



## **Evaluation**

### **The views of parent service users April 2009-April 2010**

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) & Disability Act 2002 made it a statutory duty for every LA to ensure the provision of a Parent Partnership Service from January 2002. The DfES has laid out minimum standards in the SEN Code of practice 2001 that all Local Authorities and Parent Partnership Services are expected to meet.

Local Authorities are expected to:

- ensure that the service, has a development plan which sets out clear targets and is regularly reviewed. Such plans should specify arrangements for evaluation and quality assurance
- have, irrespective of whether outsourced or provided in-house, appropriate arrangements for overseeing, regularly monitoring and reviewing the service, taking account of local and national best practice whether the service is provided in-house or bought in
- actively seek feedback from the service and service users to inform and influence decisions on SEN policies, procedures and practices in order to improve communications and minimise the potential for misunderstandings and disagreements

Parent Partnership Services should ensure:

- the regular review of the effectiveness of the service they provide, for instance by seeking feedback from users

In addition to the minimum standards, Devon County Council's Children's and Young People's Service has also agreed to adopt the voluntary minimum standards set by the South West SEN Regional Partnership. These include additional specifications that extend the detail for each of the DfES standards and provide clarification of the practical aspects in service delivery that will ensure service quality. These include:

- to ensure that the effectiveness and accessibility of the service are monitored systematically. This should include a process of monitoring client satisfaction
- to work towards at least 85% satisfaction rate for the service received
- to provide feedback arrangements to enable parents to comment on the quality of the service they have received.

#### **Rationale**

In order to monitor the satisfaction levels of parent service users that had been anecdotally reported by Devon Parent Partnership Service (DPPS) staff as a routine part of their work and to evaluate the range and effectiveness of service provided, a questionnaire was sent to all families that had asked for support from DPPS between April 2009 and April 1st 2010. The questionnaires were sent at the end of each school term to gather feedback on a short time frame so that the support that had been offered was still relevant and recall on service offered

and delivered should be more accurate. The aim was to take feedback on the service they had received, use the information received to evaluate current service delivery and utilise for future planning.

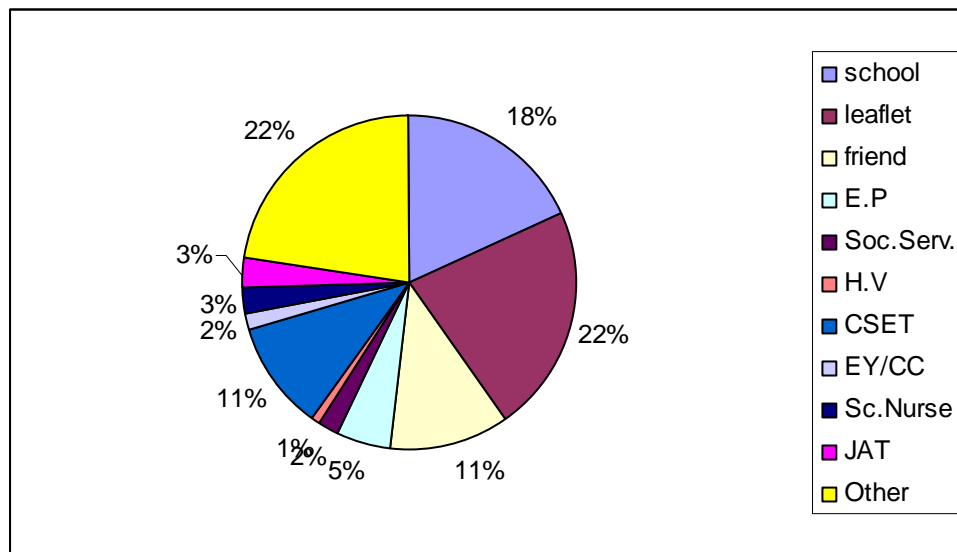
The questionnaire was sent by post with enclosed SAE for reply, in November 2009, February 2010 and May 2010. Questions were formulated from those of a DPPS questionnaire in January 2007 and successful examples from other PPS. They include both qualitative and quantitative data. A postal questionnaire was chosen because it did not disenfranchise parents without email facility and database recording facility by the service had not allowed a suitable confidential record of email addresses. The return rate was 22%

