



# OXFORDSHIRE PARENT CARERS FORUM

*The Voice of Parent Carers in Oxfordshire*

## OxPCF EOTAS (Education other than at School)

The following document contains feedback received during an online meeting with Parent Carers on 1st July 2022.

The meeting was attended by 7 parents and was facilitated by OxPCF.

This meeting came about as a direct result of parents asking how they could begin conversations with the LA around the provision of EOTAS in Oxfordshire and their experiences of this process.

There is a genuine desire from parent carers to understand the LA's position on EOTAS and how the process can be made more person centred and transparent.

During the session comments and feedback were recorded.

These bullet points are listed in this document in black, with an extension explanation in a highlighted colour.

The content of this meeting was at times challenging and contained very upsetting descriptions of the behaviour and experiences of some very vulnerable CYP.

Alongside this there are also 7 short case studies which have been collected so far and this will remain an ongoing focus of forum work.

Many of the families who came forward are the parents of children who have had exceptionally difficult experiences associated with their time in school. The voices of these children very often go unheard, because the journey to secure an education and support for them, becomes so fraught.

When families are pushed to use solicitors, the content of packages may often become considerably larger than the family would have originally requested and the cost involved in Tribunal spirals for all parties.

By working collaboratively, we hope that this journey can move towards focusing on the outcomes for the Child or young person who is in need.

OxPCF and the Parent Carers involved to date, hope that by starting an open conversation with OCC, that a clearer understanding will be obtained, ultimately ending in the production of an EOTAS Policy for the County.

We appreciate the time given by OCC staff and look forward to working with representatives from across the LA, as this piece of work progresses.



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## Feedback/Notes from EOTAS discussion with Parent Carers

1st July 2022

- It's cheaper to pay a barrister than provide a child with an education...

*Families feel you would rather fight them, than work with them to find an educational solution that is right for the child.*

- LA's not providing evidence/defence to counter-argue what you are asking:

*It's difficult for families to understand why they have to face the emotional and financial hardships of attending a tribunal, where there is often little counterargument or evidence delivered by the local authority to challenge what they are requesting.*

- If you're a looked-after child, normally everybody is held to account and works to timescales, legally etc but if you're a parent of a child with SEND and you email etc, you might as well be emailing into a void.

*We have been able to talk to parents who received very different levels of communication and interaction with services dependent on whether the child is a looked-after child or not.*

- It's okay not to put a provision in place, it's part of working practice. Parents feel there is a degree of complacency and that it is almost okay not to deliver provisions for some of the most vulnerable children in the county. It appears to be acceptable to leave them without anything at all.

*Parents would really benefit from understanding why they feel their children have been forgotten and are left with little if any provision, for prolonged periods of time.*



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- EOTAS are being used as a stop-gap solution where there is nothing available currently...

*There are some cases in Oxfordshire where minimal "EOTAS" packages are being delivered because there are no places available in special schools or suitable provisions at all. It should represent equally, the full-time education to which the CYP is entitled.*

- There is no other alternative, it's not parental preference, because they can't physically get into a school.

*Without issue, every parent we spoke to felt that it was not parental preference, but the only realistic or appropriate option for the child at this current time. There are cases where complex medical issues mean it is not a viable option for the CYP to physically attend school.*

- Tribunals are massively stressful and anxiety producing.

*The toll that a tribunal places on families cannot be overemphasised. It causes extreme financial hardship, and relationship breakdown, alienates parents and families from the very professionals that should be advocating for their child and leaves them feeling isolated and blamed.*

*It drives an even greater divide between the families that are able to do this and those that aren't, because the understanding of SEND law that parents need to develop, is almost on a par with that of a barrister.*

*Not all parents have the capacity or the ability, due to their own needs, to be able to withstand the pressure associated with progressing an appeal to the tribunal.*

*It is wrong to assume that the decision to fight this all the way to the tribunal, is based on the finance available to the family.*

*If the families are representing themselves, Tribunal is only a feasible option, if the individuals pursuing it have the resilience and ability to do so.*



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- Everything is a battle, this is not a decision of our choosing  
*No parent who is already caring for a disabled child would choose to enter into the realms of appeal and tribunal. All they are doing is striving to achieve the best outcomes and chances for their child. Many of these children have experienced trauma in school, as a direct result of their disability and may also be suicidal and self-harming.*

- I had to give up my job as a medical professional that looks after children in need, to look after my child who has needs!  
This is not the only example we heard of a professional having to give up work in order to look after their child. Personally, I gave up teaching in order to look after my child...

