

## SPEECH THERAPY

I know from the Unique Education Survey that the No.1 topic that concerns most parents is Speech Therapy, and the lack of provision. What can parents do about this? Firstly,

- Does your child have speech and language difficulties or communication problems and have these difficulties been identified by a Speech and language Therapist (SALT) or Educational Psychologist?

If the answer is 'Yes' and your child has a statement of Special Educational Needs, or you have asked for your child to be assessed then it is very important to make sure that:

- In Part 2 of the statement, which identifies your child's special educational needs, it makes reference to their speech, language or communication problems. Some LEAs try to argue that such problems require 'treatment' and are not part of education. But in a landmark case, known as the 'Lancashire Judgement 1989', the judge commented,

"To teach an adult who has lost his larynx because of cancer might be considered as treatment rather than education. But to teach a child who has never been able to communicate by language, whether because of some chromosomal disorder ... or because of social cause ... seems to us just as much educational provision as to teach a child to communicate in writing."

Although it is only a comment it can be very helpful for parents to quote this case when a LEA (Local Education Authority) tries to argue that speech, language and communication difficulties are not part of a child's educational need. (If it's not seen as a need then the LEA does not have to provide for it in Part 3 of the statement.)

And then, once it has been specified in Part 2, you must make sure that:

- In Part 3 of the statement, which identifies **how** the education provision will meet those needs, it contains provision for Speech Therapy. The provision must be clearly quantified: number of hours, how often, and by whom. This is particularly important if your child attends a mainstream school.

Some LEAs are leaving the school to decide how the funding for the statement would be used, rather than clearly specifying the provision to meet the child's **individual** needs in Part 3. In July 2003 Ann Gross, Head of Special Educational Needs Division at the DfES (Department of Education and Skills) wrote to all the Chief Education Officers to tell them that, "...by having blanket policies to issue statements which do not specify provision clearly and in detail or never quantify provision, authorities would be acting in a way that is inconsistent with the statutory provision..." This was a big wrap on their knuckles for not playing fair! Ann Gross drew their attention to a Court of Appeal judgement where Justice Hale noted,

"... the statement clearly has to spell out the provision appropriate to meet the particular needs of, and objectives identified for, the individual child..... any flexibility built into the statement must be there to meet the needs of the child and not the needs of the system....It remains the case that vague statements, which do not specify provision appropriate to the identified special needs of the child, will not comply with the law."

While 'blanket policies' are not permitted, it is possible for an LEA to offer a flexible provision. BUT it should be made clear at all times, to parents and school, what is to be provided, how it is to be provided and to what purpose.

You can find out more about the legal cases mentioned before by visiting the IPSEA (Independent Panel for Special Educational Advice) at [www.ipsea.org.uk](http://www.ipsea.org.uk) or calling them for advice on

**England and Wales** (free phone): **0800 0184016**

Mon to Thu 10--4 and 7--9;

Fri 10--1 and 7--9

During school holidays times are reduced. Please ring for availability.

**Scotland (ISEA): 0131 665 4396** Mon to Fri 10--3

**Northern Ireland: 0232 705654**

In most Special schools, Speech and Language Therapy is built into the every day curriculum and is an on-going process and so the statement may not be able to 'quantify' the exact amount.

Nevertheless it is crucial that the statement identifies that your child needs this therapy. If a school has difficulties obtaining therapy from their local Health Service then the LEA has a duty to purchase the therapy separately from another source.

Many parents have expressed concern about the shortage of Speech Therapists and the lengthy waiting lists for assessment. This is a national problem and well recognised by the Government and the Health Service. If you or your school are concerned about your child's speech and language development then it is usual for your child to be referred for an assessment at a local clinic. And then you wait and wait and wait. In the last newsletter I wrote about what parents could do to help their child's communication skills while they were waiting. My next advice would be to ring up every week and check:

- Where you are on the waiting list
- Are there any cancellations that week
- Make it clear that you could be available at short notice and give them reliable contact details
- Ask the secretary, or assistant, what information and advice they could let you have in the mean time, while you are waiting.
- Ask them about any courses they might run for parents
- Are they giving a talk on Speech Therapy to any voluntary groups – ask if you could attend as well

If you have had an assessment your child could be offered one or more of a range of services: individual sessions for a fixed period of time, portage – usually for under 5's, visits in school, or visits at home. Once your child has had their allotted share of treatment there can be a long wait before it resumes.

Unfortunately there are not enough speech therapists available to provide a continuous service and parents are most concerned when therapy has to finish: but this is the only way that services can be shared to meet the increasing demand.

Speech Therapy services are controlled and managed by the Health Service. Schools and in particular Special Schools, have no 'control' over the delivery of therapy services. This does mean that therapists can take their holidays or have training days during school terms, and that may reduce the number of school visits. (A school that can employ its own therapists has a distinct advantage.)

The acute shortage of therapists in general has meant a change in the 'delivery' of therapy. It is very rare for the number of hours or frequency of the therapy to be quantified in detail in the statement if your child goes to a Special School. A Speech and Language Therapist, SALT, will assess your child in school about once a year, (once a term if you are very lucky). The SALT will devise a communication program in conjunction with parents and the teacher. The teachers and classroom assistants will then carry out that program in school and the parents will continue it in the home environment.

If you find that your child's statement does not completely identify their special educational needs, such as a need for speech therapy, you can always ask for a review of the statement (you do not have to wait for the annual review). You can also ask for the statement to be re-assessed, as long as it is more than twelve months since the last assessment. You will then have the opportunity to include Speech Therapy into Part 3 of the statement. (Or at least try to !)

More advice on education matters can be obtained from the Advisory Centre on Education – ACE. Advice line is open from 2-5pm Monday-Friday: 0808 800 5793. If you are calling from overseas you should call: 00 44 20 7354 8321. ACE has just received additional funding to run a dedicated helpline covering specialist education matters for parents referred to them by Parentline Plus. Topics covered include education law and parents' rights. The helpline will empower parents to resolve their children's problems at school, starting with a mediation-based approach. It will help build parents' confidence in becoming involved in their children's education. (Parentline Plus runs a number of services designed to support parents and their families. Free helpline: 0808 800 2222 .It is a free, confidential 24 hour service for anyone looking after a child - parent, stepparent, grandparent, step grandparent, or foster carer).