

Workshop 1 - Special Needs & Disability Within Education

Facilitators: Viviane Treacy & Heather Larkin, Special Educational Needs Advisory Centre

1. General overview of key points covered in the workshop
 - SENAC's aim is to support and inform parents and to improve policy to reflect parental engagement, thereby improving outcomes for children who are experiencing difficulties in education
 - Structure and rules of the SEN system are laid down in legislation ie: Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996
 - Legislation is supplemented by a Code of Practice. This will be revised to include all pre school settings
 - Only 2-3% of children with learning difficulties ever get a Statement of Educational Needs
 - SENAC encourages and empowers parents to engage with schools
 - Good practice is used to influence policy further
2. How do we link with other agencies and share information?
 - Refer parents to support groups for further help
 - Use support services to train staff members
 - At Stage 4 of the process (ie: statutory assessment intended to identify the children with the more complex and/or severe learning difficulties)
 - At Stage 5 (ie: issue and maintenance of a 'Statement') the relevant Board becomes legally responsible for the child's education provision
3. How do we agree goals for the family?
 - Follow all 5 stages of the SEN system
 - Parents build up evidence and if the school agrees, set targets
 - Parents can apply for assessment, SENAC can assist
 - It is important to recognise the complexity of needs in some situations
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4. Tips for practitioners working with particular groups of parents
 - Parents want to feel: informed, encouraged, empowered, accepted, supported, understood, secure etc
 - Parents often feel: frustration, confusion, disrespected, discouraged, etc
 - This issue affects the whole family and it is important to recognise and acknowledge how parents actually feel
 - Parents feel empowered when given more assistance / information to help them make informed choices about their child's education
 - Basic information on the process is available for parents
 - Encourage parents to maintain good communication with the school
 - Encourage parents to gather evidence and put their concerns in writing to the school
 - Keep an eye on the policy and get involved to shape future changes

- MLA's want to hear parents' experiences
- Encourage schools to recognise SEN at all levels
- Push for more training in schools
- Remember a child's best advocates are his/her parents