
**On the road to the PRU: Parents' feelings of
inclusion**

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1. Introduction

The building of a new Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) has acted as the impetus to look at the behaviour and attendance pathways in a Local Authority (LA). The desire to promote inclusive schools has led to the following question: what do parents have to say about how they were included in the journey their child took in getting to the PRU? Did they have a voice?

The children in PRUs and their families can be considered some of the most marginal groups in a LA. They are not part of mainstream or special education. PRUs exist in a sort of limbo. If a LA and schools can make sure that these parents feel included then it is likely that other parents will too. The view that arrival at the PRU is part of a journey rather than a discrete event is consistent with views of inclusion as being a process rather than a place (Ainscow, 1999). The research by Hess et al (2006) demonstrates the real-life acceptance of this philosophy. They demonstrated that parents of children with special educational needs do not view inclusion as an educational placement but rather as a sense of place where their child belonged.

This essay seeks to give voice to parents. It does so via a questionnaire. The questionnaire is a hybrid of the Index for Inclusion (IFI) [Booth and Ainscow, 2002] and the research findings by McDonald and Thomas (2003) about parental reflections on their child being excluded. Roffey's (2004) research which identified five factors for effective collaboration between home and school will be used as a tool in analysing the responses from the questionnaire

This research is sited in discussion about the inclusion of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and how their inclusion links with the process rather than the act of exclusion. One idea central to the research is the overlap between the terms 'parent-partnership' and 'inclusion of parents' and a proposal is made for the use of the term *collaboration* rather than 'partnership'. A second idea is that parents have their own expertise and knowledge about discipline and their child's happiness. This is discussed as a placing a particular stress upon the home-school relationship.

2. Background

a. Inclusion and children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD)

The inclusion of children with SEBD in their local school is the thorny aspect of inclusion. It is often here that tension is greatest in a school trying to meet the needs of all children and their families while providing the most efficient education to the greatest number of students. Evans and Lunt (2002) provide evidence that children with SEBD are the group of children that schools and LAs find most difficult to include.

Ainscow et al (2006) view the terms 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' as being inextricably linked. Inclusion involves overcoming exclusionary processes and decreasing exclusion involves finding ways of increasing participation. This is an important consideration, given the nature of this topic - the parents of children in PRUs. These people's children have in some way or another been excluded from their school. Taking Ainscow et al's (2006) perspective of inclusion and exclusion being linked – what have these parents experienced by way of inclusion? Ainscow et al (2006) view exclusion in schools not just as an event but as a process where there are discriminatory, devaluing and self-protective processes in play. It may be that by examining the extent to which parents are included in the processes which lead to their child being placed in a PRU, these exclusionary processes may be evident.

If the concept of inclusion is indeed a process, any support designed to help schools become more inclusive has to address the factors underlying the process. The IFI was developed by Booth and Ainscow (2002) as a holistic tool to help schools develop their ability to include all students. The IFI uses three dimensions - school culture, policies and practice - as the main framework to support thinking about inclusive school development. The IFI suggests that school culture is the bedrock from which effective policies and practices emerge. McDonald and Thomas' (2003) study of the parents of children who have been excluded suggests that parents are aware of cultural and practical dimensions of the index. It is these aspects of inclusion which will be considered.

b. Inclusion and parents - Parent-School Partnerships: Two peas in a pod.

The indicators suggested by Booth and Ainscow (2002) substantially overlap with the ideals for parent-school partnerships as defined by Wolfendale (1985). Wolfendale's (1985) definition of authentic parent-school partnership is that it is an interaction whereby:

- Parents are active and central in decision-making and its implementation.
- Parents are perceived as having equal strengths and equivalent expertise.
- Parents are able to contribute to as well as receive services.
- Parents share responsibility and thus they and professionals are mutually accountable.

Despite this author's reservations about the ability of there ever being able to be a true home-school partnership, given the unequal balance of power between the two, ideas of partnership continue to be strong. Perhaps Roffey's (2004) idea of partnership as sharing a common concern and joint resolution might be a more realistic goal. Instead of 'partnership' the term 'collaboration' might then be more apt. Nonetheless, whether it is idealistic notions of partnership or perhaps more realistic ideas of collaboration, these ideas of schools working with parents map very well onto ideas of creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practice in schools.

