



The *Independent* Helpline for Special Educational Needs.
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THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

**November 2004
– October 2005**

**All children with Special Educational Needs
shall have the opportunity to become**

confident and effective learners

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Helpline

In October 2002 we launched our telephone Helpline for parents and others seeking procedural help and advice on Special Educational Needs. This is the report on our third year of activities. It is significantly shorter than last year's largely because there seems little point in repeating in detail the concerns expressed last year and the year before **and still ignored**. We give, however, the references to last year's report which may be obtained by contacting us or turning to www.hampton-online.co.uk

There is another reason for brevity and that is because SOS!SEN is about to receive the status of a charitable trust and will be producing an interim report soon after that status is finalised. Our move to becoming a registered charity will have significant impact upon our work, our finances and our administration.

2. Comments

The needs and concerns raised in our 2003 – 2004 Report remain largely the same. There is little or no evidence that efforts have been made by local education authorities to address seriously these matters. **Indeed there is evidence that in some local authorities respect for the law upon which SEN provision is based, and concern for the children and parents/carers have further declined.**

During the past year there has been dramatic increase in the number of calls to the Helpline from parents from authorities beyond Richmond. Several of these have turned into long term cases in which we have become actively involved.



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1.0 About the Helpline

We offer a friendly, independent, confidential telephone helpline for parents and others looking for information and advice on Special Educational Needs. There are no fees required. All members of the Helpline and its back-up team are volunteers who have either spent much of their lives in education or related services or are parents who have themselves fought with success for their children's rights and have followed a period of training to help others. The help we offer includes

- Interpreting the SEN Code of Practice and other related documents
- Interpreting official letters
- Checking proposed and revised Statements of special educational needs
- Helping prepare letters of request, comment and complaint
- Finding independent professional advice – e.g. educational psychologists, lawyers etc.
- Giving guidance on the next available procedures which may be suitable
- Acting as a “friend” to accompany parents on visits to the offices of officials in the education and health services and to meetings in schools
- Advising on preparation of case statements for SENDIST (Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal)
- Writing case statements.
- Presenting cases at the Tribunal or acting as a helper to the parents.

The helpline is totally independent and tries to give support not only to parents but to schools as well. Very often by supporting parents to fight for their children's rights we are indirectly supporting schools in getting the extra support they need to meet the needs of the children.

We can be called on **020 8979 8853** and one of our team will listen carefully and either provide an immediate answer to questions or, more likely, take a few details and ask the most suitable member of the team to call back. On those occasions when we are not available, a message and phone number can be left. The line is open 7 days per week. We do also communicate by e-mail but **prefer all initial contacts to be by phone** so that we can have a more friendly exchange of ideas.

Where cases are complicated we may suggest a meeting to talk things through. In such a case we may, with the permission of the caller, involve more than one team member or contact our advisory solicitor for clarification of a legal point.

We also run workshops on matters relating to SEN procedures – e.g. Statutory Assessment, Checking a Proposed Statement, Preparing for Tribunal, How to prepare for Annual Reviews

We raise our funds through a range of social and other events and **welcome donations**. Money raised goes to meet telephone costs, office expenses and training for helpline team members. This year we have also been able to give some help towards the costs of professional advice and legal representation at tribunals for some families whose incomes cannot be expected to stretch to even the minimum level of support.

This year we have seen the expansion of SOS!SEN advisory teams into Hampshire and Surrey where parents already helped with their own concerns are now providing a service to other parents and proving very successful pressure groups as well. Particularly notable has been a very strong movement by parents in Hampshire where some very important challenges have been successfully made of the decisions and administrative performance of the LEA.

2.0 The Origins of Calls

Richmond for very good reasons remains our most important single authority for calls but parents from Surrey, Hampshire, Kingston, and Croydon keep us particularly busy with Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Fulham providing an ever increasing number of callers. We now hear frequently from parents from Cornwall to Yorkshire and have recently had a couple of calls from N. Ireland (these required a fair bit of additional research).

We note that where LEAs are attempting back door methods of reducing the number of statements or ignoring the requirement of specific, quantified and detailed provision there is a growing number of calls from

worried parents and an ever increasing move towards appeals to the High Court for Judicial Review and to SENDIST.

2.1 Calls Received: October 2004 – October 2005

Total Calls –	1350	Calls: Richmond Borough	401
		Calls: other Local Authorities	949
Calls leading to:			
Long Term Cases* –	90	Richmond	35
		Other Local Authorities	55
Medium Term Cases ⁺ -	82	Richmond	22
		Other Local Authorities	60

*Lasting more than 3 months

⁺Lasting from 1 to 3 months

Since we began in November 2002 we have dealt with or are dealing with 101 long term cases in Richmond and a further 80 from other authorities.

For very practical reasons calls from more distant parts of the country tend not to become long or medium term cases but the helpline members have been able to advise on a number of practical points such as procedures to follow, availability of legal help and contacts for independent professionals able to assess special educational needs.