## The Views of Parents

### Response rates

Term	Number sent	Number received
Summer 2009	140	38
Autumn 2009	72	18
Spring 2010	140	27
Total	385	83

### Q1 How did you hear about the Parent Partnership Service (PPS)?



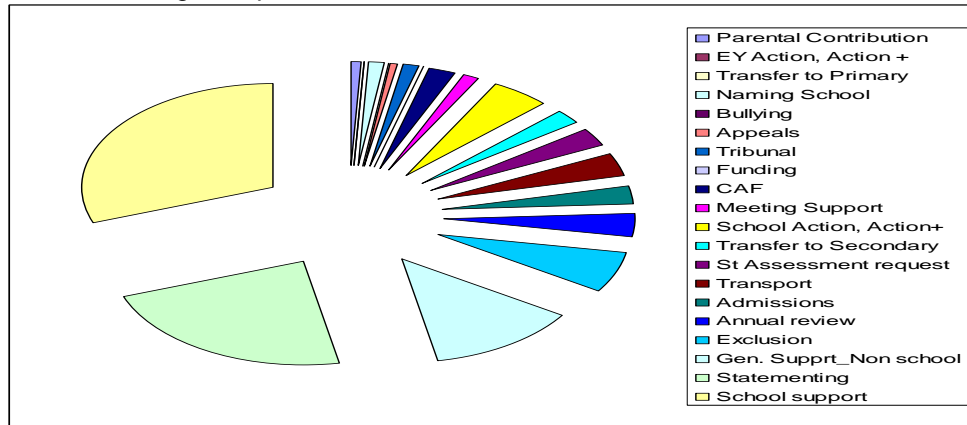
**Summary:** Parents were asked to tick all boxes that apply. It was noted in all 3 questionnaires that 29% ticked two or more sources. This suggests that parents need to be given information about DPPS more than once. The range of other sources, 22%, was wide including Exclusion Officers, Dyslexia adviser, County Autism Team, School Admission, Paediatricians, ASD, ADHD and Dyslexia Parent support groups, Internet, PCV. Most of these sources could be directly attributed to the networking pattern of activity by DPPS staff.

Due to the frequency of the questionnaire it was possible to notice termly fluctuations in the identification of the various sources by parents. In addition these could be attributed to activity levels by DPPS. In February 2010 results school had risen from 24% to 33% this followed DPPS leaflets being sent to all schools in September 2009. Also, in September 2009, DPPS helped CSET to redesign the letters sent to parents with a more clearly defined information section on DPPS separated at the end of the letter. CSET being identified as a source changed from 5% in November to 28% in February. The other notable increase was in May 2010 when Friends being the identified source rose from 13% in November to 30% in May.

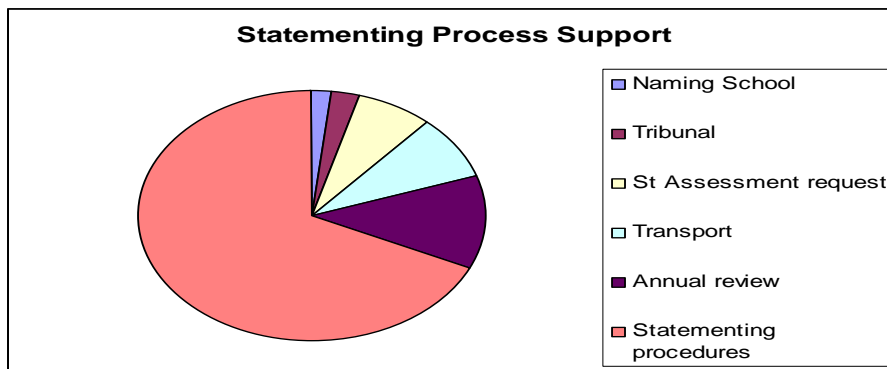
During the year April 09-April10 the referral rate to the service had increased by 28%. Together with the questionnaire finding this suggests that parents satisfied with the service were becoming ambassadors in DPPS promotion.

### Q2 For what reason did you contact us?

Responses were not highlighted into a definitive list and therefore grouping of area of support requested gives an overview of the issues that parents find most difficult. Main themes allowed grouping under school support, statutory assessment support, LA information and liaison including transport, admissions and exclusions.



