



NEWCASTLE PARENT CARER FORUM NEWSLETTER Winter 2024



Welcome to the Winter Newcastle Parent Carer Forum newsletter.

We always welcome feedback on our newsletters, and for this edition we have been asked to cover a few areas that families feel are difficult to find information about or how to get the correct support for their family.

In this issue:

- Employment and Educational Support: The Working for Carers Project
- Newcastle SENDIASS support for children and young people
- Parent/Carer guide to SEND services
- Accessibility consultancy by pupils update
- Improving understanding of mental health issues affecting attendance
- The RISE Team
- PINS update

Please let us know if this newsletter has helped, what other information and regular updates would be helpful.

E-Mail us at
contact@newcastlepcf.co.uk



Employment and educational support: The Working for Carers project

We understand that trying to find a balance between looking after someone, and your job, can be really difficult.

You might be feeling overwhelmed and exhausted due to your caring responsibilities, and you may feel like your employer or manager doesn't understand.

The Working for Carers project can support you to balance your caring role with work.



Our friendly and specialist advisors can also help you find a job, advance in your current role, access education, volunteering, and training opportunities.

We can also support with CV writing, improving your skill set, help you to understand your rights at work, benefits support to maximise your income, and much more.

The Working for Carers Progression Fund offers grants to carers to buy items to support them in work, such as laptops, training courses, interview clothes, equipment, and more.

Newcastle Carers, North Tyneside Carers' Centre and Carers Northumberland are working together to deliver the Working for Carers project. It is funded by the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with the North East Combined Authority as the lead authority.



To find out more about the project and to get support from an advisor, please get in touch with your local carers centre:

Newcastle Carers > <https://www.newcastlecarers.org.uk/employment-and-education/> Call: 0191 275 5060. Email: info@newcastlecarers.org.uk

North Tyneside Carers' Centre > <https://www.norhtynesidecarers.org.uk/adult-carers/working-for-carers/> Call: 0191 249 6480. Email: enquires@ntcarers.co.uk

Carers Northumberland > <https://carersnorthumberland.org.uk/education-and-employment> Call: 01670 320 025. Email: info@carersnorthumberland.org.uk



Newcastle SENDIASS



Did you know that children and young people can access information, advice and support about their special educational needs independently from their parents/carers? In Newcastle SENDIASS we have a dedicated worker for children and young people. Jen holds information and advice clinics in schools and post-16 settings across the city. If your child or young person would like to speak to Jen about their needs, their support, their life, or their future they can either access a clinic in their setting, or email or text Jen and she will arrange a suitable place to meet and have a chat to see how she can help.



Parent/Carer Guide to SEND Services in Newcastle:



Together with the PCF, the Local Authority are in the process of developing the Parent/Carer Guide to SEND in Newcastle. This will be a directory of SEND services available to children, young people and their families within Newcastle. It will provide a brief overview of services, explaining what the service can or cannot offer, along with details of where to find further information or how to contact that service.



A VIP Invitation!

Pupils from both Gosforth Academy and Gosforth Junior Academy VI ARPS were invited to meet with Newcastle's SEND Executive Board last month to discuss the work they have been carrying out as accessibility consultants.

We were asked to gather at the Civic Centre where we were taken to meet a panel of 15 board members in the Swan Parsons room. Following a two minute silence to mark Armistice Day, pupils were asked to take centre stage to feed back on what they had been up to. We discussed the partnerships we have developed over the past few years working alongside Newcastle University, Centre for Life and Beamish to name a few.



We explained how we have been working closely with external partners to improve accessibility for those living with a vision impairment whilst sharing some facts on the prevalence of sight loss in the UK. Finally, we shared the positive outcomes which have occurred as byproducts of the work we have carried out such as improved opportunities for pupil voice and self-advocacy, an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, incidental opportunities for habilitation input and the introduction of our new VI Science and Cricket clubs.

We plan to continue our work as accessibility consultants with future projects waiting in the wings. The development of the first SEND Pupil Voice Panel is also underway.

If you are interested in finding out more about the work we have been carrying out, feel free to get in touch with the ARP or pay us a visit!



Improving understanding of mental health issues affecting attendance

Many parents have asked about the policies and procedures regarding a child who is unable to attend school due to mental health issues. Please see below information from the Local Authority regarding Section 19 of the 1996 Education Act

The education team at the council has been working with schools to improve understanding of mental health issues affecting attendance. There is now a service specialising in social and emotional mental health that is working with all primary schools and year 7. The Educational Psychology service has been providing training to all schools on a range of issues including school anxiety and absence. The council's attendance officers are involved in this training so that schools are receiving consistent advice.

Section 19 of the 1996 Education Act places a duty on Local Authorities to arrange suitable education for children who are unable to attend school. As a guide, absence of fifteen days or more triggers this duty. There are various reasons why a child may be unable to attend school, such as permanent exclusion or illness. However, an illness that prevents school attendance for this length of time is rare. Children who are in this situation are very unwell.

The Section 19 duty does not cover absence from school due to normal worries or anxiety, concerns about bullying or dissatisfaction with school policy or process. In these situations, parents have a responsibility to work with the school to overcome these barriers.