3.0 Main SEN Needs Reported in Richmond and Other Authorities

No major change from last year.

- Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (approx. 75% of total)
- Speech and Language Difficulties
- Moderate Learning Difficulties
- Severe Learning Difficulties
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (5 cases in Richmond)
- Dyspraxia
- Dyslexia
- Down's Syndrome
- Visual Impairment

- Hearing Impairment
- Cerebral Palsy
- Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.

Note. In most cases the child had more than one need – e.g. children with ASD demonstrated sensory, motor and behavioural difficulties and some also had ADHD.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Speech and Language Difficulties still dominated the number of cases dealt with by the helpline but there was a marked increase in the number of parents who decided to pursue appeals in order to improve provision for children with dyslexia. It should be noted that in a high proportion of cases of dyslexia further assessment often revealed additional problems of dyspraxia and communication. It is worth noting that the basic range of assessments provided at Statutory Assessment time does not statutorily include Speech and Language and Fine and Gross Motor Skills and it is, therefore not surprising that these difficulties are not picked up. Indeed the waiting lists for such assessments by the NHS, if requested by parents, is so long that it is months or years after the Statutory Assessment period has passed that a clearer picture of needs may emerge.

School Age of Children — Long Term Cases

All Local Authorities	Pre- School	10%
	Primary	75%
	Secondary	16%
Richmond	Pre- School	7%
	Primary	77%
	Secondary	16%

NOTE In Primary schools the concern was in many cases related to future secondary school placements and provision.

4.0 Range of Concerns

Those of previous years remain. (Please see last year’s report)

There have, however, been some significant additions raised quite frequently and in the shape of

- a) Failure to carry out to the letter the precise orders of the Special Education and Disabilities Tribunal.

- b) A trend towards trying (once again) to put provision under Part 6 rather than Part 3 of a statement so that that provision cannot be legally enforced.
- c) Attempts, via delegated funding, to illegally deprive parents of the right to obtain statutory assessment of their children's needs.
- d) Phoney consultation where not all schools and parents are informed, information comes out too late, is vague, is misleading, information is inadequate for informed views to be made.
- e) Increasingly vague statements in which the learning support provision is set down in such a way that a child's provision may be diluted by being used by a teacher to support a number of other children. This in itself reflects the position in many schools where the SEN general budget for children on School Action and School Action Plus is inadequate and teachers forced into using for several non statemented children the provision for a statemented child.
- f) Children being placed in special schools or units which are inappropriate for their need – e.g. in so called “complex needs” units or schools designed to meet one or two kinds of need but not the particular need of the child in question.

It is tragic that these concerns have not been addressed and that LEAs remain so complaisant or obdurate. Often officers try to comfort themselves by claiming that most parents are happy with the help their children are getting and it is “only the vocal minority” who complain. A look, however, at a range of authorities tends to indicate that many parents do not complain because they are not aware of the extent of their children's needs, are grateful to get any help at all, and do not know the procedures to follow in order to get more help.

5.0 Future Developments

Within the next year we shall know more about how the proposed changes in Education as set out in the Government's White Paper on Education will affect SEN provision. We shall see first signs of the extent to which local councils have successfully put in place the requirements of the Children Act. We shall have some results from the Parliamentary Select Committee set up to examine SEN.

6.0 The Future of SOS!SEN

Clearly it is going to be a very busy future. We are now moving into our charitable status and with it we hope will come greater opportunities for raising

funds to help parents who are unable to afford the expert help they need in order to have a clear picture of their children's needs and how to obtain them.

We have already started searching for permanent office space in the Richmond area and are urgently seeking help with clerical and information work.

7.0 Programme of meetings

During the year we held a highly successful weekend workshop We plan to hold more of these with the first in March 2006. We have held frequent workshops in the evenings to cover a range of topics concerning SEN matters and plan to hold more of these.

Since our last General Meeting and Open Forum on November 9 last year, we have had frequent small but valuable workshops in the evening for parents and professionals. We have also held fun raising activities where parents and supporters have met in a lighter vein

There have also held some larger meetings including SEN Open Forums run by Ann Bauer and her team in Fleet with questions answered by a group of SEN experts. We also held highly successful weekend workshop on May 14/15 this year on "A practical guide to Statementing and Tribunals", with 120 attending, where we heard from lawyers and therapists, culminating in a very realistic Mock Tribunal.

Members of the team have also visited other groups in various parts of the country to 'spread the word'.

Our next workshop is scheduled for all day Saturday 19 November when solicitor Melinda Nettleton will tackle the issue of

SEN and the Social Services.

@

3 The Avenue, Hampton, TW12 3RN

10 am – 4 pm

£5 including light lunch

Further meetings will be announced during the year

THANK YOU.

We wish to thank all those who have helped us achieve such a large measure of success whether this help has come in the form of valuable legal and practical advice or in the form of help at meetings and fund raising occasions, particularly from groups of parents in Fleet and Kingston.

Above all our thanks to those parents who have contacted us, and with whom we have been able to work so successfully.