO (SEN Co-ordinator).

Most schools will be pleased that you have taken the time to tell them about concerns that you have about your child as working together can prevent small issues developing into bigger problems later on.

What are your concerns?

It might be any of the following:

- You feel your child isn't making much progress with their learning and needs extra support.
- Your child is making progress, but only because you are paying for a tutor or you and/or the school, are spending extra time, helping them with their homework.
- Your child has become reluctant to go to school, sometimes more so after the weekend or holidays.
- Your child's self-confidence has become very low.
- You are regularly asked to meet with a member of staff, because your child has misbehaved at school, yet your child is behaving at home.
- Your child seems to be fine at school, but then comes home and has outbursts or has become withdrawn. Whilst this may make it seem that the problem is home based, misbehaviour at home can sometimes be caused by stress at school, even if your child seems to be coping there.
- Your child is doing well academically, but comes home very unhappy and says they have no friends.

It is worth remembering that the **SEND Code of Practice*** says that because a child is reaching expected levels, you should not assume that this means that there is no learning difficulty or disability. Unmet needs may lead to disaffection, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

**SEND Code of Practice is statutory guidance telling schools, settings and many other agencies how they should implement the Children and Families Act 2014.*

For more about how a school should identify and support children with SEND at SEN Support, you can read **A parent's guide to SEN Support** and OCC guidance to schools **Oxfordshire Guidance for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support**, both available on the Local offer www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/localoffer

Preparing beforehand

Meetings go better when there are no surprises. There are things you can do to make sure you are better prepared and more confident about raising concerns. It can be very helpful to talk things through with someone beforehand as that may help you prioritise what you want to ask or say. You could do this with a friend, family member or SENDIASS. It is a good idea to write down what you want to say.

Here are some questions you could think about to base your discussion on. They might not all apply to your child or they may act as a prompt to some of your own:

- How long have you had concerns?
- Do you think your child is happy at school?
- What does your child say they find hard? Lessons/Breaktime/Friendships/Homework?
- Are there particular lessons your child struggles with?
- If your child was worried at school, would they know who to go to?
- Is your child anxious before school in the morning?
- Does your child seem overwhelmed by school/exhausted when they get home?
- Can your child organise themselves for school e.g. equipment, PE kit etc.
- Is it difficult some mornings to get your child into school?
- Do you think from what they say that your child might be being bullied?
- Do you feel your child is at risk of being excluded or truanting?
- Does your child worry about homework?
- Is your child regularly getting detentions for late homework?
- What homework does your child struggle with and why?
- Do they find it hard to concentrate?
- Do they stay on task and work independently?
- What support do you have to give for them to finish their homework?
- Does your child have difficulty remembering instructions at home?
- Has your child's behaviour got worse or have they become withdrawn at home? If so, in your view, is it related to school issues?
- Has anything changed at home that might be affecting how they are at school?
- How does your child feel about themselves? Are they losing their confidence?
- Does your child have any health issues that could impact on their learning? e.g, have they had their eyes or hearing tested?
- Do they have sensory issues that you've noticed? (e.g. hair washing, noise, foods, lights)
- Is your child sleeping well?
- Does your child take part in any out of school activities? How do they cope with these?
- Do they play/meet up with friends outside of school?

By doing this you will be creating a picture that you can share with school. Some children are very different in different settings. Remember you know your child best! You might find it helpful to take a piece of schoolwork or homework with you that shows some of the things you are concerned about.

Other things you might decide to include:

You may be unsure about how much to share with school about your child and your family. It is worth considering whether it might be helpful in giving a fuller picture of your child to share such information, for example:

- Are there members of the family or wider family who have had difficulties at school? Is there anyone who has been diagnosed with autism or ADHD?
- Is anyone dyslexic?

- Is your child adopted?
- Are they a Young Carer?
- Has there been a bereavement in the family?
- Have there been any other significant changes?

What can I ask?

One thing that some parents tell us is that they hadn't realised that their child was having difficulties because they did not have other children to compare them with.

You could certainly ask how they are in class compared to others of the same age.

You could also ask how they are doing in relation to how the class teacher measures progress called **Age Related Expectations** and request to see examples of their work.

If your child is not already receiving extra support because the school has not identified them as having a difficulty with their learning, their behaviour or developing the social skills that you would ordinarily expect from a child of their age, you could ask whether they share your concerns. You could share the things you have identified from the list of suggested questions and ask if they have noticed any of them in the school setting.

You could ask if there are any appropriate in-school assessments that could be done to identify whether your child does have additional needs. You could ask whether it might be possible to meet up another time with the school's or setting's SENCO present to discuss your concerns.

If your child has already been identified as having Special Educational Needs or diagnosed with a disability that impacts on their learning and is on the SEN register, you should have 3 reviews each year with the school or setting to discuss progress.

If you have asked for an interim meeting because you have developed concerns or things are deteriorating, you could start by asking how things are going at school, have they begun to have concerns? Have they noticed any changes?

If you feel that additional support or a different approach might be needed, you could ask whether that might be possible. If the school do not share your views or feel it is not possible to increase support or ask for advice from external sources, it is reasonable to ask them to explain.

Other things to consider

You might not be sure whether to include your child or young person in the meeting. If it is the first meeting you are having to raise your concerns, you may not want to include your child or young person at this stage as you are not sure what will be discussed.