It is the position taken in this paper that if there is a good parent-school partnership or collaboration then parents will feel included. Therefore one can examine the potential problems of the inclusion of parents by reference to the problems already identified in establishing authentic parent-school partnership. Roffey (2004) developed a model which identified five factors that affected constructive home-school collaboration. These factors will be used to analyse parental feelings of inclusion as elicited by the questionnaire. These factors are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors affecting constructive home-school collaboration

Factor affecting constructive home-school collaboration	Way in which factor is conceptualised or demonstrated
1. Definition and attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the child is discussed. Is s/he pathologised and demonised as being ‘mad, bad and/or sad’ or is the child accepted and included. • Parents view of their child and their hypotheses of factors which may be affecting their child at school being genuinely included in formulations.
2. Power differences between school and parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The knowledge discrepancy between home and school causes an imbalance of power between the two. Feelings of powerlessness can cause parents to feel and act in different ways if their child’s behaviour is causing the school difficulty. They may feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ intimidated or fearful and act with compliance. ○ powerless and ‘opt out’ perhaps appearing uncaring. ○ angry and feel the need to defend their child. As a result they could be seen as ‘difficult’ themselves.
3. Communication, context and parent role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Way in which parents are approached • Wording used in letters • Language used in meetings • Level of negative language used about the child

4. Parental Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for flexibility in dealing with parents • Understanding the demands schools sometimes make on parents lives
5. In loco parentis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting and caring for the whole child acknowledging strengths and weaknesses • Concern about learning needs not just behavioural management • Parental role in understanding the socialisation and discipline aspects of teachers acting <i>in loco parentis</i> can be an issue if a child's behaviour is of no concern at home

c. SEBD, parents and schools.

Discipline and a child's happiness are areas that engage the parents' primary role as carer. At school the boundaries between a teacher and a parent's skill and knowledge in these areas overlap. This can present some difficulties for both parties as traditional boundaries demarcated by professional and academic knowledge are less relevant and collaboration can be difficult to achieve.

Table 2 depicts research demonstrating how the overlapping boundaries of knowledge and expertise between home and school with regards to discipline, can affect joint understanding and action for both parents and school. These findings are labelled according to Roffey's (2004) factors affecting home-school collaboration.

Table 2: Research findings of aspects of how schools deal with discipline and the impact this has upon home-school collaboration.

Author(s) Year	Research Findings	Home-School Collaboration Factor Involved.
Hess et al (2006)	Mismatch between parent expectations of warmth and caring from teachers and the requirements of professional practice which places value on an objective professional stance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In loco parentis</i>
Roffey (2004)	Parents defended themselves or their child when the teacher positioned the child negatively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power difference • Definition and attribution

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication, context and parent role
Evans et al (2003)	Interventions for children with SEBD are not framed in the context of supporting children but in terms of reducing social or behavioural deficiencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition and attribution • Communication, context and parent role
McDonald and Thomas (2003)	Parents felt judged and criticised by schools for their children's actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication, context and parent role
Hallam and Castle (2001)	Successful projects which aimed to reduce exclusion from school invited parents from the outset to be involved in the identification of their children's needs by contributing to decisions concerning strategies for dealing with them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition and attribution
Crozier (1999)	Parents believed that decisions taken by teachers/school were immutable and unlikely to be affected by anything they themselves might say or do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power differences
MacLure and Walker (1999)	Parents expected to take actions over problems raised by teachers but often had difficulty securing undertaking from teachers to act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition and attribution • Power differences • <i>In loco parentis</i>

d. Parent voice on the way to the PRU – aspects of culture and practice

Parent voice has been described by Vincent and Martin (2002) as “parents’ willingness and ability to be involved with and intervene in their child’s school life” (pg.109). If a parent is included by the school and LA to the extent that they are able to work collaboratively with the school then they should be able to be involved with and intervene effectively, that is, ‘have a voice’. However, one suspects, that although parents may have the ability to be involved with their child’s school life, they may not necessarily have the ability to intervene. If this is the case then the parent voice could be said to be muted.

To what extent have the parents of some of our most marginalised children, those attending PRUs, been able to have a voice? McDonald and Thomas’s (2003) study of parental reflections on their child being excluded suggested that parents of excluded children felt they had little voice and had an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and anger. These feelings can be aligned along two main dimensions of the IFI, culture and practice. Table 3 highlights the findings from McDonald and Thomas’s (2003) study.

