

# Reading Families' Forum

*A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities*

**COFFEE EVENING 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**At the Avenue School**

Eight parent carers attended a discussion with Joyshree Saikia, the Community Engagement and Research Advisor from RISE and Andrea O'Neil Anti-Racist and Racial Equity Network. RISE is the new Reading Inclusion Support in Education team.

RISE supports schools and colleges to help them include young people with additional needs. They don't work with early years provision such as nurseries.

Ordinarily Available Provision is the support that mainstream schools or settings should be able to provide for a child or young person through their agreed funding and resource arrangements. Reading's ordinarily available provision is on Reading's Local Offer here:

[Reading Directory | ORDINARILY AVAILABLE statement - Provision the local authority \(BFfC\) expects to be made available by schools, early years and post-16 providers & SEND Support in Mainstream Schools](#)

Support for children with additional needs should be part of graduated response. This is also described in more detail on the Reading Local Offer.

The RISE team help schools to use the ordinarily available and graduated responses to ensure that young people get the support they need in schools.

If the Local Authority agree to assess a child for an Education, Health and Care Plan to provide more support, it can take 20 weeks to complete the assessment. Parent carers noted that special schools and specialist nurseries are full.

Some schools are better than others at supporting children with additional needs. Parent carers talked about what they would find useful for more schools to have support in:

1. Reception and Year 1 staff need to be able to meet the needs of pupils who are waiting for an autism or ADHD assessment and/or have little speech. Children

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may be having a lot of support at their early years setting or just able to cope for a couple of hours per day. Parent carers are worried about primary schools being able to meet their children's needs. Other parent carers have known children being excluded in Reception and/or doing puzzles in the corridor as they can't keep up with the work.

2. Take what parent carers say seriously; we know our children.
3. Some children with additional needs do well but then don't do well the next year as that form tutor doesn't understand their needs. All teachers should have enough understanding of additional needs.
4. Parent carers agreed that the RISE team was positive if it improved schools' ability to meet needs.
5. It is important that teachers and TAs understand speech delay and sensory circuits.
6. Children need a safe place to go to take when they are feeling stressed at school.
7. Children with additional needs should be able to learn and not just put with children who have behavioural difficulties that the school are struggling to manage.

One parent carer was told that their child won't get a special school placement as special schools are full. They are concerned about how their child will be supported in mainstream school.

## **Racial Equity Training in Schools**

Andrea explained that she is working with colleagues to ensure more racial equity in schools. The group discussed the impact of having additional needs and coming from a racial majority background. 4 Police officers had arrested one parent's son because he is of an Asian background. Some Black young people at Special United, Reading's SEND youth forum, have said that they are afraid to go out as they are often stopped and searched.

Andrea is encouraging schools to feel confident talking about race and making the curriculum more inclusive.

There is a national drive to recruit more racial majority teachers – one parent carer said their partner is very reluctant to even go into schools because of the racial abuse

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he suffered at school. Less than 1% of head teachers are from racial majority backgrounds in the UK.

One parent carer said that her child had been refused a dyslexia assessment as their child was not British. Others were concerned that their child wouldn't be able to express if they were experiencing bullying or racial abuse. Parent carers all agreed that it was important that children with additional needs from racial majority backgrounds were valued and included.

RB 21/07/24