

Consultation on: Draft Children & Young Peoples Plan 2010-13 October 2009

Consultation with parents & carers from across Oxfordshire

Methodology

The consultation was carried out through October 2009, using various formats, including telephone interviews, face to face interviews, email survey and groups, focussing on the 3 core priority areas in the draft plan. The comments in italics are specific quotes made by parents/carers either individually or in groups. This report is divided into two parts: the first is from parents across the county from vulnerable/marginalised/ disadvantaged groups, the second is from Oxfordshire Family Voices – a parent-led forum for parents of disabled children and young people.

PART 1: parents/carers

155 parents, of which: 40 single parent families and 60 two parent families, with approx 300 C&YP between them – fairly equally spilt between early years, primary, secondary and college ages. They are from across the county and include a range of urban and rural parents/carers. Their circumstances were varied, but included:

Parents with Child protection issues (domestic violence, drug and alcohol, mental health, violent behaviour)	15
Young parents	15
Fathers – with drug / alcohol/ mental health/teenage issues	9
Asian	12
Pakistani	13
Bangladeshi	2
Middle eastern	12
Moroccan	8
Afro Caribbean	11
Portuguese	1
Polish	5
Parents of children with Autism, dyspraxia and autism	15
Parents of disabled children	22
Many on benefits/low income	

a) Safeguarding

- **More activities for teenage children, that are free/subsidised/owned by themselves:**

“For communities to feel safe I think for our community- the Afro Caribbean community – we need to create positive role models – it would be great if we could set up a mentoring programme that young black children could be mentored with positive role models in the working world – so they can raise

and broaden their aspirations. There is a Saturday school that we have but funding is difficult – it is very popular, children and young people go there to do homework, raise achievement, learn more about Afro Caribbean history. Need to get the whole community to embrace each other – get the kids to stop hanging round the shops and intimidating the girls and people on their own – and get the youth centre open much more – the youths use the CDI but they only run if we can get funding whereas if the youth centre was open and used more they would have some where to go, do sport, raise aspirations”. (Afro Caribbean Mum, Central area)

“Kids need somewhere to go that they can just chill, all they have round my way is the main road, there are plenty of community centre’s and youth centre’s that are hardly ever open – they aren’t used to their full potential. If they had these places open over the weekend they could run their own cafes, and their mates could come, the local CPO, and youth workers could drop in and build relations between all the different groups, services could drop into them rather than the kids trying to work out when and where services run – like free condoms/ support if they hate school/ bullying etc” (Father of 2 with drug and alcohol issues, Central area)

“Well there’s bugger all to do around here, the youth club keeps changing the age limit, the only activity put on for my 13 year old is a church club on a Friday – if they had some free or cheap activities over the weekend the kids could go somewhere and get a bit of independence – then we wouldn’t argue all weekend and fall out, especially now the winters coming – I’m dreading it. My husband cant cope so he goes the pub, and I’m left arguing – why isn’t there any support services at the weekend? Everything costs” (Mum experiencing DV and alcoholism, Southern area)

“Our community worry about what they hear on the news about gun crime – and how much are guns available up North and will it spread down here – if schools and communities really want to keep children and young people feeling safe and happy they should have much more youth centres available – we don’t understand why they say (the county council) they want to help young people but we aren’t seeing it? We need more activities that overlap with school and community – school could then get involved and help thy kids” (Asian/Bangladeshi/Middle eastern/Moroccan parents across Oxfordshire)

“It would be great if children and young people had places they could go to at the weekend within their community that doesn’t cost any money – everything round here costs a fortune. Hanging out on the streets is not a good example for the kids growing up, it ends in trouble”.(Ex drug using Mum, Central area).