School support reported ranged from a need for information about SEN provision, resourcing, school liaison, and support with admissions. This included support for meeting preparation to enable parents to feel that they were working as partners with school and getting their voice heard.



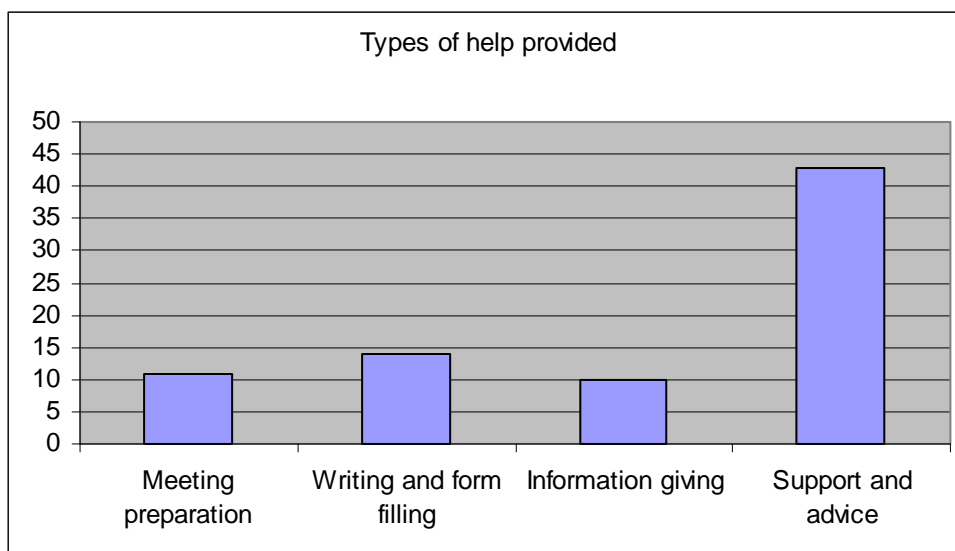
The range of support requested with statutory assessment process covered all aspects including application, amendment, annual review and support with appeal.

In May an increase in Transport appeals was noted as a new reason for contact, this could be a result of the change to LA transport policy.

### Q3 How did PPS help you with this?

Key themes: Phone support, meeting preparation and attendance. Being listened to, giving support, advice and reassurance, help with exploring options and understanding rights, information giving and signposting, help with writing and understanding forms.

Responses were grouped into four types of help to identify trends



#### Q4 How did this affect the outcome?

Successful outcomes: Parents identified change in either themselves or the situation. The list of positive outcomes included gaining a statement, re entry to school, 'got somewhere', improved provision. Comments said they felt more informed, more knowledgeable, empowered to persist, more able to communicate their wishes, more confident and able to function in partnership with professionals. More informed of their choices and supported to make decisions

Some responses (7) were still awaiting an outcome but noted that they felt listened too.

Some identified no change (7) with one comment 'not resolved but I feel better'.

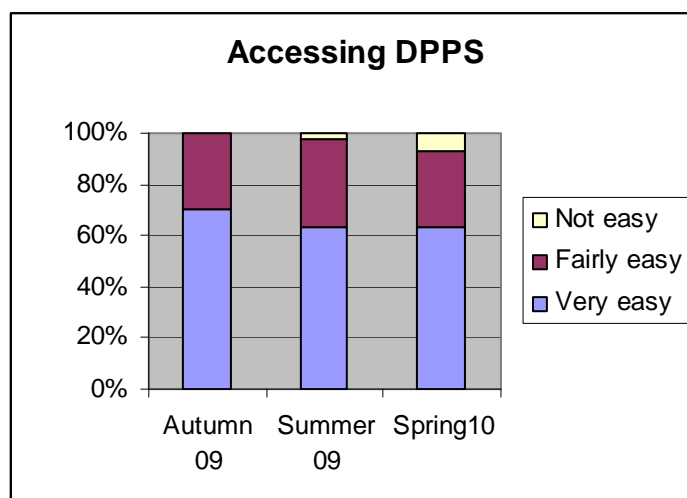
Examples of responses:

- .Allowed time to talk through frustration and gave general advice on how to conduct myself at meetings with school.
- Helpful information but most importantly the first person I felt listened without dismissing my concerns.
- I felt more prepared, more in control because I had prepared a written list to address, made the staff take notice of what I had to say.
- More positive and less emotive
- A more organised process began
- I approached it in a knowledgeable and confident manner and made it clear that I knew my rights
- Help given aided communication with CSET and other agencies

Two responses were negative. One came from a parent who did not get what they were wanting from LA, the other stated 'Too much information and confusing to take in. Felt overwhelmed'

As these parents did not request follow up or provide contact details, it was not possible to ascertain if DPPS work had contributed to the problem.

