

PaCC Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Report – September 2025

Introduction

PaCC (Parent and Carers' Council) held a focus group on *Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)* on Thursday 18th September 2025 at Community Base, Brighton. Parent carers shared their experiences of trying to access or manage EOTAS for their children, alongside reflections on their wider educational journeys. The independent consultant leading the current EOTAS review attended the session to hear directly from families.

In addition to the focus group, parent carers were invited to provide written feedback. This report brings together contributions from both sources. It reflects the lived experiences of families in Brighton & Hove and highlights the changes needed to ensure that EOTAS provision is timely, consistent, and supportive of children and families.

1. Child's Journey - What could have been done better?

Parent carers described how gaps in early support, poor communication between services, and delays in intervention caused harm to their children.

Key themes identified:

- **Missed early intervention and poor communication**
 - Families reported being passed between services, with no joined-up planning.
 - “People and organisations are there but they are not joined.”
 - Needs were identified but not acted upon, leaving children without timely support.
- **Trauma and harm from unmet needs**
 - Several children experienced restraint, isolation, or repeated detentions in mainstream schools before EOTAS was considered.
 - One parent said their son was moved around by up to seven staff and often made to eat alone
 - These experiences left lasting trauma and, in some cases, led to mental health breakdowns and burnout
- **Lack of social opportunities**
 - While some children received tutoring or specialist input, they often had no peer interaction.
 - Parents reported regression in communication and social-emotional development due to prolonged isolation
- **Inflexibility of provision**

- Families described lessons cancelled at short notice, or hours fixed in ways that did not take account of medical appointments or children's fluctuating needs
- **Inequity and inconsistency**
 - Some families felt EOTAS was a "lottery," with children in similar situations receiving very different levels of support

2. Parent Carer Journey – What could have been done better?

Alongside the impact on children, parent carers described significant strain on their own lives and wellbeing.

Key themes identified:

- **Battles with bureaucracy and lack of accountability**
 - Parents described being passed from service to service without clear responsibility.
 - *"There is an issue of accountability; who is checking from the LA that money is spent rightly?"*
 - Complaints were often dismissed or ignored, leaving families without recourse.
- **Stress, trauma, and financial impact**
 - Parents reported PTSD, loss of employment, and severe financial pressures due to paying for private tutors and diagnoses
 - The cost of having a child out of school, both financial and emotional, was described as "often overlooked and still hanging over us."
- **Not being listened to or blamed**
 - Parents felt blamed for attendance issues or behaviour, with threats of fines rather than understanding of needs
 - One parent said: *"Listening to parents can make a huge difference - otherwise the result is a very traumatised child."*
- **Positive but inconsistent relationships**
 - Some individual staff within services were described as caring and supportive, but families emphasised that this depended entirely on the person rather than the system

3. Experiences of Trying to Access or Receiving EOTAS

Parent carers shared mixed experiences of EOTAS, with many reporting significant barriers to access and inconsistency in delivery.

Key themes identified:

- **Unclear and inequitable processes**
 - Families described a lack of information about what EOTAS is, how to apply, and what level of provision should be expected.
 - Some were wrongly told it was only available for medical needs
 - *“It’s not a fair system... it’s a lottery.”*
- **Delays and gaps in provision**
 - Even after EOTAS was agreed, families reported long delays before packages were put in place.
 - In some cases, agreed hours were never delivered, or provision stopped without explanation
- **Issues with tutoring**
 - Families raised concerns about frequent changes of tutors, lack of SEND or trauma training, and tutors not being given adequate background information about the child
 - Parents also reported a lack of formal feedback and inconsistent quality, with some tutors showing little commitment.
- **Isolation and lack of peer interaction**
 - Children on EOTAS often spent all their time with adults, with no structured opportunities to be with peers
 - Parents suggested that the Local Authority should facilitate local groups for children in EOTAS
- **Positive examples**
 - Where provision was flexible, consistent, and tailored, children thrived. Examples included:
 - Consistent tutors who built trust over time
 - Use of personal budgets to create balanced packages combining academic, social, and physical activities
 - Access to the Central Hub, where staff were described as skilled and empathetic