“Its like during the week the kids can go to all these activities and clubs but then the weekend comes and nothing – they just sit there, unless I can get some money to go out? Why aren’t children centre’s open at weekends, and youth centre’s, free leisure activity, sports to let some of their energy out? (Mum, Southern Area)

“Our teenage community need more activities – physical activities that the youth service could provide, they just sit at home in front of the computer on the internet getting all this information on the internet about gun and knife crime, there is a centre here but its not used as much as it could be. They need cricket, snooker, sport, get them more involved in developing their own project that they could own. The summer programmes here were fantastic – thoroughly enjoyed it could some of those things keep going through the year? We could use the youth clubs to encourage health eating and many other things” (Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Moroccan parents in Central area).

▪ **Build and invest in relationships within our communities**

“We feel safe when there are lots of familiar faces on the street, lollipop lady makes us feel secure / teacher relationships makes us feel safe, local links with the CPO’s” (Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Moroccan, Central area).

“Drugs is a big worry - the community can play a part schools and communities could play an active role and report the dealers and sellers to the CPO to keep communities safe. We feel it is a big problem and it starts from school –when we collect our kids we see boys and girls smoking outside the school. I’m so worried I’m thinking of moving my child from there. School doesn’t have the power to implement the rules – police don’t have enough time to police the children” (Asian and Bangladeshi parents across the county)

“I feel that it is important to find a balance between the schools and the community it serves where both the schools feel they have the support of its parents and local community, and that the parents and local community feel involved and valued by the school. Often parents are overlooked or uninvolved, they feel that the Governing body of the school is made up of unapproachable individuals who have seemingly lost touch with the real issues in the community that affect the pupils and parents of the school. To ensure that both children and parents feel safe and happy the school needs to look at the wider picture that impacts on the child and its family, the school needs to look to the “WHOLE PERSON” wellbeing, after all a happy child is a safe child, and if, as parents, we see our children going into school happy, we are confident they are safe. Schools need to communicate better with its parents and its children, they need to listen and to watch, to love and cherish our children, to involve the school and our children more into the community, in fact to go back to the “Base facts” to ease off on the academic achievement of its school and concentrate more on learning through fun and nature. To get more of the local community residents to become more involved in the school. Schools need to teach children the basic values they need throughout life that are so often forgotten, the most basic of these is “respect.” If our children have respect for themselves and others it sets a good foundation for the rest of their lives”. (Kinship carer, Southern area)

“My kids don’t always attend school (secondary school), I think that is because they don’t have a teacher that they could go to if there was a problem – they only see their form teacher for 15 minutes of the day so they don’t feel like they know them. If it was possible for them to go to teachers if

they weren't happy and had a problem then my kids would attend more".
(Dad, Northern area)

"No quick answers but I feel that being well informed helps us to feel safe and gives us an element of control. What we don't know about we can't have a voice or an opinion about. Communication is key in all areas. Personally I'd feel more confident that everyone's needs are being met when the 'professionals' consider and respect the views of all in the community".
(Kinship carer, Northern area)

"When I went to my school about my son and my worries over his drug use, they didn't do anything about that, or put me in touch with people who could help, they just said that I needed to make sure he attended school otherwise I may get into trouble. The reason he doesn't go is because he is caught up with this gang and keeps fighting the Asian gangs, and he uses cannabis all the time – I was really honest and told the school but they just looked at me as if I was worthless. He doesn't feel safe at school, I had to ring the police to get the special constables to be around school at the end of the day by the school gates – the school didn't do any of that – its always a battle for families like mine to be taken seriously. If secondary schools could be friendlier and knock down some of those barriers that make us feel like we shouldn't be going to them for help, life would be easier" (Mum, Central area))

"I think if the school respect you and listen to you as a carer then the children feel valued and safe too. The school really wants to be a part of the community. I have got an excellent relationship with Head of Year – but it has taken time – so teachers are our main point of contact so they need time built into their day to give the time. My foster child has improved at school since this relationship has been developed with the teacher". (Foster carer, Southern area)

