



FORUM FOCUS

News & Updates from Solihull Parent Carer Forum

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CHAIR'S WELCOME – SAJIDA GOLBY

A very warm welcome from me, the chair, and the rest of the Management Committee. We are proud to unveil this, our very first newsletter! I'll firstly give a quick overview of the Solihull Parent Carer Forum for those who may not know what we are all about.

Solihull Parent Carer Forum, formed in November 2017, is a small group of parent volunteers who are experts by experience in the area of children with additional needs. We work with (but are independent from) Solihull Local Authority and Health Services to ensure the services they plan and deliver meet the special needs of children and young people, as well as the standards required by law. We do this by ensuring they are informed of parents' and carers' opinions and the issues that they face.

Our launch event took place in March of this year, where we introduced ourselves and our aims to a group of parents and carers. Since then we have been attending many local, high level meetings, where decisions that affect our children are made. This is where we communicate the voice of parents and carers so as to positively influence those decisions. Some of our input has been reported on later in this newsletter, and I hope you enjoy reading it. As you will see we've been very busy raising our profile with local professionals!



GETTING INVOLVED – JULIA MANN, MARKETING OFFICER

If you are a parent or carer of a child or young person (aged 0-25) with additional needs who lives in Solihull and/or whose child uses Solihull Education, Health or Social Care Services you can become a member of the forum! By doing so you will receive updates about our activities as well as opportunities to participate! However much or little you choose to get involved you will be helping to make a difference to the services that matter so much to our children.



Find our sign up form on our website at this address: www.solihullpcf.org/join-us or click the link at the top of our Facebook page. Alternatively email us at solihullpcf@gmail.com and we will add you!

THE LOCAL OFFER – ROSEMARIE SALLUFI, SECRETARY

What is “The Local Offer”?

The SEN Code of Practice states that the Local Authority must set out information about provision that it expects to be available regarding Education, Health and Social Care for children/young people in its area, who have SEN or a disability. It must also include provision outside the LA’s area that it expects is likely to be used by children and young people with SEN for whom it is responsible. This includes those without EHCP’s (Education Health and Care Plans). This is referred to as the ‘Local Offer’.

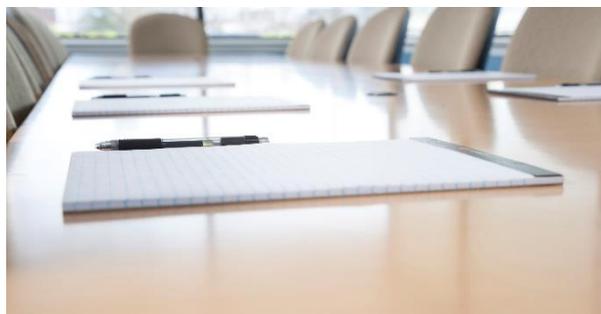


The Solihull Parent Carer Forum attend the monthly Local Offer Task and Finish Group, at the Council House, to discuss changes required on the website in order to make it user friendly and accessible. A recent relaunch of the Local Offer website saw a lot of changes, but there is ongoing work to continue to improve the website. **This is where you could help...**

Firstly you need to visit the Local Offer website itself at <http://www.socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer> Look for the information you need. Did you find it? Does it need moving to a more logical place? Is it out of date? Is it missing? If you have any comments or suggestions please click the feedback link at the bottom of the page. This will inform the Local Offer Team to make corrections or source missing information. It’s by no means perfect but with your direct feedback it could be improved much faster!

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY BOARD MEETING – HAZEL LEWIS, ASSISTANT CHAIR

This board meeting takes place every two months and is chaired by Phil Leivers, Assistant Director of Education & Skills with senior representatives from SENDIAS, Adult Care and Support, Employment and Skills Manager, Strategic Commissioner for Children and Young People, Clinical Lead for Specialist Assessment Services, Head of SEND 0-25, Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurse, Children’s Community Nursing, Chair of Solihull Schools Strategic Accountability Board, Head Teacher of Forest Oak and Merton Schools, Commissioning Officer – CYP & Families, Team Leader of Children’s Community Nursing, Children’s Learning and, of course our own representatives from Solihull Parent Carer Forum.



The board brings key parties together to update on initiatives within and across teams. So far we have attended three meetings since we formed last November, the first of which was an ‘away day’ which was a great opportunity for us to get to know people. Another was dedicated almost entirely to reviewing a cross-team action plan following the Ofsted review in October 2017, progress against which will be shared at a high level going forward with the board.

At the most recent meeting in May we had the opportunity to share our key priority areas for Solihull Parent Carer Forum. We since have built up contacts in Health and Education Psychology and are

building relationships to enable our team to share the parents' voice from and improve the services to our children and their families.

We are also identifying initiatives within all areas that we feel the forum would add value to. So far this has resulted in our engagement with SENCo meetings for both primary and secondary, the Local Offer review team (see previous article) an initial meeting with Bev Petch, Head of Alternative Provision and engagement with the Education SEND Sub Group. We will report back on these in future newsletters.

SOLIHULL ACADEMY MYTHBUSTER – JANE CREESE, VICE TREASURER

What is Solihull Academy?

(From their website www.solihullacademy.org) “Solihull Academy is an alternative provision for students who are not flourishing in mainstream provision. The school offers students the opportunity to study a mainstream curriculum focused on academic subjects, in a much smaller environment, with classes of a maximum of 10, than that on offer in mainstream schools in Solihull.... The School will provide education for 110 students aged 13 – 16. These places will be a mix of mainly full time and some part time places.”

There has been a lot of confusion recently, particularly from parents and carers of children with SEN, around what the new academy is offering, and whether their children could benefit. We invited Stephen Steinhaus - Principal of the Academy, to a recent Management Committee meeting to get the facts about this new provision.



Is your school a dedicated provision for children with an autism diagnosis?

No. We are a school offering an alternative environment for students who find traditional mainstream schools difficult to manage. We have some students who have a diagnosis, for example autism or attention deficit disorder, but many have no diagnosis, and still struggle in a mainstream setting for a variety of reasons.

So they do not need an EHCP to attend?

That is right. Some students do have an EHCP but this is not part of our admission criteria

How are children referred to the Academy?

We have agreements in place with all 15 mainstream secondary schools in the Solihull area. These schools can refer students that are struggling to us, and we then meet and assess each student personally and offer a place if we feel we can help. We take year 9 students onwards who have had difficulty achieving their academic potential in a mainstream setting.

Is your school a stop gap, aiming to return children back to mainstream schools asap?

No. Many of our students will stay with us for the rest of their schooling to the end of GCSE, and will leave us with a plan of what they will do post 16. Some students will return to mainstream, but that is their and their family's choice in conjunction with the next school.

How does the Academy differ from a mainstream school to help children achieve their full potential?

We are a small school, 110 students, with class sizes of 10 maximum. We have a significantly higher staff to pupil ratio, and the staff are all specifically trained to offer a range of support personal to each student. Our curriculum covers a wide range of aspects around social skills and conflict resolution and the physical environment is designed to be less distracting and overwhelming.

We would like to thank Mr Steinhaus for taking the time to put some of the myths straight for parents and carers around this new school provision. If you would like more information, please contact the parent carer forum and we can advise accordingly, or check out the school website at www.solihullacademy.org

Thank-you for reading! And don't forget, you can sign up to receive updates at www.solihullpcf.org/join-us