Practical Considerations and Parent Suggestions:

Parent carers also highlighted a number of practical issues that affect how EOTAS works in reality. These included:

- **Length and review of EOTAS packages**
 - Families felt that EOTAS often seems temporary, with no clear timescale. This makes it difficult to plan provision.
 - *Suggestion:* Agree EOTAS for a defined period (e.g. by term) with a review date set.
- **Managing personal budgets**

- Parents described stress when advance payments are required by providers but LA payments are made monthly or delayed.
- *Suggestion:* Ensure termly payments are agreed up front to avoid financial strain.
- **Transparency about available provision**
 - Parents reported having to “start from scratch” to research activities, with no central list.
 - *Suggestion:* Publish a directory of trusted providers, activities, and alternative provision options in the local area, with indicative costs.
- **Clarity on tuition hours**
 - Families reported inconsistent guidance on how many hours form a standard EOTAS package.
 - *Suggestion:* Provide transparency about expected minimum hours by age/stage, including the threshold needed to maintain Child Benefit eligibility.
- **Updating EHCPs**
 - Outdated EHCPs were seen as a barrier to securing appropriate EOTAS packages.
 - *Suggestion:* EHCPs should always be updated to reflect EOTAS status, with outcomes aligned to the provision being requested.
- **Examples of good practice**
 - Parents felt it would be helpful to have model EHCPs and school documents showing how EOTAS provision can meet outcomes.
 - *Suggestion:* Include case examples as appendices to the EOTAS policy.
- **Free School Meals (FSM)**
 - Some families were unsure how FSM eligibility applied in EOTAS.
 - *Suggestion:* Provide clear links and guidance in the EOTAS policy so eligible children do not miss out.
- **Transport to activities**
 - Parents described confusion and inconsistency, with some receiving transport through schools or Home to School Transport (HTST) while others were blocked.
 - *Suggestion:* Establish a consistent, city-wide approach agreed across schools, SEND services, HTST, and parent carers.

Summary and Next Steps

The experiences shared by parent carers highlight both the challenges and the potential of EOTAS in Brighton & Hove.

Key messages:

- Children's needs are often unmet until crisis point, leading to trauma and long-term harm.
- Parent carers face exhausting battles with bureaucracy, lack of accountability, and financial strain.
- Access to EOTAS is inconsistent, unclear, and inequitable.
- Provision, once agreed, is frequently delayed or delivered inconsistently.
- Children on EOTAS need opportunities for social interaction and peer connection.
- When EOTAS is delivered flexibly, consistently, and with empathy, it can enable children to thrive.

Parent carers also put forward clear, practical suggestions for improvement:

- EOTAS agreements should be set for a defined period (e.g. by term) with review dates.
- Personal budgets should be paid termly in advance to reduce financial strain on families.
- A local directory of trusted providers, activities, and costs should be published to increase transparency.
- Clear guidance is needed on the expected minimum tuition hours for different ages/stages, including Child Benefit thresholds.
- EHCPs must be updated to reflect EOTAS status, with outcomes linked to provision.
- The EOTAS policy should include examples of good practice, links to FSM guidance, and consistent transport arrangements across the city.

PaCC will continue to work with Brighton & Hove City Council and other partners to ensure these insights shape the ongoing review of EOTAS. Families' voices must be central to the process, so that future provision is transparent, equitable, and focused on the needs of children and young people.

PaCC welcome any communication in relation to this report. You can contact us by emailing admin@paccbrighton.org.uk.

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, SEMH (Social, Emotional, Mental Health) issues or special educational need. The group was formed in 2009 to enable parent carers to work closely together to help improve services and support for themselves and their family. It aims to help parents get more directly involved in the strategic delivery of services for disabled children in Brighton & Hove and now has over 720 signed up members.