"I wish communities and schools would actually see that they often call the victim of bullying the bully – when they are just retaliating to weeks of torment from another child – my son is a bit different – in how he dresses and what he is interested in – since he has been in secondary – 2 years – I have been called into school at least once a month about his behaviour, but he has been bullied by these kids since primary – but no one passed that information on and now my son hits back. If schools could make more time to communicate with parents and children then I am sure kids would feel happier – now my son has to bury his fear and is scratching his arms – I am a dad who is the main carer as his mum doesn't like being a traditional mum – so I have to go to school to deal with the problems and I feel I am always the one being blamed for being a rubbish parent".(Dad, Southern area)

I'd like people in schools who can be there to listen to children if they're upset about bullying ... School should try harder and teachers should get more involved ... There needs to be more supervision in the playground.. there are corners where no-one can see what is going on ... Information for parents so they can see the signs and know what to look out for (Parents in Central area)

“There’s a lack of cultural awareness, like teachers using insensitive language towards pupils. Intimidating teachers and head teachers (towards both parents and children) who are dismissive of parents’ and children’s views. Abuse of power by teachers. “Invisible” head teachers who spend most of the time in their office. Staff who make parents feel like a nuisance and/or are judgmental. Lack of understanding of children’s individual needs e.g. mental health, behavioural issues, learning disabilities”. (Dad, Central area)

▪ **Good communication will lead to early and quick support**

Approachable teachers, good communication & accessible staff (particularly head teachers), e.g. by text message, email or phone info on support services and how to use them (Parents across Oxfordshire).

Better confidentiality in schools, for young people in the looked after system.

“Me and my partner were having trouble and we were both getting violent, my health visitor was brilliant because I know her and she knows the family she got us an appointment straight away for the GP and he had some meetings with us to talk through the problems. The good thing was that I could talk to her and tell her there was a problem early on, and then she did something straight away. We both really want the same things to be happy and our kids to be happy but we are skint and my older 2 are his step children, and he has his own issues so in our house there’s always a problem. Knowing there’s someone in our community who can help, and makes us feel as if that is her job to help, makes things so much easier” (Mum, Southern area)

“Someone being around to discuss matters with, face to face not an answering machine or a receptionist telling you someone will get back you” (Young parent, Central area).

“Lots of my kids friends have really hard times and suffer real mental health but it doesn’t seem to get dealt with in school, so they need workers in the community to befriend them on their own terms – obviously with a bit of give and take, its so sad, all they do is smoke weed, or get drunk, get in trouble with the police (Mum, Central area).

b) Raising achievement

▪ **Celebrate and reward and value children and young peoples other skills – not just academic achievement.**

“Forgotten how to be kids! We are training them for SATS, they need to learn outdoors, encourage more people from the community to come in and show their skills. More practical learning (cooking / gardening) in small groups and outside spaces” (Mum, Central area)

“You can’t be generic, all children and young people are individual, their experiences are different, their backgrounds are different – they need teachers/youth workers/ to understand them individually and celebrate their differences – and to build a learning programme that is relevant to them – there is too much emphasis put on the standard subjects – even in primary –

they don't get to show their other skills – schools do star awards for all the naughty kids but the average kids get left” (Parents across Oxfordshire).

“It would be great if children didn't have to misbehave to get rewarded – my daughter is average – and never gets special roles to play in assembly – or awards. I spoke to school that I was concerned she may have dyslexia – but I feel because she is quiet and no trouble they just left her – I had to get a private assessment done two years later before they did anything – and it is her final year now before she goes to secondary – if they had smaller groups and really go to know the children surely that would raise their achievement”. (Parent, Southern area).