**Q5 How easy was it to make contact with the service?**



Average scores  
 Very easy 65%( 53)  
 Fairly easy 32%(26)  
 Not easy 2%(3)

The service had a small change in access to the service as it became busier with referrals. The staffing levels did not increase and the response time from staff will have been affected.

**Q6 How did you find your first contact with the service?**

Polite	95% (78/82)- Yes	
Friendly	93%(76/82)-Yes	
Helpful	95%(78/82)-Yes	2%-No
Understanding	89%(73/82)-Yes	2%-No
Knowledgeable	93%(76/82)-Yes	2%-No

**7 Did you receive?**

- Telephone support 99% (81)
  - Was it clear & helpful 93%(76) Yes No - 0
- E-mail support 40%(33)
  - Was it clear & helpful 37%(31) Yes No - 0
- Meeting support
  - Preparation 34%(28)
  - Attendance 30%(25)

**Comments examples:** Good listening ear, feel they are on your side. Very reassuring talking to someone with experience. Attendance at meeting helpful, kept focus for all. Vital support, Part time work leave and vast distances affected level of support, did ask for IPS a long time ago but there wasn't one available then.

- Leaflets 43%(33)

Which ones were helpful? 25% felt all were helpful, 25% couldn't remember which.

As a result of these comments changes have been planned to the colour of the range of leaflets to enable easier differentiation.

- Other support

What other support did you receive? Meeting the person was good, IPSEA, Home visit, Signposting to other information, Being able to talk to someone, attending and appointment with me, IPS training, EP, support worker. Other websites

**Did you look at our Website? 24%(20)**

Comment examples :OK I prefer to speak to someone face to face, reinforced information on leaflets, printed off leaflet very easily, very useful, used it to get phone contact details.

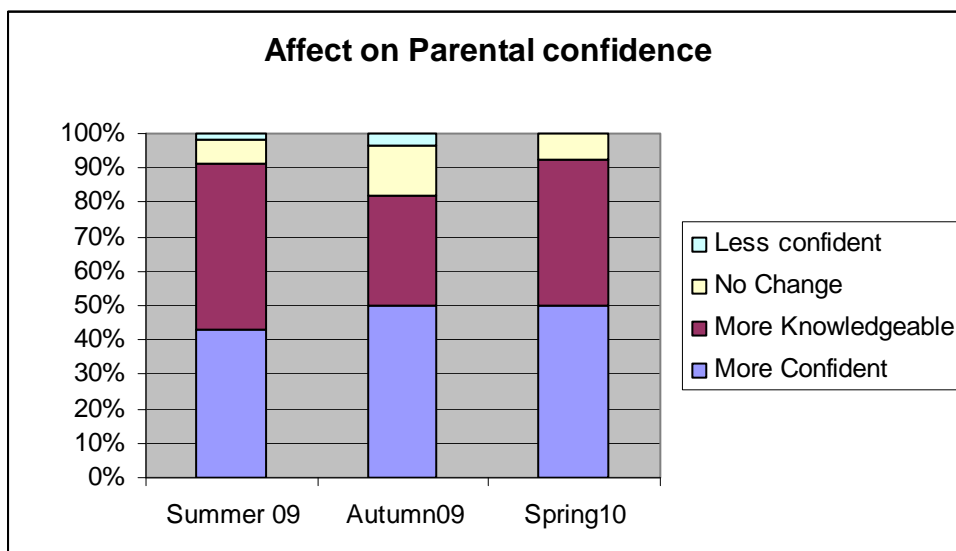
one negative comment - not useful

**Q8 How did you feel about dealing with the issues about your child's education after your contact with the service?**

(More than one box could be ticked)

More confident	77%(63)
More knowledgeable	71%(58)
No change	15%(12)
Less confident	2%(2)

These are the average figures for the year, the breakdown in the chart gives an indication of the spread over the year.



