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Dear Colleague

Welcome back and I hope you have had a good summer break.

For those of you who have attended SENCO networks, you will be aware that we are changing the way we hold meetings around the EHC Assessment.

Up until now, we have only held a meeting at the end of the process once all the advices have been gathered in where we then review the draft EHCP for discussion and consider the findings and the content. Whilst this has merit in confirming the content of the EHCP, it brings some challenges and also means that opportunities for early face to face discussion with parents and relationship building with the Assessment and Review Officer are missed.

As of now, we will hold an EHCAR decision meeting within 4 weeks of an EHCAR being submitted. At this meeting, there will be the ARO and the Educational Psychologist for your patch (excepting situations where staff are on leave when there will be cover). **Meetings will be held in your area on a set day each week in term time** and as EHCARs are submitted, they will be allocated to the next available slot. Please do contact the SEN Admin Team to find out the day and location of meetings for your school. When you submit an EHCAR, you will need to be ready to attend the meeting within 2-4 weeks of submission.

The school and parents will be invited to this EHCAR decision meeting. At this meeting, the group will together consider the evidence and make the decision to assess or not. Parents and school will be equal partners in this decision. It continues to be vital that the EHCAR is fully completed before submission as if the assessment goes ahead, that provides the core evidence from school. It also provides the framework and evidence for that decision to assess however, in this new way of working, if something is missed or isn't clear, there is the opportunity to discuss this at the EHCAR decision meeting. Currently, with the panel decision to assess, we sometimes conclude that there isn't sufficient evidence and say "no" to assessment and then further information that was missed or unclear becomes available and that decision is over-turned. We feel it will be more supportive and productive for everyone involved if that decision is made together with opportunity to confirm and clarify the information provided.

In the case where the joint decision is not to assess, the ARO and EP will be able to discuss any next steps, future options and support the school with any required SEN Support planning. Where the decision is made to assess, the ARO will be able to discuss the process face to face with parents, offer any information or reassurance and confirm who will need to provide advice and timescales for doing so. As a group, you will be able to discuss outcomes for the child / young person and these will then shape and inform the assessment. The EP will be able to arrange times and dates with you to follow up on these assessments and the group can discuss any interim support / actions / interventions required whilst the assessment takes place.

Most Local Authorities have an early planning meeting of this type and the benefits typically are that:

- 1) Parents have a face to face early discussion with the SEN Team where they can share their concerns, expectations and wishes all of which will then help the SEN Team to better support them through the process
- 2) The assessment is outcome focused with a clear steer on what the barriers are that we already understand, where we need to find out more about the child / young person's needs and what the aspirations are that we are working towards through that assessment
- 3) School have early support for children for whom they have identified SEND (whether that ultimately requires an EHCP or not) and we can signpost to other support if required
- 4) Parents are equal partners right from the decision to assess and we hope that this will reduce any anxieties or concerns that they have around the process and the LA's response.

In practice then, please continue to submit EHCARs and ensure they are as comprehensive as possible, evidence the level of need, the 2 cycles (minimum in the vast majority of cases) of the graduated response and the support / interventions already provided. Once received, SEN Admin will allocate the next available EHCAR decision meeting and will let you know when and where that is. There will no longer be a meeting after the advices have been collected. We hope that parents and school will be better supported by this early meeting and having a face to face discussion that focuses the assessment and the support at the outset.

We will discuss the meetings at SENCO networks and look forward to seeing you there! If you have any questions please contact your ARO.

Kind regards



Nikki Joyce
Head of SEN