If you feel that the school is not responding to your concerns, you should follow the school's complaints procedure.

If it is likely that your child will be unable to attend school for more than fifteen days, despite the best efforts of school and parents, the school will contact the Local Authority for guidance. Under Section 19, the Local Authority will support the school to provide a suitable education while your child is unable to attend. The nature of this education provision will vary depending on the circumstances of the absence. For advice about attendance, parents can contact the council's attendance team at accessandinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk

Where can I find more advice?

DfE summary of responsibilities when mental health is affecting attendance is a summary document for parents, schools and local authorities explaining their role with mental health related absences.

accessandinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk is the email address for the access and inclusion team at Newcastle City Council. They can help if you have questions about school attendance, including provision under Section 19.

School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support YoungMinds has lots of useful tips and advice for parents about children's mental health from the national charity Young Minds.

www.newcastlesendiass.co.uk is Newcastle City Council's independent advice service about SEND.

<https://padlet.com/NewcastleEP/emotionally-based-school-non-attendance-ebsna-support-and-in-hzpbuueal1kspiwr> is a set of resources for schools and parents from the Education Psychology Service in Newcastle.



The RISE Team



The RISE Team - Mental Health Support in Schools RISE Newcastle Mental Health Support Team works with children and young people aged between 5-18 to support them with their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Their team works into schools/colleges and are qualified to deliver interventions for low mood and anxiety.

RISE lead on a whole school approach delivering a 12-week programme within schools and colleges across Newcastle and support the Senior Mental Health Lead on a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Please note they only accept referrals for support from the schools they are delivering in.

You can watch their promotional video [here](#) which explains in more detail how they work. There is information, advice and guidance available on their [website](#), [YouTube channel](#), Instagram and X.

Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)



The PINS project is underway. Newcastle Parent Carer Forum (PCF) members will meet with the parents and carers of the children attending the schools taking part at relaxed coffee mornings.

The first coffee morning is an informal chat with parents so they can find out more about the PCF and PINS, and an opportunity for them to let us know where they feel they would benefit from support.

We then use this feedback to try and secure some additional upskilling or support and where possible bring along specific services during a follow-up coffee morning.

This is a great opportunity for mainstream schools to improve the outcomes for this group of children and provide better information and communication between school and parent carers. The offer to participating schools includes five days worth of flexibly delivered specialist support.

Top tips

Read *Ambitious about Autism*'s top tips to help support autistic children and young people at Christmas.

No surprise gifts

As a general rule, autistic people are not a fan of surprises. They find it harder to read other people's reactions and body language and so end up feeling worried about how to respond in certain social situations without giving offence. Giving an autistic person a surprise gift puts them under a lot of pressure to respond 'correctly.'

To avoid this, you could simply ask them what they would like and give them time and space to open their present. Depending on the person you may want to get rid of wrapping paper altogether, which is also better for the environment.



Personal space at parties

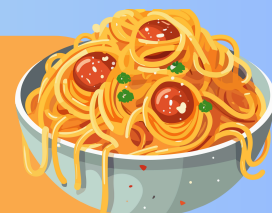
Christmas parties can create a lot of anxiety for autistic people. It's not that they don't want to be invited to parties or that they don't enjoy them when they attend— but the loud music, crowds and flashing lights can have a more uncomfortable effect on them than on neurotypical guests. Turning down music, giving people space and providing a quieter area for breaks if they need them make parties more welcoming for all.



Christmas dinner options

Families up and down the country will have strong views and set ideas about what food is served on Christmas Day. Typically menus contain unusual food that is rarely served at other times of the year – such as Brussels sprouts or Christmas pudding.

This can be a bit of a nightmare for autistic people who struggle with the different textures and tastes of unfamiliar foods. Autistic people often rely on what they call "safe foods". These will be different for every person – and may not be traditional 'Christmas' food – but it's important to stock up regardless to support your autistic guest.



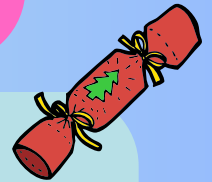
Prepare for festive changes

From hanging stockings and eating mince pies to visiting Santa's Grotto, Christmas involves many unusual traditions and changes to routines. Autistic people, who generally prefer predictability, can find these changes highly stressful. Preparing in advance for these changes is key. Autistic young people really appreciate plans and itineraries that explain when and why things are happening. Most importantly, if someone doesn't want to join in – don't make them!



Consider your decorations

Many would agree that Christmas crackers are loud, tacky and annoying, so do you need them? The same goes for brash decorations or flashing Christmas lights. Softer lighting and quieter music also help create a more welcoming environment. Why not involve autistic people in your decoration choices to create an atmosphere that works for everyone.



Let people do Christmas their own way

Not everyone celebrates Christmas, and for lots of different reasons autistic young people and their families may prefer to ditch certain 'traditions' and do things their way. If people aren't taking part in the celebrations in the way you'd expect its best not to draw attention to it and let them enjoy Christmas their own way.

For further information and resources please visit
www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