Table 3. Findings from McDonald and Thomas’s (2003) study of parents’ experiences of their child’s exclusion from mainstream schooling.

IFI Dimension	Parents feelings
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treated poorly by school and LA • Promises of what would happen after exclusion varied or did not eventuate • Felt they and their child did not have a voice • They felt they could not influence or change the power relations within the school
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings surrounding their child’s behaviour were negative experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ not friendly and at times embarrassing ➢ not geared towards developing action plans to help their child ➢ often included people they had never met ➢ made to feel they were unfit parents. • Lack of information about what would happen next • Parents lacked advice about taking the right course of action and how to get their child into a school • Excluding schools were not helpful with next steps.

The parents of children in a PRU have experienced the process of exclusion, the flip-side of inclusion. Good parent-school partnerships or collaboration should enable parents to feel included despite exclusionary processes. However, collaboration can difficult to achieve when a child’s behaviour is of concern to the school. Tension between home and school can exist as parents have understanding of and skills in dealing with their child’s behaviour. This may pose a challenge to the traditional power differential between home and school. Attempts by school’s to maintain power may cause parents to not have a ‘voice’.

3. Rationale for the current study

The author undertook to research parental feelings of inclusion of children who attend PRUs in Solihull. Of particular interest were their feelings of inclusion before their child started to attend the PRU. It was hoped that by listening to these parents voice, the LA would be able to include parents better and work in a more collaborative way with them in the future.

4. Context of the study

The study was conducted in a small metropolitan borough council (MBC) in the West Midlands. It has three PRUs with a fourth, purpose - built, soon to open. Currently 148 pupils attend a PRU in this LA.

One PRU, Dean Dell, is for 13 primary school-aged children. These children may be 'looked after children' (LAC), unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) or those children who are referred by the emotional and social and behavioural difficulties team as needing 'something a bit extra'. A new pathway for entry into this PRU has just been developed. It is hoped this will lead to consistency of access to the service.

The two other PRUs cater for secondary aged pupils. Old Bridge is primarily for children who have been permanently excluded; Queensdale is for children with medical conditions that prevent them from attending school. The entry criterion into these two secondary PRUs has needed to be flexible because of heavy demands made upon them. Both these two PRUs can only offer part-time placements because of high numbers. The managers of the PRUs meet once a week to discuss new referrals to try and work out the best solution for the child. The construction of the new PRU has prompted the LA to consider its policies and procedures for entry into and exit from the PRUs.

5. Research method employed in the study

The study was a mixed design. It is part structured questionnaire, part qualitative case study. This study takes the epistemological standpoint of parents, seeking to give voice to those rarely heard.

6. Participants

Parents of seven children participated in this study, one from Dean Dell and three each from Old Bridge and Queensdale. Following discussions with the manager at Dean Dell three parents were invited to participate via a letter from the author. Suitability criteria included not being a LAC or UASC. One parent positively replied. A letter was sent to all parents of pupils at Old Bridge and Queensdale. No replies were received from the parents at Old Bridge. Following discussions with the centre manager it was decided that the author would attend the parent-teacher afternoon and approach parents as they visited the centre. All three parents who visited the centre agreed to participate in the interview. The families of three children from Queensdale positively responded to the letter. For copies letters see Appendix A.

The backgrounds of the children attending the PRUs were varied. One child had attended both independent and public sector schools and had been permanently excluded from the independent sector. Two children were on the autistic spectrum. One child had experienced severe bullying. One child was out of education for 9 months before attending the PRU. Three of the seven children had been permanently excluded and two had statements of their special educational needs.

7. Questionnaire

In this study the IFI was adapted to take into account the particular experiences of parents of children who attend a PRU. For the adapted questionnaire see Appendix B. Adaptation was deemed necessary after Ainscow (1999) reported a school that used the

parental questionnaire from IFI and found very low level of returns from parents. It was suggested that perhaps some of the questions were inappropriate for parents and this contributed to the low return. The adaptations were led by McDonald's and Thomas's (2003) findings of the particular aspects of culture and practice which gave rise to parental feelings of powerlessness and not having a voice in the exclusion process for their child. In total there were 17 questions to which one of three responses was asked for *definitely agree/agree to some extent/disagree*. Items 2-10 were taken from the IFI whilst items 11-18 were constructed following the conclusions arrived at by McDonald and Thomas's (2003) research.