“It seems like everyone's been put into groups, not just racial groups, it like 'you're this way because of that and this way because of this', so people get put into sections – there must be something that could improve this and make communities real communities again”. (Mum, Northern area)

“I know they need their maths and English and all those boring subjects, but my daughter loves her drama, I just wish they could celebrate the fact that she is good at that, something that gives them a sparkle, get the kids a bit more involved rather than being told my daughter isn't doing well in her compulsory subjects”. (Mum, Northern area)

“As a Carer, Parent and Grand parent I recognise how individual each of our children are. It is important that everyone involved with decisions realise this and don't make decisions that exclude any of the young people. I am only too aware that setting a standard beyond the reach of some young people will mean that they can't even engage with the learning as they feel they have no chance to succeed. Each young person will have skills that need to be nurtured in order for them to feel they can achieve. For some the steps will need to be small but the more they feel pride in their contribution the more they will want to try something a little more challenging. Saying that all young people should achieve X amount of Grade A to C in their exams will be beyond some of them. We need targets that recognise the strengths and weaknesses of our individual children. The more we encourage them to achieve, the more we can progress them on to bigger and better challenges. Some of our young people are bright and have the capacity to achieve academically but their early life experiences may have affected their ability to conform in the way schools or communities expect. We need to be tolerant of their disabilities and set clear boundaries to channel their skills into achieving the best results they can. It isn't easy managing disruptive behavior in school but clear guidelines that are understood by teachers and pupils will have a greater effect than a knee jerk response from an angry teacher” (Foster Carer Northern area).

▪ **Finances**

“I've said this to my social worker many a time – parents hold their children back because they don't have the money to take them to experience different things. Services spend their money on things we don't see the benefits of, I wanted to take my kids to theatre, museums and on day trips, but I never had

any money or vouchers to do this – it would have been so educational for them and we could have learnt together, I could have told them about history, and had fun together. Finances are so important to give kids opportunities and new experiences, I just didn't have the money". (Dad, Central area).

"It's the little details that could make things so less stressful, like knowing where to go for information or if you have any worries or problems, if the teachers said hello to you and made eye contact-maybe I would ask her but she is so busy. I really want to get a job and do something but I am stuck in this rut of school runs and income support, I should take my kids to after school clubs and stuff but I spend all my money. It would be good to go some where locally because I never go further than my local area and I don't have the internet. I don't even know how to do my kids homework sometime for secondary – I can't help her so she just thinks I'm stupid now. Classes that the primary school could run for mums and dads like me on how to use a computer, or budgeting, or just to say what help is out there" (Mum, Northern area).

"The Oxfordshire Learning Platform when it's inaccessible to parents could help but the reliance on ICT excludes families like ours in poverty who don't have access to it. ICT brings additional pressure on parents who may not be familiar with it" (Parents with safeguarding issues)

▪ **Inclusion and communication**

"How they deal with difficult children – my son is difficult at school and they think something maybe wrong with him, so I give them the sticker chart that I use at home – for some reason the school wont use it and they just keep putting him on the thinking chair – he doesn't like that so I asked again could they try my system – but they were very nice to me but never tried it – so one big thing they could do is take me, as a young parent, a bit more seriously. He would be much happier if he was taught in a small class, with the most experienced teacher – but he seems to always have new teachers who just think he is naughty" (Southern area, young parent).

"Its important to include children with special needs, my son has autism and he is in mainstream, it would be good for schools to take the time to have small group discussions around the different children's needs so that the kids in his class understand and he knows the fact that he is different is out in the open, his teachers seem scared of it, as if they don't know what to do – so then my son becomes scared of it" (Dad, Central area).

"Black parents rarely have a voice that is listened to and have many issues navigating their way through school systems to support their children" (Dad, Southern area).

"If there is a problem with children's development and progress than tell us parents sooner rather than later, I got told on the last week of term at the end of foundation stage that he was thought to be really further behind than the other children. It was another mum going in that told me he couldn't cope on the carpet sessions. I think that teacher wasn't interested in children who

didn't learn as quick, she said we needed to do more at home – it was our fault!! Now he has a different teacher who is fantastic – she sits him next to her, asks him questions that he can answer during group time and he now actually speaks in class – it is such a relief for me and my son” (Mum, Southern area).