**Q9 How has your relationship with the school and/or the LEA changed, as a result of contacting the service?**

	School	LEA
Improved a lot	12	1
Improved slightly	17	6
No change	41	15
Worsened	2	

Comments examples: Parents found this question difficult to answer, they stated that this outcome was hard to measure and that it was not always a relationship that needed improving

- Senco has left and I will be starting all over again with new head & SENco! Feel confident though
- Breakdown not as a result of using contacting the service
- Initially I felt more in control with the relationship with the school - but the school have let my son and us down to which we have withdrawn our son from the school.
- Relationship was good with school anyway so no change.
- Brief encounter with LA so no change noted.

The question did not identify what impact the DPPS input has had, did not measure the starting point of the relationship or give indicators of what would quantify as an improvement.

**Q10 Would you recommend our service to other parents?**

Yes 80      No 0

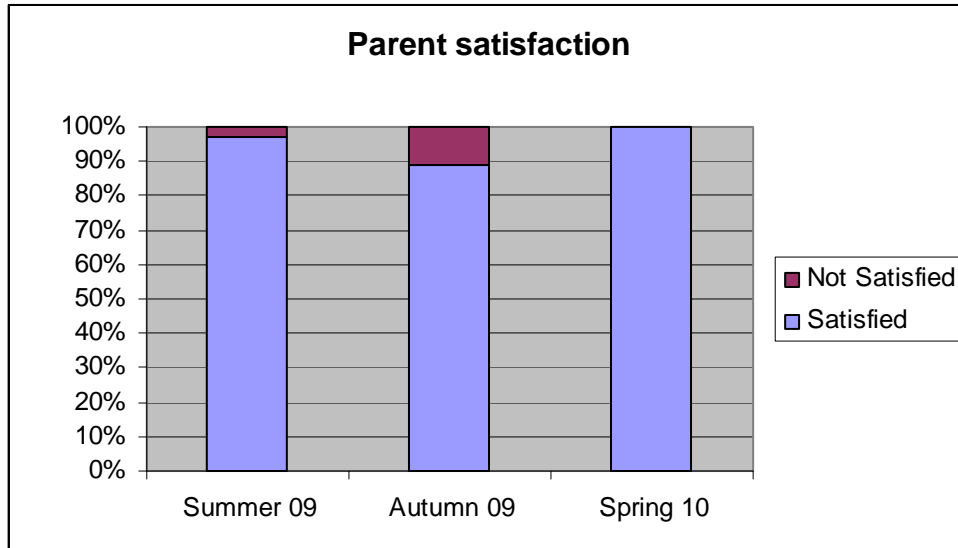
**98%** would recommend the service – 2 did not complete – 0% would not recommend

**Q11 Were you satisfied with the service you received?**

Yes 78      No 3

Average for the year **95%** were satisfied with the service

Two unsatisfied responses were from parents who did not get the response for a statutory assessment that they were wanting but both said they would recommend the service



**12 Do you feel that the service you received was unbiased and independent?**

Yes 79      No 0

No one felt the service was biased, one response raised a question and another gave a description

Comment examples:

- On the fence
- Beneficial to both myself and school as it was completely unbiased.
- ? is service funded by DCC

Funding and location of the service is explained to parents if requested. All Parent Partnership Services are funded by Local Authorities as they have a requirement to do so, whether the service is in house or out sourced. The 'on the fence' comment suggests the parent wanted an advocate for themselves who was on their side. This supports the view that DPPS is providing a neutral and unbiased service but this is not always what parents are seeking.