- There's a cohort of children who are demand avoidant and are unable to access school, whether mainstream or special as these provisions are structurally incompatible  
*The more research that is carried out and the greater the understanding of the CYP EOTAS needs, the more evident it becomes that many of these CYP have consistently displayed demand avoidant patterns of behaviour from a very early age. Whilst this is a very small cohort of children, it is definitely a group that will require a specialist and bespoke approach.*

- There must be a school named - it's limited just by definition, they need something that's bespoke, flexible to be able to support his needs. The school won't have the flexibility to do this.  
*There needs to be an understanding for both sides around the motivating reasons behind naming a school, which will never be attended.*



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- Alternate provision via Personal budgets

*CYP in Oxfordshire are often provided with places in alternative provision. Sometimes following tribunal, this is through a personal budget and other times it is provided through funding directly to the AP. There is a wealth of AP in Oxfordshire, that is being massively under-utilised by the LA as it is impossible for them to become part of the DPR and support to do so is hard to access.*

*However, some of these are being used by other services in the county and other counties.*

*Why is there a reluctance from OCC to provide families with in-county access to these providers, preferring in some cases to use out-of-county or large national providers, which are more costly options?*

*OCC needs to be creating their own in-house teams, to deliver and support the packages for this cohort of CYP.*

- Stipulations with deadlines in the working document/plan. It needs to be based on their own needs at the time and in the RIGHT setting.

*There has to be a desire and commitment to keep this process person-centred.*

- It's total conditional failing, no understanding, you're worthless because you can't do what every child does in this country

*The all-consuming sense of failure experienced by many of these children and their families is overwhelming. The expectation on them to learn in a situation that is impossible for them to manage, alongside damage done to them in school, makes it impossible for them to return.*

*The feelings of failure impact everyone involved.*

*It often feels there is little understanding from some professionals around the long-standing impact, that these experiences have on our CYP*



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- **Poor training and capacity of staff**

*Some parents felt concerned for school staff who are managing exceptionally challenging situations in their classroom.*

*There needs to be significantly more training and support given to staff around the patterns of behaviour and complex needs of a CYP, for whom school is impossible, or with a demand avoidant profile.*

*Teachers need to feel empowered and know that it is ok to say "this isn't working"*

*School staff are often overwhelmed and the only options available are to apply for 1:1 funding for a TA to help manage the behaviour, place on a reduced timetable, or exclude.*

*ASD GIRLS, with demand avoidant profiles, are far more likely to end up with escalating complex mental health issues, placing them at risk of significant harm or inpatient requirements.*

## Table of common issues

- Complex medical need
- ASD
- PTSD
- Developmental Trauma
- RAD (Reactive attachment disorder)
- FASD (Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder)
- Demand Avoidance
- Trauma
- Self Harm
- Suicidal Intervention
- Not feeling heard, blanket approaches,
- Being blamed and ignored
- Pushed to appeal when they want to talk
- Exhausted
- Fatigued by the constant battles,
- Lack of consistency across services,
- No guidance or infrastructure around the delivery of EOTAS
- No timeframes for the commencement of service delivery, leaving CYP with very little
- Lack of transparency



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- Detailed understanding of what does and what doesn't work

*Developing an understanding around what does and doesn't work for this cohort of CYP, could deliver a breadth of understanding that is both informative and supportive across many services and areas of need. It could allow for the development of early intervention practices that prevent or reduce the need in many cases, going forward.*

- Need to do some work on risk assessing - are there other departments in occ that can help? They just commission out the risk

*There is a general lack of understanding around risk/support available and the use of EOTAS by other departments.*

*What appears to be a risk in one department, isn't in another*

- What's working well - case stories of the positive

*Look proactively and openly at cases where EOTAS is working well and allowing the CYP to achieve the outcomes identified in the EHCP and learn from this.*

The EOTAS parents that have chosen to engage with us, came to us asking for our support. They want to work with the LA, in order to create an EOTAS policy for Oxfordshire and therefore supporting all families in this situation.

- Policy needs to include a list of things of what can be done, what are the processes

*There needs to be a local area EOTAS policy or statement of understanding around the use of this approach and its delivery.*

*This would ensure there is a county-wide understanding around how to support CYP at the earliest opportunity and in the most appropriate and effective way.*

*This approach could then be implemented in a standardised and regulated manner, using consistency of delivery, whilst understanding the need for it to be person centred.*



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- **Lack of joined-up thinking**

*Families and some professionals, feel hugely frustrated when they are trying to work towards developing a plan of action that will support the CYP, but a lack of joined up thinking and working causes delays and continued hardship for the child. This often results in the CYP being left for prolonged periods of time without any educational provision. If a child is a risk to themselves and suicidal and their psychiatrist, in their professional opinion states they are unable to attend school, then that should be an opinion which is respected and then shared by all professionals working with that CYP.*

- **Safeguarding**

*Parents fully appreciate the safeguarding elements around ensuring that services are delivering the high-quality care and provision which should be expected.*

*However, many of these children have been at significant risk and experienced treatment in school which has led to trauma and a formal diagnosis of PTSD.*

*These children have not been safeguarded whilst attending school and their experiences often go unheard or respected.*

- **Extra burden on the family**

*EOTAS it's not the easy option which many outsiders may believe is the case. It comes with a multitude of complex decisions and alters the management of family life.*

## **Next steps:**

We are in the process of collecting further case studies to help us and the services involved understand your experiences. If you would like to share your experience, please fill in [this form](#).

We have shared our report and met with Oxfordshire County Council to start the initial discussions around EOTAS provision in Oxfordshire. We will be meeting again with OCC in the next academic year where arrangements will be made to create an opportunity for EOTAS parent carers to meet with the local authority.

If you would like to be involved in this work or any of our other projects, please register your interest via this [form](#) or email [info@oxpcf.org.uk](mailto:info@oxpcf.org.uk) to register your interest.