

PaCC Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP) Report – September 2025

INTRODUCTION

PaCC is a parent-led carer forum which represents parents and carers of children and young people, up to 25, with additional needs and disabilities who live in Brighton & Hove.

Brighton & Hove City Council are in the process of creating Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP) guidance. This OAIP guidance highlights the inclusive practices expected to be embedded across all mainstream schools to ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND but without an EHCP, can access learning and feel a sense of belonging.

The OAIP guidance does not prescribe specific provision or support that schools must or should deliver. Instead, it offers practical guidance for teachers and school leaders on inclusive practice. The guidance aligns closely with the city's Principles of Belonging and is designed to support whole-school approaches that foster inclusion and equity.

Developed through extensive co-production between professionals, parent carers, and the local authority, OAIP aims to make inclusion a consistent, everyday reality in schools. It focuses on providing practical help to teachers, building confidence in inclusive classroom practice, and ensuring pupils experience genuine belonging.

The OAIP guidance will be trialled for a year in Brighton & Hove schools and adapted in response to feedback from teachers, SENCOs, parent carers, and children and young people (CYP). The evaluation will explore whether CYP experience improved access to learning and an increased sense of belonging. Insights from this process will inform a final version that reflects what works in practice.

PaCC fully supports the aims of the OAIP guidance and recognises the value of this co-produced approach. However, parent carers continue to raise concerns about whether schools currently the capacity, resources, and training have to deliver inclusive practice effectively. Staff shortages, funding pressures, and high workloads make it difficult for schools to provide the support they aspire to offer.

Conversations will continue between PaCC, schools, the local authority, and other partners about how these barriers can be overcome or reduced. PaCC is committed to working collaboratively to identify solutions that are realistic, sustainable, and genuinely improve inclusion for children and young people, while providing challenge when needed to ensure commitments translate into meaningful change.

NATIONAL CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

PaCC recognises that the development of Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP) in Brighton & Hove sits within a national context of potential SEND reform and wider changes in education policy.

While the OAIP guidance does not specify what provision or support must be in place, its focus on inclusive practice remains highly relevant regardless of national changes. It provides a practical resource for teachers, helping them understand barriers to learning and identify inclusive strategies to support pupils in the classroom.

PaCC acknowledges the pressures schools face, including staff capacity, workload, and funding challenges, and will continue to work collaboratively to identify realistic and sustainable ways of embedding inclusive practice across all schools.

This work takes place against a backdrop of potentially significant national changes to disability benefits, SEND policy, and education legislation. Parent carers have serious concerns about the potential impact these changes could have on inclusive practice in schools.

PaCC will be monitoring developments closely to ensure the voices of parent carers remain central to local implementation. We will also share concerns and feedback with the Co-Chairs of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF), who meet regularly with the Department for Education. Even without national policy changes, local OAIP success depends on adequate funding, stronger accountability in the SEND system, training, and staffing levels in schools. PaCC will continue to work in partnership to ensure the OAIP remains a practical and evolving tool that supports schools in embedding inclusion and belonging, rather than becoming an aspirational document.

FINDINGS

1) What is working / what has worked to support your child at school?

Relationships and Belonging

Parent carers described relationships as the foundation for inclusion. Children thrived when they had a “person” in school who was safe, consistent, and available and when they had a clear base to go to if needed. This sense of security was further supported when both children and parents knew exactly who to contact for help.

Peer connections were also vital. Several parents spoke about the importance of maintaining existing friendships across classes, trips, and group activities, with one describing friends as “*friend armour for transitions*” that made moving between year groups or schools less daunting.

A recurring theme was the need for children to be “seen” beyond their masking behaviours. One parent said, “*It’s not enough to see the surface. You have to acknowledge the person behind the mask.*” Recognition and being heard were essential to building trust.

Smaller school communities, or schools that created “small school” environments within larger sites, were praised for fostering belonging. Staff consistency was repeatedly identified as essential: “*Leadership must get it to enable belonging. If leaders don’t understand, staff can’t embed it.*”

Understanding Needs and Flexibility

Parents valued teachers who believed in their children’s potential, particularly those who were neurodivergent or dyslexic. Proactive approaches worked best: “*Don’t ask a child in distress what they need, anticipate it.*” Empathy was described as “*key, and it can’t be faked.*”

Examples of flexible approaches included:

- Adjusting food arrangements for sensory or preference needs.
- Offering forest/nature school, movement breaks, or interest-based clubs as part of the school day.
- Creating quieter spaces and alternative navigation routes around large secondary schools.

When children’s interests were embedded into learning, engagement improved significantly. Parents wanted schools to see these as legitimate curriculum pathways, not “extras” or rewards.

Communication

Open, regular, and responsive communication between home and school was repeatedly linked to better outcomes. Parents also wanted to see consistent communication between staff in the same school. As one parent explained: *“It’s no use if the SENCO agrees an adjustment but the supply teacher hasn’t been told.”*

Where communication was strong, parents felt listened to and could work in partnership with the school. In contrast, delays or dismissive responses left families feeling excluded from decision-making.

Staff, Training, and Leadership

Parents valued staff with lived experience of SEND, saying this led to more understanding and practical responses. Training priorities identified by parents included:

- Communication and speech/language needs.
- Building an inclusive culture and sense of belonging.
- Reflective practice and peer support for staff.