Three parents/carers were interviewed at their home and one on the phone. The Old Bridge parents were interviewed at school during the parent-teacher afternoon. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviewer recorded parent responses by hand. Each interview started by asking the parents to describe their child's schooling history. This was a technique used by McDonald and Thomas (2003) to help set the scene and help parents start thinking about their own experience. The questionnaire statements were all read out by the interviewer to take into account any literacy difficulties parents may have themselves. The interviews concluded by asking parents who was helpful or supportive to them in the time leading up to their child attending the PRU and what they did that was useful. This was to ensure that the interviews finished on a positive note. Information from this question was also recorded.

8. Data Analysis

Responses to the closed statements were totalled. The open-ended question which asked for comments relating to how things could have been better for each item, who was helpful and why were recorded by hand during the interviews next to each relevant statement. A template approach to the analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken. The key codes were those factors of effective home-school collaboration derived by Roffey (2004): definition and attribution, power and partnership, communication, context and parent role, parental contexts and *in loco parentis*. After this initial coding the statements were further grouped into themes or issues.

The main threat to validity with this study was the possibility of positive instances. Robson (2002) describes this as a tendency to ignore information conflicting with hypotheses already held and to emphasize information that confirms them. However, the researcher was aware of this as she was conducting the interviews. It was assumed that the information given by each parent or set of parents was equally reliable.

9. Results

A copy of the amalgamated responses can be found in Appendix C

1. Responses to Statements

Numerical analysis of the questionnaire revealed that there was quite a spread of perceptions amongst the seven set of parents/carers. This is not surprising given the different backgrounds and experiences of the children and the small number of participants. However, there was one item on the questionnaire on which all 7 sets of parents agreed. All 7 sets of parents strongly disagreed with the statement “I knew what to do, where to look for help when my child was excluded”. The natures of the exclusions were all different and parents had very different immediate concerns. Even three weeks is a very long time for a parent whose child is not in school. Concerns varied from being “very worried about their child dropping academically” to worries that “other people” unknown to them were making decisions about their child.

2. Open ended responses

Parents found it difficult to comment as to how things could have been better. They often gave examples which illustrated their response for that statement. As a result many of the statements made were negative. Comments were coded according to Roffey’s (2004) five factors which contribute to effective home-school collaboration. Issues pertaining to each factor were identified. Issues that emerged from this analysis follow;

i. Definition and Attribution

The parents/carers comments centred on two issues.

- a) The school pathologising their child and building up a case to remove them from the school. *We sensed the meetings were to build up a case to get rid of her. The meetings were not to help the child but to help the school remove the child. Sometimes the class teachers and SENCOs were perceived by parents to be generally more accepting of their child as they gave positive information about my child and was encouraging and positive that things will get better.*
- b) Lack of respect for the role and knowledge of parents. This was particularly the case for senior management team in the school *everything is done their way.* At times the picture presented to parents of their child was not recognisable to them. *The child you are describing is not my son* one mother recalls telling the head teacher.

ii. Power differences between school and parents

Four issues were highlighted by parents’ comments.

- a) Parents felt that there was a lack of openness and transparency about their child’s behaviour and decisions made on their behalf. In this way schools (and LA) were able to maintain the power derived through knowledge or information. Minutes of meetings were copied to people parents were unaware of. On one occasion what one parent thought was a copied report was in fact a copied and altered report. Sometimes parents felt things were going well only to be surprised by things they were unaware about. *I thought he was doing well on his monitoring card but there were these ___ that we didn’t know about.* Sometimes parents were rendered powerless by making it difficult for them to access personnel. *I*

- b) Conversations and meetings with school staff often left parents feeling belittled and worthless. *At the meeting for the individual behaviour plan we feel we were being told off – you’re naughty, a bad parent, I didn’t feel I could speak-when I did I was threatened, the exclusions appeal meeting made us as parents look stupid and very sadly we were made to feel like we were the scum of the earth. It’s a very difficult time for families, they are very sensitive.*
- c) Tone and type of language used when talking about their child with the school seemed to parents to increase the power divide between home and school. The meetings were *very adversarial, we felt helpless. I’d get a lecture, be told off.* Sometimes parents’ suggestions were just ignored and one parent objected to being *called by my first name rather than Mrs....*
- d) Ways in which power differences could be reduced. When asked who they had found helpful or supportive and why, 50% of comments made related to ways in which these people had increased parents’ sense of power. Parents said that this person:
- Believed me and was on my side
 - Let me know that there were other options
 - Gave us suggestions about what we might do about getting her into school
 - Gave moral support
 - Helped us write things down and suggested tactics for the appeal meeting
 - Was accessible

iii. Communication, Context and Parent Role

Comments from parents seemed to centre around four issues:

- a) Actual language used. Sometimes parents felt that they and their child were spoken to in patronising ways. Parents felt that language used implied that they were ‘bad’ families or ‘bad’ parents. *I don’t want you talking to the girls’ family; she comes from a nice family.* The more formal the meetings the worse this seemed to get with senior management team members not being very approachable for parents. One set of parents felt language used in reporting an incident was derogatory towards their child. The school were very reluctant to change this despite parental request.
- b) Listening skills. Parents really appreciated teachers and professionals who took the time and listened to what they had to say.
- c) Lack of information. Several parents felt that there was a lack of information in a more formal sense. This varied in information from the LA to information from the school. One parent didn’t understand the difference between the two types of PRUs for secondary aged pupils. Another parent had no idea where to find help from the LA once she felt the school were not helping her. A final parent thought her son was doing well at school only to be surprised by information/data of which she was unaware.

- d) Communication practices. A parent reports that her phone calls to the school were not returned *the school said they'd get back to me – they never did. No courtesy as if they don't care.* Another parent felt that earlier notification from the school that their child's behaviour was causing concern would have been useful.

iv. **Parent Contexts**

Two issues were raised in relation to this. When a child has been having behavioural difficulties at school over a long period, the once 'helpful' and necessary procedures can place quite a burden upon a family if they go unchanged over time.

- a) Timing of meetings. One family's work patterns were very inconvenienced by the reintegration meetings always being scheduled late in the morning rather than at the beginning or end of the day.
- b) Phone Calls. One mother grew to dread her phone. The phone was ringing so often that *I couldn't leave home, I felt sick waiting for the phone to ring.*

v. **In loco parentis**

Roffey (2004) was surprised to find what strong views parents had about school's role as *in loco parentis*. She viewed this as a crucial factor in home and school developing a joint understanding. Three issues emerged from the discussion with the parents in this study.

- i) Parents were concerned about their child's academic progress and general well-being as well as their behaviour *I felt he needed support for his learning as well as behaviour. They didn't put anything in place.* One parent described how her son hit rock bottom emotionally with the permanent exclusion. She felt he needed some emotional support to deal with this.
- ii) Parents expected that their child would be treated well by the school. One parent was upset when a member of the senior management team spoke in a patronising way to her child in front of her, *did I tell you to speak?* Another boy was made to wait in reception for 2 hours whilst a meeting about him took place. One mother said that her son asked who would be seeing or marking the work that was sent home for him to complete once he was permanently excluded. When she said no one he said he wouldn't be doing it then.
- iii) Parents appreciated it when staff accepted their child for their strengths and weaknesses, *parents need people...that let you know your child matters and that they are not the scum of the earth.*

One group of comments by parents were not able to be coded by the above factors. These comments make a consistent sixth group of factors which affect effective home-school collaboration. This I will call 'action'.

vi. Action

Parents and carers expected that schools and the LA would follow up on actions agreed in meetings. It was a source of frustration for most of the parents that often things that the school agreed to do did not eventuate. Parents were rendered quite helpless by the lack of action. They felt that the school did not care for their child. *To my face* (they agreed to do things) *when I left they did nothing* and *the school said they'd get it sorted, nothing was resolved*.

10. Discussion

The creativity required to find participants from all PRUs resulted in better than expected sampling. This is particularly with regard to motivation for participating. Just over half of the participants had responded to a letter request. This implies some degree of motivation. Informal discussions with the parents/carers indicated that this motivation was a combination of wanting to say what had happened to them, be able to help other parents in the future and have a chance to speak to an educational psychologist. However, nearly half of the respondents were simply approached directly in a suitable environment and asked if they wouldn't mind having a chat about their experiences. The motivations of these parents will have been quite different.

Roffey's (2004) factors for effective home-school collaboration offered a useful way to organise the open-ended questions. However, the present research suggests one more factor might be added to the list, that of 'Action' - where school staff follow through with actions they agree to with parents. These six factors act as a good starting point for schools wanting to promote parent inclusion and give parents a voice.

