

**PaCC Position Statement: Secondary school admission arrangements
October 2024**



This is the response of the Parent Carers Council (PaCC) to the Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) engagement exercise about secondary school arrangements in Brighton and Hove.

Introduction:

Parents are aware and concerned about the challenges related to the achievement gap and the lack of access to quality education in Brighton. However, they are frustrated by the narrow focus of discussions, of BHCC's engagement process, which seem to address only a few issues while not taking into consideration other wider issues.

This engagement exercise does not consider the needs of children with SEND accessing mainstream schools. For children with SEND, transitions are already stressful, and many struggle with crowded environments, public transport, and the overall busyness of the outside world. To date there has been no consideration as to how proposed changes will impact children with SEND risks exacerbating existing pressures, including the strain on mental health services, which are already overwhelmed.

- Many families feel decisions are being made behind closed doors, with little clarity or transparency. They call for more explicit reasoning and evidence before further changes are rushed through.

PaCC is aware of the limited co-production to date with BHCC and local authority officers in these discussions. There is a strong feeling, not only within the SEND community in Brighton & Hove but also in the wider parent community; namely that the challenges and needs of children with SEND have not been adequately considered.

- We urge BHCC to adopt a more collaborative approach with PaCC moving forward, ensuring that the voices of SEND families are included within future discussions and decision-making processes.

Travel Concerns:

The prospect of long commutes for children with SEND is a particular concern for parent carers. Many may face complex bus journeys across Brighton, with some routes taking over an hour each way. Parent carers feel this would be both unnecessary and harmful, when there maybe schools within walking distance. They highlighted that many children with SEND would struggle cognitively and emotionally with extended travel, becoming confused by unfamiliar routes, forgetting to take care of essentials like school bags over an extended period, and facing social and emotional challenges throughout the journey.

Parents worry that their children, exhausted by long commutes, will struggle to focus on homework or have any energy left for family time. Anxiety, emotional distress, and meltdowns are almost certain to follow as families struggle to manage their children's mental health on top of the increased travel burden.

PaCC are aware that children with SEND in the east of the city are already having to travel long distances to and from school, highlighting the need for this issue to become a priority for Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC).

- The current situation demonstrates the urgent need for the council to focus on reducing travel times for vulnerable children, particularly those with SEND.

Children Without an EHCP:

Parents are particularly concerned about children with SEND who do not have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP), as these children's needs are not considered in the proposed changes. Choice is vital for all children, but parent carers report that the council has stated they will only assist children with an EHCP, leaving others to manage alone. This lack of support excludes a large number of children with SEND who are not yet diagnosed or do not meet the criteria for an EHCP.

Parents are concerned that their child might need full travel assistance, due to their combined SEND/anxieties, but not be able to access it without having the reinforcement of an EHCP.

- PaCC strongly feel that these challenges must be taken into account in all future discussions and decisions.
- The system is already struggling to process EHCP applications. Children with SEND not being able to access mainstream secondary provision could risk an increase in demand for EHCPs, potentially leading to longer delays and further disadvantaging those who desperately need support.

Friendship Groups:

Another major concern for parent carers is the potential impact on children's social lives. The possibility of being sent to a school far from their friendship group is troubling for many families, as these bonds provide critical emotional support. Key friendships act as a critical transition scaffold for learners with SEND.

- Opportunity for children to build and maintain friendship is paramount for their mental health and wellbeing, it does need to be taken into account

Accessibility of Information:

Parents have expressed concerns that the format of the information, documents, and the survey provided by the council was not accessible for some parent carers. This created additional barriers for families who already face challenges in engaging with formal processes, especially within the SEND community.

- Ensuring that future communications and consultations are accessible and inclusive is crucial to allow all parents to participate meaningfully in these important discussions.

Parent Statements: Impact on Children With SEND:

“My daughter hides her anxiety in public but is often overwhelmed at home. She finds transitions into new situations incredibly difficult, and the thought of long, crowded bus journeys to a new school is already causing her distress. She suffers from anxiety and self-harms at the beginning of each school term. How will she cope with two hours of travel every day, less sleep, and being separated from her supportive friends?”

“My daughter has finally made a close group of friends, and it’s one of the main reasons she enjoys school. I’m extremely worried about the effect it will have on her if she’s separated from them under these new catchment proposals.”

“My son was separated from his friends when he moved from nursery to school, and again from infant to junior school. The anxiety and emotional distress that caused him was heart breaking, and we’re still dealing with the fallout over a year later. If he’s forced to attend a secondary school without his friends, it will be devastating for him.”

PaCC welcome any communication on any of the issues contained in this document. You can contact us by emailing PaCC at admin@paccbrighton.org.uk or by calling **01273 234862**

The Parent Carers’ Council (PaCC) is a parent-led forum, which represents parent carers with children and young people with any kind of physical disability, learning disability, complex or long-term medical/health condition, or special educational need. The group was formed to enable parent carers to work closely together to help improve services and support. It aims to help parents get more directly involved in the strategic delivery of services for disabled children in Brighton & Hove.

The forum has over 680 members. This position statement was developed through consultation with our members, our Steering Group and our partner groups: Brighton Pebbles, mASCot, T21, Amaze parent groups and befriending (PGB), Fresh Youth Perspectives, Dads Group and Children’s Hearing Services Working Group (CHSWG).

Find out more here <https://paccbrighton.org.uk/>