

# PARENT CARERS TOGETHER



## Bournemouth Christchurch Poole

the voice of parent carers of young people with special educational needs and disabilities

# EHC Needs Assessments: Exploring why schools sometimes suggest that parental requests are preferred.

Parent Carers Together asked our members, “Do you have any experience of schools/SENCOs suggesting to parents that it is better/faster/easier for them to make a parental request for EHC Needs Assessment, rather than a school request?”

The following notes are based on feedback from quite a few parents. (51 comments on a post in PCT private members Facebook group, plus some additional comments by email and messenger.)

PCT position is that we would like to see cooperative dialogue between parents, schools and the LA in assessing SEND needs. We would like to see the Graduated Response working well in all schools, so that all parents know that their children are being well supported.

Nevertheless, PCT position is that any parent who suspects that their child may have SEND is entitled to make a parental request for EHC Needs Assessment. They can do this at any time, irrespective of the views of their child’s school/teacher/SENCO – whether they are supportive or not. BCP Council should not in any way imply that an increase in parental requests is a problem, nor that parents ‘ought to’ wait for the school to make a request.

These are themes and suggestions that emerged from parents’ experiences. All the bullet points are direct quotes from PCT members.

Compiled on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023 by Peter Phillips,  
on behalf of Parent Carers Together.

First the good news:

### Some schools prefer to make school requests

School staff tell parents that a school request is preferable to a parental request.

- “The Deputy Head told me that if I made a request the LA would only give them 2 weeks to prepare a lot of paperwork, so they encouraged me to wait for the school to request it.”
- “Our school has been very supportive. I’m sorry for those whose schools are not.”

But unfortunately, the positive comments were very much outweighed with experiences where schools were not supportive, or didn't have time, or didn't have the resources:

### Some schools don't acknowledge the needs

School staff tell parents that their children don't have sufficient needs to justify an EHC request.

- "I have done 2 parental requests (which resulted in EHCPs) because school refused to acknowledge my children's difficulties, and refused to do the applications, saying they wouldn't get a plan and didn't want to waste their time."
- "The Head of SENCO told me, 'What difference would an EHCP make? The school still has its expectations and policy to follow.' At this point the tears started to roll down my face. I was told I could make a parental request if I wanted to."
- "I made a parental request because my son's school refused to acknowledge his needs throughout reception. By the end of the year, they acknowledged that he'd barely made any progress, but said they'd now have to start the graduated response process which would take months of evidence gathering."
- "My child had known SEN when starting school, but they said he was doing fine and no issues. When I spoke to SENCO and asked about EP assessment, we were told my child wouldn't be considered. We were told 'they are not an EHCP child'. So we made a parental request, and the plan was issued by 20 weeks (back in 2021)."
- "Schools often don't see all the needs because the child masks. Unless the child is disruptive, they may go unnoticed."
- "A friend's child is undiagnosed due to being 'fine in school'. The school will not pursue an EHCP as they don't perceive the need, but things are particularly difficult for the family out of school, so they are making a parental application."

### Some schools "don't have time" to do EHC requests

School staff tell parents that they don't have time to do an EHC request for their child, but instead offer to support them in making a parental request for an EHCP.

- "I did a parental request. The school said they supported my request, but the SENCO didn't have time! So encouraged me to do it."
- "Even if the school is happy to apply, the forms require lots of detail and take a long time to fill in, and the SENCOs simply don't have time."
- "The school application form requires at least 10 hours or more, and the SENCO doesn't have that spare in a single week, so it takes a few weeks to fill in."
- "Parents are being told to do parental requests as schools do not have the capacity to do the work."
- "SENCOs are having to do more in schools with less time to concentrate on SEN paperwork. Schools don't have enough support staff with spare capacity."
- "Due to BCP's poor performance on applications and annual reviews, SENCOs time is taken up chasing existing applications and reviews, or fighting over provision that are included in existing EHCPs but not funded. So they have less time to do new applications."

### Some schools don't have enough 'official' evidence

School staff tell parents that they can't make an EHC request because they need to collect more evidence.

- "The school says they have to record 3 cycles of plan-do-review."
- "Our experience is this. The school acknowledged in reception that there are SEN issues. They worked through the BCP graduated response throughout reception and Year 1. At the end of year 1 they admitted that the EHCP application was needed, but it took until the end of the first term of year 2 to complete the application forms."
- "The school says they can't get evidence if the child is not attending, so they won't apply until the child returns to school."
- "Schools often say they have to do 3 cycles of plan-do-review, but that's not what the law states. We can't wait for this if our child is struggling. Late intervention leads to an increase in needs and mental health issues."
- "Why isn't there a 'fast-track' option for a school to apply for an EHCP for a child when it becomes obvious very early that they have significant needs, without needing multiple terms-worth of 'evidence'? This is particularly relevant in reception years, and in the first year of moving to a new school."
- "The paperwork for EHCP needs assessment is ridiculous. I completely understand why schools don't want to say 'yes'."
- "The SENCO told my friend that they wouldn't qualify for an EHCP because school didn't spend more than £6,000 supporting her child."

### Some schools don't have enough funding for specialists

School staff tell parents that they don't have sufficient funding for their child to be seen by an EP / OT / SALT or other specialist.

- "Lack of school funding means that an EP can only usually visit 1-3 children, so they prioritise the really disruptive children. And EHCNA means that my child will get seen by an EP (assuming the LA accepts the assessment)."
- "If the LA wants to reduce parental requests they need to make sure the school has easier access to EPs, sensory OTs, and SALTs so the child's needs can be identified early and the adjustments put in place to meet their needs to stop them escalating to the level of needing an EHCP."

### Some parents receive recommendations from other professionals

Some parents are advised by other professionals to make a parental request.

- "I contacted Educational Psychology myself – had one of their parent consultations, and the EP advised me that because my child's needs were evident before starting school that I should make a parental request."
- "My school said he was doing fine, so we paid for private SALT and development assessment. The 2 professionals said there was enough evidence that the needs would persist throughout school and recommended EHCP."

### Perception that a parental request is faster to start the process

School staff tell parents that the parental request process is faster than the school request process.

- “The SENCO said it will be a quicker process if I do the request rather than the school.”
- “I wish I’d made a parental request. I worked with the school on their form and it took a month of meetings etc. even though they already had the evidence.”
- “I’ve known people where schools say they will look to see if there’s evidence to apply, and the parents think the job is done, but then the school doesn’t apply, and the parent only finds out a year later when they ask what’s happening.”
- “Schools know that it is quicker to get the process started if the parent applies.”
- “Because it’s widely known that most LAs are not achieving the 20 weeks, it’s best to start as soon as possible.”
- “School SENCOs help parents to make parental requests because it is quicker and easier.”
- “My daughter’s infant school took almost a year to submit the EHCP application. I was considering submitting my own as the process was so slow.”
- “If parents are waiting for years for a diagnosis, and parents are desperate to help their child, an EHCP application is a logical step. If the school is unsupportive then parents are going to apply themselves.”

### Perception that a parental request is less likely to be declined

School staff tell parents that a parent request is more likely to be approved than a school request.

- “Our SENCO told us that if they applied for an EHCP they wouldn’t get it, but parental requests are given more often.”