Ainscow et al's (2006) view of inclusion and exclusion being inextricably linked is demonstrated with clarity in this research. The adapted inclusion index was able to highlight the devaluing processes parents experienced in the steps that led up to their child attending the PRU. Parent's heightened sensitivities and anxieties in dealing with the school about their child seemed to exacerbate feelings of not being able to play an active role in proceedings. From the parent's perspective the self-protective processes used by the school related to communication – particularly between senior management and home. Not surprisingly, as found by Hess et al (2006), it appears people in senior management posts in schools have difficulty managing to balance the difficult roles of being a teaching professional and acting in loco parentis. This very difficult balance might be better achieved with greater awareness and training around communication with parents. However, despite being inextricably linked, exclusion and inclusion might also be mutually exclusive. That is, parents will never feel included if their child has been excluded.

11. Conclusion

This group of parents felt excluded by various processes and language used by schools and the LA. The power differences between home and school were accentuated by schools using language and meeting practices as a tool to render parents mute. It may be

that this accentuation of power was necessary as schools felt they needed to negate parent’s knowledge and understanding of their child. The effect of this was that parents did not have a voice and were not able to intervene effectively with the school on behalf of their child. Awareness raising and training for SMT re: communication with parents may be a good step in helping to address this issue.

The LA could promote the inclusion of parents whose child has been excluded by ensuring that someone is responsible for a child and their family and makes contact with them in the first 2 days when permanent exclusion takes place. This contact would:

- To ensure that parents’ questions are answered.
- Offer a child counselling/emotional support within the first two weeks and then follow-up one month later.
- Ensure that work sent home for the child is collected and marked.

The IFI has culture, policy and practice as the bedrock of inclusion. This research has demonstrated some aspects of school practice and culture which affect parents feeling of inclusion. Until now this author has made no mention of policy. School behaviour and attendance policies need to be explicit in how they will try and work with parents so that they feel more included. This will acknowledge and help reduce power differences between home and school. Simply saying there will be “strong home-school partnerships” in a policy does not do this. In addition, the concept and use of the term ‘partnership’ with the implication of equality needs careful consideration.

What might a behaviour and attendance policy which seriously addresses parent-school *collaboration* look like? Based on this research, Table 5 might provide a start.

Table 5: Possible parent-school collaboration section to a school’s behaviour and attendance policy.

Definition and attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child with strengths and weaknesses is viewed as part of a school environment. • Parent views of a child are listened to, acknowledged and incorporated into the overall view of the child.
Power differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is openness and transparency about how information is circulated and the decisions made on behalf of a child. • Minutes of meetings about a child are copied only with agreement of parents. • Copied minutes and reports are unaltered. • Language and tone used with parents is respectful about their child. • Language and tone used by school is mindful of parents increased sensitivities and strives to be as friendly as possible.
Communication, context and parent role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools will take time to listen to what parents have to say.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about outside agencies will be made available to parents. • Phone calls from parents will be returned within a specified time.
Parent context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timings of meetings are arranged to suit parents as well as school. • Modes and frequency of communication from school to home is checked regularly to see if changes are needed.
<i>In loco parentis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school acknowledges that they are dealing with a child not a problem. • Learning and emotional needs as well as behavioural needs are addressed. • The school will treat and speak respectfully to the child.
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions agreed will be documented and followed through. Parents have a copy of agreed actions. • Parents have somewhere to turn (governors) if agreed actions do not occur.

End Note

Shortly after this research was completed the author had a meeting with the Behaviour and Attendance Consultant for the LA. A consequence of this is an altered behaviour policy for universal provision in secondary schools. This places much more emphasis upon collaboration with parents. See Appendix D for details.

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Appendix A: Letter sent to parents requesting participation

As part of the Educational Psychology Service's development plan for 2008-09, I am completing a small piece of research. We are interested in the experiences of parents whose children attend a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). Solihull is keen to ensure that all parents are able to 'have a voice' and participate fully in the processes and decisions made about their children. By agreeing to have a conversation with me about your experiences during the time that led to your child attending the PRU, you will be able to make a contribution to how parents are treated and included in Solihull by the Children and Young People's division.

If you agree to have a chat with me, please let a staff member at the PRU know and I will ring you to arrange a suitable time when we can talk for about 30 minutes to an hour.