Big need within Wood Farm for parents who haven't been to school in the UK, there are a lot of our children that have a special learning need, and the school tells us to do more work with them at home but we cant speak English and so we cant help our children, homework clubs would really help as our children are falling behind and looking for other groups to support them, they underachieve because they don't get the back up support. They feel the special needs support for their community is not very good, their children aren't being identified soon enough, and they have to battle with the education system – and you need to know the system to get through it – (Pakistan/ Bangladeshi parents, Central area)

The park is always used for football .. worry about playschemes where there are children aged from 5- 16. 16 year olds have a much greater awareness of sexuality than my 5 year old.. they shouldn't be in together. (Parents in Central area)

c) Narrowing the Gap

“For me it is about the community, being more supportive of each other and having things in common. It would be good if we could have meetings in schools with teachers more regularly and if I could actually feel like they wanted me to be more involved, I don't feel as if they want the parents to bother them (Parent, Southern area).

“If we could rebuild links between the old folks and the young people I think that would benefit everyone in their community – build respect up again and get all the professionals that work in that area to promote that as well – we may have some hope of improving things – it is everyone's responsibility. If professionals talked to each other more and stayed in their jobs for a longer amount of time them it would feel like they knew their community and understood the issues. Otherwise there will always be a wall of silence and invisible barriers, of suspicion and people judging each other (Afro Caribbean Mum, Central area).

“In school my kids are already labelled as the naughty kids because they cant sit still for very long – if they could do more active stuff and there wasn't so much sitting down and writing he could show that he is really good with his hands like his dad, he can put bikes back together and everything like that. But there is nowhere in our school that you can do that so he just feels like he is the naughty kid. And I feel like the naughty parent” (Parent, Southern area).

If I could get in touch with my social worker and get her to meet my son's teacher it would be a real relief because he keeps getting into trouble but it is because of what me and his mum used to do, not because he is a bad kid. If we could all sit down once in a while I would feel so much better because at

the moment its like a pressure cooker, my health visitor knows one thing, my social worker never rings me back, the teacher keeps calling me in after school to say he bit someone – I dread picking him up! All the mums and dads stare at me because some know I'm an e-junkie. If we could have it so that professionals were out and about a bit more, and we could get hold of them instead of being in meetings or doing the paper work, then it would be a normal part of school life, seeing the health visitor chatting to my sons teacher, and seeing the social worker visit the school – instead its like some huge secret that I should be ashamed of – think how my boy must feel (Father with drug addiction history, Southern area).

We have to encourage ALL of our children/young people to engage with education in whatever form is appropriate to them as individuals. I realise that the curriculum has to be followed but it can be set at the speed suitable for some of our slow learners. Some will struggle with being identified as Looked After Children and resent being singled out in school. We have to find ways to increase their self respect and for them to feel valued. For some 'being in care' is a stigma that they carry and we need to find ways to help them to see it as a positive and not a negative. I hear too many people who see our young people misbehaving say 'oh they are in care we expect this behaviour from them'. It isn't their fault that they are in care and we should stress this to everyone. Introducing them to people who have overcome some adversity to achieve in school and go on to having a useful and happy adult life is important. Children need role models that they respect and admire to give them the incentive to overcome their own shortcomings. They need to see the connection between their education and their ability to gain employment. When we talk to our young people about what they want as adults they will usually talk about a nice car, the best mobile phone, all things that cost money. They are usually able to recognise that this means a well paid job and we need to show them the connection between a good education and qualifications in order to achieve this. I find that some young people who struggle in school can be reached by involving them in sports where they can achieve individually or by learning to be a team player (Kinship Carer, Southern area).

PART 2: parents/carers of disabled C&YP

42 parents from across Oxfordshire in varying economic circumstances including:

- 9 African mothers
- 3 Afro Caribbean Mothers
- 1 Somalia Mother
- 29 White British

a) Safeguarding

Many disabled children cannot speak, and as they travel to school in taxis, parents can feel very uninvolved and unaware of what is going on. Therefore all schools should have a duty to welcome parents into school to observe their children. Two way mirrors and speaker systems could be installed in every door, so that parents can view the class without disturbing the children (which is usually cited as the reason for refusing parental access). Alternatively

classroom webcams could be installed (cheap and easy solution) and parents could view these on school property. (Parents from across the county)

“Many of our families within the African community struggle to understand the system for our children in school and we don’t understand why certain decisions are made that our children don’t get statements when we try to speak to the county council, we have real trouble getting through and when we do its difficult to get concrete answers” (African Mum, Central area).