**Q13 How do you think we could improve our service?**

**November 09**

- I think that a meeting with a supporter would have been much better and guidance one step at a time as too much information in one hit just made things feel impossible. Having a child with special needs is stressful as it is, so some help with the burden with statementing would be better one to one in person. Maybe act on our behalf a little?
- Have more workers for your sake, I bet you guys are run off your feet!
- A local support group/offices would be helpful but not completely necessary because help is available on the phone.
- Have more people available
- It would be nice to maybe be able to see someone and discuss more options.
- Have more people work for you
- I don't know I found your service very thorough.
- More advertising, not very well known to general public.
- Not sure I was happy with all aspects for my purposes
- It was all very good as it was very helpful

- By supporting people at tribunals
- By helping draft letters. I didn't know how to get started sometimes and felt I would be a nuisance to ask for someone to sit and help me sometimes even though you are capable of doing it you feel very low and exhausted
- Increase availability
- More promotion as I feel it was too late before I was aware you existed. Would have benefited from your service much earlier on
- Maybe for DPPS to contact school, it can be very scary when dealing with your own emotions
- I felt that the main service delivery for resource reasons was at the level of telephone contact. It was good but impersonal and remote
- Let parents know of your existence
- Make it easier to contact someone- perhaps more email. Sometimes need urgent help but person not working/ on holiday etc.
- It can be difficult to get to speak to someone so maybe more staff
- More hours for local advisers
- It would be great to have more staff- easier to contact, lady I spoke to was part time.

#### February 2010

- For tribunals train advisors more. Tribunal helpline service was very wonderful. Liz Batchelor is very good and a kind person
- Run a course on Statementing like North Wiltshire PPS
- It would be great if I could meet with someone face to face to help me write my contribution - it never happened so I felt I could of wrote my letter much better with the help of your people, so I have to hope the best that we are granted a statement
- Actual service absolutely fine just more staff/volunteers
- More advertising. I was confused between PPS and Parent Carer Voice. You offer a great service

#### May 2010

- Be more available and less time constrained
- By letting more parents know about the service
- More people so everyone can get help
- Completely satisfied no improvement except more advisors
- Possible more study days for parents
- I do not feel there is any need for improvement really. I needed some help and information and DPPS was very quick and understanding to help me with this problem.

**Actions:** There have already been responses to some suggestions. These are noted in the conclusion. As the questionnaire was collected termly, any action that could be taken was more immediate in response.

## Conclusions

### Publicity

The importance of the networking role of staff and its direct impact on promotion of the service needs to ensure time is allocated and protected for this. Questionnaire results show that 30% needed information from two or more sources before they contacted DPPS. The range of services needing to be contacted however is huge for a small service. DPPS staff needs to have the capacity to network to a wide range of professionals in order to ensure all eligible parents have information about the service. There had been an expectation that school would have been higher than the 18% as a source of referral route as they have a responsibility through the Code of Practice to advise parents of DPPS. This level did rise for one term after DPPS had a specific promotion to schools and sent a pack of leaflets to every school in the county. DPPS is unable to sustain regular contact with every school and plans to target areas of low referral by using IPS to extend opportunity to contact individual schools. Leaflets as a source at 22% suggest that this type of promotion is useful and is being supported by website information. Review of the current leaflets is undertaken with each reprint and planning for new publication of leaflets to meet SEN changes is within the DPPS annual plan.

Increase in the referral to the service combined with an increase from 13% to 30% of other parents as a source of information about DPPS suggests that the parental satisfaction with the service offered by DPPS is growing. An increase of awareness through improved publicity, quality of service offered and improved networking have all been elements in triggering parental recommendations.

### Reason for referral and outcome

As specified in the Exemplification of Minimum Standards, PPS should offer practical support, provide accurate neutral information on the parents rights, roles and responsibilities, explain the range of options and signpost to other services. Questionnaire responses were not collected by tick list but were looking at qualitative data and allowed parents to write their individual reasons, support they received and outcome. This did make presenting data more difficult but main themes were identified and grouped. Referral reasons were grouped under school support, statutory assessment support, LA information and liaison including transport, admissions and exclusions. The type of help received was categorised into four areas, support and advice being the biggest share, writing support and form filling, meeting preparation, information giving and signposting being the others. Distribution is noted in type of help graph page3. These results strongly support the view that DPPS work appears to be achieving the Minimum Standards outcomes for parents that are part of the core purpose of the service to empower parents. In addition they also show the contribution that DPPS makes to support the parental engagement and participation agenda.