Yours sincerely

Licette Gus
Educational Psychologist

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Parents – Perceptions of Inclusion

					definitely agree	agree to some extent	disagree	how could this be better
2	I think the school kept me well informed about how my child was doing.							
3	The school provided clear information about how I could help my child with their school work at home.							
4	When I was concerned about my child's progress at school I knew who to contact.							
5	If I told staff of concerns I had about my child's progress I was confident that my views would be taken seriously.							
6	I think the staff were friendly towards me and other parents.							
7	I think the staff worked harder to help some students than others.							
8	Staff at the school encouraged all students to do their best, not just the most able.							
9	All families were equally valued whatever their backgrounds.							
10	Parents who get involved in helping the school were valued more highly by staff than those who do not.							

11	Meetings surrounding my child were positive and helpful.				
12	I felt staff in school and other professionals respected my role as a parent and my knowledge of my child.				
13	I feel I contributed to decisions about how to deal with my child at school.				
14	I found it easy to talk to professional's about my child's strengths and needs.				
15	I knew what to do, where to look for help when my child was excluded.				
16	I understood why my child would attend the PRU.				
17	Promises made to me by the LA and school were kept.				
18	I believe I was able to have a say in decisions that were made regarding my child's education.				

20. a. Who was helpful/supportive for you?

b. What did they do that was helpful/supportive?

Appendix C : Collated Responses from Questionnaire for Parents – Perceptions of Inclusion

Parents/carers have been given numbers 1-7. On occasion a parent/carer felt unable to give an answer for a particular question.

					definitely agree
					agree to some extent
					disagree
					how could this be better
2	I think the school kept me well informed about how my child was doing.	1 3	2 4 5 6 7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More contact about what was happening. At pa nothing was too bad so it was a bit of a surprise. • School said they'd get back to me – they never as if they don't care. • I thought he was doing well on his monitoring c were PRS that we didn't know about. • Report every week instead of at parents meeting • We felt as though the school was writing down ever had done wrong. Nothing about her strengths • He struggled in every lesson – it was a shock to behind he was. • I couldn't leave home, I felt sick waiting for the
3	The school provided clear information about how I could help my child with their school work at home.	1 2	5 3 4 6 7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing other than saying make sure they do the
4	When I was concerned about my child's progress at school I knew who to contact.	2 6 7	1 3 4	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couldn't get to speak to anyone higher than his nothing was being done. • Too busy to take it seriously, have more time to (mum).
5	If I told staff of concerns I had about my child's progress I was confident that my views would be taken seriously.		6 7	1 2 3 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff need to listen to what home does successful • More face-to-face talking. I got nothing not eve • After meetings with the HT and DH nothing wa • Things agreed in the meetings didn't eventuate. • To my face yes, when I left they did nothing.
6	I think the staff were friendly towards me and other parents.	2 3	1 4 6 7	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers made me feel like I was a naughty girl • DH said "if I told you to take him home, do as I • "I'd get a lecture be told off". • HT said "he's a naughty defiant little boy irrespo

7	I think the staff worked harder to help some students than others.	1 2 5 6 7	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who were good at certain things at school got more leeway. • I think the school is more interested in pupils not doing well. “every child matters” – nuh! • They wanted W out. Head of pastoral support I was part of a conversation he had had with me. • It’s the same in all schools, if you’re ‘normal’ you get more help.
8	Staff at the school encouraged all students to do their best, not just the most able.	1 2 3	5 7	4 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the beginning it was good. After 6 months they started to know and just wanted to get rid of her and pass the time.
9	All families were equally valued whatever their backgrounds.	3 7	5 6	1 2 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I was treated badly. More communication would have been better. Whenever I phoned, they did not phone back. This happened on at least five occasions. • Be more careful about the comments they make to other families/parents “I don’t want you talking to the girl who comes from a nice family”. • I thought there was a racist teacher in relation to my child. I mentioned it to the HT nothing was done.
10	Parents who get involved in helping the school were valued more highly by staff than those who do not.	1 2 4 6		7	
11	Meetings surrounding my child were positive and helpful.		1 3 7	2 4 5 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We felt as though the school was writing down everything we ever had done wrong. Nothing about her strengths. • At the meeting for the IBP we felt we were being treated as if you’re naughty, a bad parent. • Very adversarial. We felt helpless. Copies of reports sent to loads of people and organisations who we didn’t know. • Sensed the meetings were to build up a case to get the child out of the school. The meetings not to help the child – it’s to help the school. • We felt like we were the scum of the earth. It is not the time for families, they are very sensitive. Parents need to be helped to help them feel involved, that let you know your child is not the scum that they are not the scum of the earth. • When head teacher attended a meeting the atmosphere was negative and not one positive thing was said about S. The meeting lasted for 2 hours and S was made to wait in reception the whole time. • School said they’d get it sorted but nothing was done.