Special school playgrounds sometimes resemble prison exercise yards because of the lack of interaction, lack of suitable activities, children just wandering aimlessly. Children should have access to a large range of appropriate play equipment and there should be plenty of staff to interact with them. Children should have play, interaction and OT IEP goals as well as classroom goals. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

“Physical restraint of disabled children should not be accepted. In cases where staff are using restraint, an expert should be brought in to assess how best to manage/improve the behaviour so that physical restraint is not required”. (Mum, Central area)

“All community playgrounds should have a variety of equipment suitable for all children. All should be enclosed high self-locking gates so children cannot easily escape”. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

“Better discipline of students, to enable students to learn to the best of their ability without distractions. Clamp down on swearing. It is unpleasant to hear and not necessary to punctuate every sentence with it. (I wouldn’t employ them) however staff appear to accept it as the norm, not challenge it. Need to create self respect and respect for others, self worth and develop social skill”. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

“Police need a better understanding and knowledge if dealing with someone with special needs”. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

“Would like to think that everyone is safe to play outside, with or without special needs, but not confident”. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Continuity of staff, approach of staff, joined up working would all help (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Better education about special needs to a) staff, to enable a united and supportive approach, more consistent and active response to reports of bullying – ACTION. No point in reporting it if it is not acted upon. Demoralising. b) students – to encourage understanding and empathy rather than ridicule and teasing. Engender much greater positive attitudes. Praise success rather than be embarrassed about it .we’re very good at ‘knocking’ achievement. Support special needs children, make adjustments for them and encourage and shelter them. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Much more support for those with special needs on the Autistic Spectrum. There is nobody teaching social skills or over viewing: nobody monitoring, even at a distance, nor an expert to call upon when issues arise. Comprehensive multi-disciplinary help please. More worthy medical supervision, if only an annual visit, or an expert one can call on. GPs are great, but not A.S. experts. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

“These children have mental health issues, but nothing is happening to help them. Please help them with intervention....earlier than later, before it becomes supremely urgent”. (Parents of C&YP on ASD across Oxfordshire)

b) Raising Achievement

Lead by example. Encourage self respect and respect for others. Encourage self worth. Need to know that they aim high for themselves. Encourage self motivation as well as external motivation. Enthusiastic, supportive and positive staff. Allow them to feel secure in their surroundings. To be valued, and their contribution valued. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Allow some sensible risk taking... health and safety gone mad. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Teach them to take responsibility for things. The Curriculum should include more emphasis on these life skills. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Schools and community need to recognise and appreciate the differences in children and that these differences affect their learning. By acknowledging these differences, programs and curricula development will be diverse and accessible to all thereby ensuring children can achieve their potential. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

More opportunities within the community for children and young people to develop transferable skills thereby creating positive impact on career prospects. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

The promotion of positive role models and mentorship programs within the community and schools will provide opportunities for children to visualise their potential achievements. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Schools and the Local Authority sometimes fail to implement Statements. IEP goals are often very minimal and are ignored. Some decisions about classroom organisation are made for political reasons rather than for best outcomes/learning environment for the children. Children should be treated as individuals and placed in classes according to specific needs and abilities rather than age. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Children with learning difficulties should be assessed on an annual basis to determine progress. Currently children are not assessed after they start school at five, despite their changing needs and abilities, relative to a typically developing child. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

It is hard for us to explain about our cultural experiences and how different they are from some communities that we live in, often the children centres and the schools we use are very busy but we would like to be able to explain to people our culture, and what we value and what is important to us, we feel that sometimes people want to ask us but feel they cant because it may seem rude – education on different cultures is so important to feel a part of the community.(African mother of a disabled child, Central area)