Measure of outcome is difficult to collect in an objective way as parents may only measure the success of an outcome by whether they achieved what they wanted such as a statement. In addition some referral reasons can take a long time for the parent to see any tangible change or outcome. However many parents did note that the change was not always on the situation but also in them. Comments stated they felt more informed, more knowledgeable, empowered to persist, more able to communicate their wishes, more confident and able to function in partnership with professionals. More informed of their choices and supported to make decisions. Only two responses were negative from 82 which confirms that parent find the DPPS to have a positive impact.

Evaluation of the referral reason and outcome show that DPPS involvement is a catalyst for change either in the confidence of parent or by a change in the situation.

### Accessibility and Type of Support

The development of a specialist central enquiry line manned by DPPS staff appears to provide an effective mechanism for maintaining an accessible service. Fluctuations in figures from 71% of parents finding DPPS very easy to access in February falling to 65% in May, 29% finding it fairly easy, may be due to the increased referral rate. Only 2% found the

service not easy to access. Service users found DPPS to be polite, friendly, helpful and understanding with over 90% positive responses in all these areas.

Telephone is the most used type of support (99%) but also the most easily available. Email support is offered to all parents but not all chose this as their preferred method of contact, 40% had used this and of those 94% found it helpful.

Although there is more availability for support at meetings due to IPS training, the contact with parents is principally conducted through the PPS officers to ensure the quality and consistency of service offered. This should improve as IPS become more experienced and should then be able to take on more casework. Meeting support did increase from 35%-37% during the year. As noted in the comment by a parent, meeting support and meeting face to face is limited by the capacity of the service.

For information support 43% had used DPPS leaflets. It was noted that although they found them helpful they found it difficult to identify which leaflet they had used. Review of the leaflet is being undertaken with a plan to provide more differentiation by colour.

DPPS website had been accessed by 24%, this is used to find out about the service or to access the leaflets. As parents are identifying support and advice as the highest type of support they want, website facility is not available to all or is it used to support which is provided by the other more personal communication.

### **Impact on parental confidence**

Parents note significant improvement in confidence and knowledge, 77% were more confident and 71% more knowledgeable. Two parents (2%) said that they felt less confident, as these parents were not identified it was not possible to ascertain if there were any issues with DPPS work, however this is not a significant number of responses. Future questionnaires will require identification of respondent to enable follow up.

This evaluation supports the view that DPPS is a service which empowers parents by building their confidence.

### **Impact on School and LA**

The question set did not enable parents to clearly identify the impact of DPPS input on precipitating a change in their situation with school and the LA. Parents identified that it was hard to measure and there was not always a need to improve the relationship but they did note that they felt more empowered to participate as a partner in the process. There was some improvement noted in both school and LA relationship. School relationship improvement responses being higher, this supports the view that DPPS school liaison work has had some effect. DPPS will continue to promote to schools their part in earlier promotion of our service as being an effective preventative tool.

Revision of this question will need to be made for subsequent evaluations which will measure the starting point of the relationship before DPPS input and provide indicators of change. Some of the aspects of this measure are answered by the qualitative responses to following questions.

### **Parent satisfaction**

Parents appear to be satisfied with the service and happy to recommend it to others, this is further evidenced by the increase in parent to parent promotion. An average satisfaction level of 96% is well above the requirement of 85% as identified in the regional standards. Of the three responses that were not satisfied none stated that they would not recommend DPPS, 98% would recommend.

### **Independence and Impartiality**

Impartiality is a hard concept to explain and to be understood by both parents and practitioners. The responses of 96% who consider we are unbiased and independent and none stating that we were biased or not independent, indicates that parents feel that DPPS is neutral and impartial. This is a very positive indicator that DPPS as an in house service has

not compromised its independence but through recent developments and improvements has reinforced its impartiality.

Responses elsewhere indicate that some parents wish us to be on their side and are unhappy when we are unable to provide this. However this is another indicator that DPPS is maintaining its neutral working practice.

Comment example:

- Very helpful and impartial service providing clear information on your child's options. A great support for meetings where you may not feel confident facing authority.
- Beneficial to both myself and school as it was completely unbiased.
- Unbiased, informative help to understand issues with special needs kids. It helps to explain your rights in an easy and understanding way.

### **Parental Suggestions for Improvement**

All comments are recorded in the question responses above. Picking up common themes has been used to inform DPPS service planning.