On the other hand, if this is a termly review of your child who is already receiving SEN Support, you may want to think how best to include them. This is particularly important for the young people as they get older. Their views are very important and if they are not able to attend, or speak for themselves, you should encourage them to write down their thoughts on the support they receive and the things they would like to change.

It can be difficult to discuss your concerns about your child with them in the room, so perhaps they could be involved at the beginning or the end of the meeting so you need to consider how this can be arranged. Some children may need quite a lot of help to prepare for attending the meeting.

Getting the meeting off to a good start

It is really important for your child that school and family work together to support them so it is always worth being appreciative of the time the school has given you. There may be issues that are concerning you but it is a good idea to think of one thing that you feel is working or has worked well to start a meeting. It often works better than launching into all the things that you feel are not going well.

During the meeting

- Focus on what matters.
- Use the list you have made beforehand so you cover the key points that you want to make or the main concerns to raise.
- It might be helpful to have a copy of your concerns and the issues you have identified to hand to the school at the meeting. They will then have them to refer to and on record and so help keep the focus on what you want to say.
- Avoid too much detail of the historical stuff. E.g. you can say you were concerned when Jack started at nursery because you noticed that he was not interacting with other children like the others seemed to. You can say who you raised it with but you don't then need to give in depth account of the conversations you had.
- Ask what can be done differently in the future rather than dwell on what went wrong in the past.
- Don't leave the important stuff until the end. (Some parents can be so worried about expressing concerns that they leave it until the meeting is almost finished to air them and then can run out of time).
- If the school has agreed some actions e.g. to carry out some in-school assessments, make sure you clarify the time scale for this and agree a follow up meeting.

After the meeting

It is a good idea to send an email to the class teacher or form tutor and SENCO, if involved, thanking them for their time and outlining what was discussed at the meeting.

It might be helpful to summarise what was discussed and agreed including dates of actions, follow up meeting etc. This helps clarify any misunderstandings and also creates your own paper trail so that, if at some point in the future, you feel your child needs higher levels of support, you have evidence of how long you've been raising concerns and what has been discussed, agreed or put in place.

You can talk through with your friend or supporter how you felt the meeting went as it is sometimes easier for someone less involved to take on board all that was said. If you feel the meeting did not achieve what you hoped for, you could ring SENDIASS to talk things through to see what advice or support they can offer for the next steps.

In the interim between now and the next meeting, it might be useful to note down any changes you see in your child's approach to school, their homework or their behaviour.

Who are we?

We are a group of parents just like you. Our children have a wide range of needs, from mild to severe, including physical disabilities. Some have 'hidden' impairments, like mental health issues, ADHD or dyslexia, while others have behavioural problems, or no firm diagnosis.

What do we do?

As members of the National Network of Parent Carer Forum's we support the development of parent carer participation, a process in which parents work together with professionals to make improvements to local services.

We believe that 'Every Child Matters' and that all disabled children and young people in Oxfordshire, should have access to the same opportunities, experiences and information, as any other child.

Our Vision is to be a well informed, connected and empowered community of families of children with disabilities or additional needs.

We will offer support to each other and working in partnership with health, education and social care we will create quality services that meet the needs of all parent carers and their children/young people.

We will build links with as many informal and formal groups, both those of parents and professionals and use those links to promote communication between professionals and parent bodies.

We aim to provide reasoned feedback and support to professionals and ensure young people and their families are listened to.

How to get involved?

By joining us you can:

- receive information about opportunities for you to help shape local and national services.
- opportunities to meet like minded families.
- contact us at any time for information; sign posting; support groups or to tell us 'what is going well?' or 'what would be better if?'

Are you a parent; grand parent or carer?

Do you have parental responsibility for a child or young person with additional needs or a disability, who is aged between birth and 25 years old and lives in Oxfordshire?

Are you a friend of parent carers?

Are you a practitioner; provide services; provide resources; run a support group; provide parent courses; run articles?

Would you like to?:

- receive information relevant to changes.
- let us know about your service or resource so we can signpost families.
- provide information to our families.
- share dates of workshops, courses or events.
- receive our press releases.
- let families know about us.

Join us

Membership is free and does not commit you to anything.

To find out more and or to register an interest in joining the forum:

Tel: 07394 735666

Email: info@oxpcf.org.uk

Web: www.oxpcf.org.uk

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/oxpcf/>

Twitter: @OxPCForum

Instagram: [ox_parentcarers_forum](https://www.instagram.com/ox_parentcarers_forum)

Sendiass Oxfordshire can offer all year round:

- A telephone helpline, 9.30-2.30 weekdays with answerphone outside these hours:
01865 810516
- Information, advice and support on matters to do with a young person's SEND
- Help with communication between you, the school and the Local Authority
- Trained volunteer Independent Parental Supporters and Independent Supporters
- Advice about preventing and resolving disagreements
- Training events for parents and groups – see SENDIASS website
- An informal Drop In SEN Advice session, 'Talking Points', – see website for dates

**Contact us on: 01865 810516 or
text 07786 524294
sendiass@oxfordshire.gov.uk
<https://sendiass-oxfordshire.org.uk/>**

Confidentiality Code:

Everything you tell us will be treated in strict confidence. We will not disclose our records to, or discuss the case with, a third party outside SENDIASS Oxfordshire without your consent, except if we suspect a child is at risk.