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion appeal meeting made us as parents look like we were underhanded and tried everything not to work. School were underhanded and tried everything not to work back. • They made you feel you're not a good parent, that's what they were negative all the time. Need to be positive. • They were negative all the time. Need to be positive. • School spoke in patronising way to my child at the time. "I tell you to speak?" • Called me by my first name rather than Mrs. ... which was disrespectful.
12	I felt staff in school and other professionals respected my role as a parent and my knowledge of my child.	3	1 7	2 4 5 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take action and more communication. • SMT need to respect my role more CT and SENCO. • School said "go and tell your mum and go hide your child. she never sees any wrong in you". • He had no mentor. I asked if he could have one and he would get sorted and then he was permanently excluded. • School didn't I had a different view of my son. "describing is not my son!"
13	I feel I contributed to decisions about how to deal with my child at school.	1 2		3 4 5 6 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school just said this is the way it is done, a way of dealing with things. So there was no room for discussion. • I made several suggestions which were ignored. • Never took onboard anything I said. • I felt he needed support for his learning as well as social. They didn't put anything in place.
14	I found it easy to talk to professional's about my child's strengths and needs.	3	1 2 6 7	4 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who I thought cared I could talk to – but they didn't. • SMT need to be more approachable. • They wouldn't listen anyway, so it's pointless. I would go for a meeting once a week or she couldn't go because we're both working. They hold the meetings in the middle of the day so we had to take half a day off work. Would have been better if the meetings at the beginning or end of the day. • They would listen better.
15	I knew what to do, where to look for help when my child was excluded.			1 2 4 5 6 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would have been good to have a clearer picture of what we needed to do. In writing or a meeting. • No 'unofficial' exclusions. Have official exclusions so then I would have had all the information. • Not a clue. It was just a fluke I saw a leaflet for a service in my other child's school. • We were very worried about him dropping academically.
16	I understood why my child would attend the PRU.	1 2		7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't understand the difference between TC and PRU.

		3 4 5 6			
17	Promises made to me by the LA and school were kept.	3 6	7	1 2 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had two meetings for re-integration at his old school. At times the HOY forgot she had the appointment. The HOY • Actions agreed in meetings by the school are carried out. • LA didn't want to know, they made promises just to get us out of the door. School made promises of mentors, refresher and self-esteem classes, nothing happened.
18	I believe I was able to have a say in decisions that were made regarding my child's education.	3	2 6	1 4 5 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier input would have been useful. Decisions were made by anonymous people before mum and dad were allowed to say anything. • Everything is done their way. • I didn't feel I could speak. When I did I was told "they're the professionals". • They gave us two choices permanent exclusion or a school move. The other schools were not the ones I would have chosen for her. • Support from the week he got permanently excluded until they couldn't do anything until after the governor's intervention. It was a rock bottom emotionally after the permanent exclusion. More support for him would have been good.

20. a. Who was helpful/supportive for you?

- School Inclusion Officer
- EWO
- Cousin's wife (a parent governor in another school)
- SENCO
- Statementing officer
- Best Friend
- Education Officer
- Head of Year
- Deputy Head

b. What did they do that was helpful/supportive?

- Just talk to us, she's interested
- Gave us suggestions about what we might do about getting her into a school.
- Helped us write things down, suggested tactics for appeal meeting.
- Arms open to mum and child makes mum feel like they're wanted

- Gives positive information about her child
- Listened to me
- Believed me and was on my side
- Let me know that there were other options
- Accessible
- Encouraging and positive that things will get better.
- Understood my son.
- Gave moral support

Other issues

Wording derogatory when writing about incidents in which child was involved.

When mum and dad asked them to change the wording the school was very fussy about it and in report it said “wording changed at parent’s request” .

Home schooling assessment by LA. M&D apparently had a copy of the report but a different version of the report was sent to other people which contained sensitive information.

Work sent home by school

School never asked for it back. Child asked who is going to be looking at this work or marking it. Once he realised no one was going to, he said I’m not doing it then.

Pressures at home

Mother had to give up work.

Mother had to go on valium