A common theme identifies the need for increased availability of staff and access to more support. This has been raised with the LA. Some increased capacity will be met by the training of IPSs, but this needs to be sustained by adequate funding for continuing training and expenses and adequate capacity to allow monitoring and supervision by the core staff.

Parents requested support with tribunals. As this is part of the core offer through the Minimum Standards, this is now offered and staff has accessed some training for this. There will be more training made available nationally but this will have a funding and time constraint where capacity is already an issue. A recommendation from the Lamb Report is that PPS staff should be trained to have expertise on the legal aspects of SEN.

Parents request that there is more information available about DPPS. Promotion and publicity are constantly reviewed for ways of making use of current resources in an effective manner. Details of this work can be found in the DPPS Annual Report 09-10. There is a constant tension between the time and resources required for networking and development of information and publicity materials whilst maintaining the emphasis on the core work of parent support. The parent support work has increased by 28% in the year 2009-2010 which indicates that there has been more effective promotion but this has left staff with less time to continue the networking links.

### **Summary**

Parents have provided evidence that they consider the DPPS to be an effective service at building their confidence and empowering them to work with other services, to provide them with information and improve their understanding of the SEN processes. They are satisfied with the service that they receive and consider it to be independent and impartial in its working practice.

The key changes which parents recommend for the service are

- to increase the capacity of the workforce in order to increase availability of support
- to improve the promotion of the service so that it is made known to more parents.

Sue Brealey  
August 20<sup>th</sup> 2010

## Parental comments that were included in the questionnaires

### What would you want to say to other parents about the Service?

- Very helpful, particularly beneficial in preparation for meetings and I think helping effective communication for parent and school.
- To help children to get into school and to get out of the house and make friends
- Genuinely supportive, practical and helpful advice, non-judgemental in dealing with the situation. Wish I'd had access to the service earlier.
- Impartial
- The Devon Parent Partnership Service gives parents advice on how to get the best for their child from the education system and confidence in how to express their concerns to school practitioners.
- Don't be scared to ask for help as often there is no where else to turn.
- It helps to have a second opinion on what you are trying to say instead of a brick wall.
- They talk you through everything and are so helpful after all you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.
- Good clear helpful advice, to help you have the confidence to help be an ambassador for your child
- I was really unsure of certain information but DPPS helped reassure me with a personal visit and provided the help I needed. Thank you
- Although we are still waiting for a decision, Karen's advice was good and confirmed what we had written was all ok.
- Excellent service. Knowledgeable and understanding, empathise with the situation and give good ideas about how to deal with schools etc.
- It is friendly and helpful advice. The staff on the end of the phone, are sympathetic and knowledgeable which makes you feel at ease.
- We were impressed by the way our PP officer got to grips with our child's complex education situation within a short space of time. Her knowledgeability, support and professionalism gave us the added confidence to fight our child's corner. Her attendance and subsequent summary of our child's annual statement review really helped to take some of the pressure off. Mr & Mrs Sadler
- The service provides a friendly source of advice. They are unbiased and very helpful. They Listen!
- Very helpful and impartial service providing clear information on your child's options. A great support for meetings where you may not feel confident facing authority.
- Having someone to talk through your child's educational needs and frustrations, gives you more control- self-empowerment. Helps to address the school with rational thinking
- Thank you for providing this service - W Rose

- PPS help you understand the processes involved in getting the best for your child with special needs. The more informed you are the better prepared you are and the more likely you are to get the best for your child.
- They are there for parents
- Unbiased, informative help to understand issues with special needs kids. It helps to explain your rights in an easy and understanding way.
- A valuable source of information and practical help. Definitely worth a phone call
- They were able to listen to what we were trying to achieve and help us progress in the situation to have a welcomed outcome.
- Impartial advice that gave me the confidence to proceed and ask for the level of support I felt my son needed.
- Parent Partnership helped me get the information I needed for my son
- It definitely helped with our daughter's school placement and the advice provided was unbiased and very useful.
- When I felt lots of doors were closing this service helped me re open some and find some new doors. A very helpful service I recommend using.
- Devon Parent Partnership Service is there for parents to offer help and advice. They are friendly and helpful and only a phone call away
- Very helpful service. Staff were really knowledgeable and really listened