Improving access to information by using more innovative and up- to- date communication methods such as new media - online social networking, texting, twitter, websites etc. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Severely autistic children always need 1:1 support in order to learn. The LA accepts that autistic children in mainstream need 1:1, and yet severely autistic children in special schools are given much lower staffing ratios. This sends a message to parents that their children are not worth bothering to try and teach. Failure to adequately support Autistic children often leads to them wandering aimlessly around classrooms, sometimes literally climbing the walls, unable to cope and unable to learn. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Special schools often have very low expectations, and lack ambition. They sometimes feel like respite centres, rather than places where children are expected to maximise their potential. Children can often make substantial progress, especially when young, but currently these opportunities are being lost. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Ofsted Inspectors have insufficient knowledge of special needs and are therefore unable to assess them properly, or measure their effectiveness in raising achievement. Perhaps they too have very low expectations for the outcomes for disabled children. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

c) Narrowing the gap

Communities sharing more open information on special needs children like, aspergers syndrome: this is a hidden condition. Children need help with social skills, positive interactive experiences and help to develop self esteem in all areas of life. They don't get it. Much more help should be available at the time of diagnosis. All of our help and knowledge has come from charitable organisations. The siblings of these children need extra provision and assistance too....as indeed do the parents. Everyone has a lot to deal with. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Act as if they are valued. Teach respect, self respect, motivation. Give them social skills to enable them to interact in a positive manner, so that they have some integrity and interest in learning, thus giving them the ability to function to their maximum without being held back by 'idiots'. If schools were teaching this, surely the community would improve as a result. E.g. It is tedious, in the streets, being shown no respect by youths who stick their middle finger up at you if you have to make an emergency stop to avoid them when they step or bike out in front of you and punctuate every other sentence with unnecessary obscenities (Father of 2 disabled YP, Southern area)

Disabled children need specialist schools not special schools. One size does not fit all, especially given the vast array and complexity of disabilities. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Teaching methods should be evidence-based. For example, special schools persist with the “eclectic approach” for autistic children despite the fact that research has shown this to be less effective than ABA (a comprehensive autism-specific program). (Mother of 2 disabled children, Central area)

Oxfordshire desperately needs a “Treehouse” type school for autistic children, see www.treehouse.org.uk We need a school which is specially adapted to the specific needs (eg visual, sensory, behavioural) of autistic children. More focus is needed on teaching functional communication and independence skills to severely disabled children, instead of attempting to follow the mainstream curriculum by teaching meaningless subjects such as French, History and RS. (Parents across Oxfordshire with autistic children)

More clubs for mainstream children, and more clubs with extra, and knowledgeable adult support for folk with special needs, for example sport etc.. or more skilled adult support for special needs children to interact within the mainstream clubs. To enable social interaction within a safe environment. Teenagers don't want their parents with them, but need support. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Specific education facility for folk with asperges syndrome or MUCH more support in mainstream schools. Mainstream schools, especially at senior level, are letting these children down badly, as is society. Hence the need for clubs and practical support not just lip service. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

All special schools should have extensive facilities (e.g. fully equipped gym, challenging play equipment and access to regular swimming). This would help all children (but especially hyperactive autistic children) to have vigorous exercise and improve their muscle tone, physical coordination and stamina. They will also work off excess energy, enabling them to focus better in class. (Parents across Oxfordshire) (See a sports-based approach with Autistic children in Turkey: http://www.dailymotion.com/relevance/search/otizm+/video/x60sg7_otizm_sport)

Teaching assistants in Special Schools need to have specialist teaching skills as they often have a much greater and more challenging role in teaching than their mainstream school counterparts. They should receive much more relevant training, and it should be a higher status job with higher pay. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

Head teachers of schools deemed “outstanding” should mentor other schools and share their good practice and experience. (Parents across Oxfordshire)

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