Parents stressed that training was only effective if matched by leadership that understood and prioritised inclusion. They also raised concerns that even the best strategies failed without enough staff to deliver them.

Resources and Physical Environment

Normalising sensory tools like fidget toys, wobble cushions, and ear defenders for all pupils reduced stigma. Parents also suggested:

- Softer, simpler uniforms (no ties or blazers).
- Sensory adaptations to canteens and alternative quiet spaces at breaktimes.
- More navigable environments in large secondary schools.

Mechanisms to gather pupil feedback were seen as valuable, but only if acted upon.

Mentoring and Staff Support Roles

Learning mentors, especially when consistent over time, were highlighted as transformative for building trust. Support during transitions, reflection time, and preparation for changes were all valued.

Provision and Practices

Alternative provision, when staffed by skilled, dedicated staff rather than used as cover, was cited as highly effective. Sensory strategies were most successful when delivered by experienced staff who understood the child's needs. Transition planning worked best when all staff read and acted on provided information.

- 2) Can you talk about a time when things went well, or were better than at other times?

Flexibility and Emotional Safety

Parents described better experiences when schools relaxed rigid rules, reduced pressure, and took an individualised approach. Humour, fairness, and avoiding punitive measures made a notable difference: *“Not spotlighting, gaslighting, or punishing means my child can relax and focus on learning.”*

Opportunities and Inclusion

Inclusive practice meant adapting opportunities rather than excluding children. Parents gave examples of adjusted leadership roles like *“head girl”*, ensuring clubs ran during the school day, and adapting the wider curriculum so children didn't miss out due to attendance or behaviour policies. One parent said, *“Prom should never be used as a punishment.”*

Communication and Relationships

Trust between parents and staff was vital. Parents appreciated when they were believed and not blamed, and when schools worked alongside them to find solutions. Positive examples included excellent support from school nurses and proactive SENCOs who understood funding options and advocated for the child.

Staff and Environment

Pastoral staff were described as “essential and undervalued.” Smaller class sizes, smaller schools, and strong teamwork among staff made inclusion easier.

Transitions and Consistency

Effective support included involvement from the Social Communication Resource team in Year 6–7 transitions, legal and supported part-time timetables for reintegration, and maintaining relationships with trusted adults from earlier school years. Losing such support during a school move was described as *“devastating.”*

Support Tools and Adaptations

Visual timetables, regulation tools available in class, and blended learning when attendance was difficult all helped. Parents wanted sensory tools like ear defenders and fidgets to be available without the need for a formal SEN label.

Specialist Provision and Services

Access to alternative provision such as Riding for the Disabled, well-developed care plans created with health professionals, and psychological safety measures (e.g., consent for information-sharing) were also highlighted as good practice.

- 3) What are the barriers to some children having their needs met at school currently?

Relationships and Attitudes

Parents cited poor relationships between school staff, professionals, and families as a major barrier. Experiences of stigma, blame, and everyday discrimination left families feeling alienated. A lack of empathy and listening by staff was often experienced by parent carers.

Understanding and Knowledge

Gaps in recognising masking, outdated teaching approaches, and insufficient ND training were raised repeatedly. Parents also noted that some SENCOs lacked knowledge of funding routes and governors lacked SEND training. Teachers who were already overwhelmed and unsupported found it harder to adapt for diverse needs.

Systemic and Structural Barriers

Parents reported that time pressures, funding shortages, and staffing gaps would limit the ability to deliver OAIP. There were concerns about a lack of accountability for school leaders regarding SEND provision, and about punitive cultures prioritising results, uniform rules, and attendance over connection.

Provision and Practice

Some schools failed to take action on reasonable adjustments, didn't explain available tools and support to children, or ignored broad neurodivergent profiles. Parents said school systems often didn't allow for alternative learning approaches or adaptable teaching styles.

Equity and Inclusion Gaps

Lack of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the curriculum, and a lack of understanding of

the unique challenges faced by neurodivergent students contributed to exclusion.

Co-Production and Representation

Parents wanted more lived-experience voices involved in designing school systems and policies. They reported that professionals were sometimes reluctant to admit when they didn't know something.

Technology and Adaptation

Reliance on handwriting and spelling, rather than assistive technology, was seen as outdated. Useful tools were often available but not used.

Government and Policy Issues

Parents expressed frustration that national government was not listening to lived experience. They suggested adapting NHS Oliver McGowan training for education staff to improve understanding and inclusion.

SUMMARY

- Strong, consistent relationships and a sense of belonging are central to effective OAIP.
- When a school's ethos is already inclusive, having an OAIP guidance would be transformative.
- When behaviour policies are rigid, or inclusion is seen as an optional extra rather than a core value, it will impact on how effective the OAIP guidance is.
- The ethos and culture within each school, including behaviour policies, will inform how successful the OAIP guidance will be.
- Flexible, proactive strategies that are neuroaffirmative and trauma-informed help children feel safe, valued, and able to learn.
- Communication, within schools and between school and home, is a key success factor.
- Current barriers are as much about systemic and attitudinal issues as they are about resources.
- National policy changes could impact on OAIP so PaCC, schools, BHCC, and other stakeholders need to continue working together to reduce the risk of this happening.
- PaCC will continue to work collaboratively with partners, while providing challenge when needed, to ensure OAIP delivers real change for children and families.

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.