

Title: Strengthening SEND Support Through School-Based Coffee & Chat Sessions: The WPCF School Coffee & Chat Project was created to give SEND parent carers a safe, welcoming space within school to share concerns, ask questions, and access practical support.

Aim

The Wakefield Parent Carer Forum School (**WPCF**) Coffee & Chat Project was developed to strengthen relationships between schools and SEND parent carers by offering regular, supportive, and accessible sessions within school settings. The project was launched with a dedicated team consisting of a Parent Co-ordinator and several Parent Carer Representatives - all SEND parent carers themselves - who received training and shadowing opportunities before delivering sessions independently.

During the first six months, demand for the project grew significantly. Initially planned for a smaller number of schools, the project soon expanded to **37 schools** across the Wakefield district, including nurseries, primary, secondary, and specialist settings, with a further 16 schools preparing to join. Schools consistently expressed high interest, and every school approached agreed to participate.

Each school received a bespoke offer, with session frequency tailored to its needs - some receiving monthly input, others every other month. Flyers were created and shared with schools and WPCF members to ensure good visibility and attendance

Parent Experience and Challenges Identified

In the first session at each school, parent carers were asked to share their concerns and priorities. The most requested topics included **challenging behaviour, sleep, and toileting**, alongside wider issues such as anxiety (both parental and child), managing appointments and admin, and concerns about Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and other therapy services. In response, WPCF created accessible information leaflets for each theme, providing practical strategies parent carers could use at home and take away afterwards. These resources became highly valued by families

Parents consistently reported that having support available *in-school* felt positive and reassuring. They felt comfortable opening up about their concerns within the supportive group setting, appreciating the opportunity to connect with peers and ask questions they normally struggled to raise. The sessions helped many parents who were early in their SEND journey and unaware of the support available to them. Real-life examples and strategies shared by the Parent Carer Reps helped increase confidence and understanding.



LOCAL AREA CASE STUDY

School Feedback and Impact

SENCOs reported significant benefits from the project. Many stated that the sessions **saved them considerable time**, as concerns could be discussed collectively rather than through multiple one-to-one appointments. Schools also noted a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by parent carers.

Importantly, schools reported that the project helped reduce **unnecessary escalation and requests for EHCPs**. With increased understanding from both parents and staff - supported by WPCF's explanations of reasonable adjustments - some families felt more confident that an EHCP was not immediately needed. Schools also began requesting additional sessions after seeing the positive impact.

Working with other Services

Because the offer was bespoke, WPCF was able to connect with other local services and invite them into relevant sessions. This included the Preparing for Adulthood Team, Wakefield's SEND Co-ordinator, and the 0-19 Team. WPCF also contacted Wakefield ICB to gather clearer information on therapy services following consistent parental questions. This ensured that families received accurate, up-to-date guidance going forward.

Overall Impact

The project has demonstrated clear value for both parents and schools. Parents gained confidence, knowledge, and a supportive peer network, while schools benefited from strengthened relationships, reduced pressure on SENCO time, and improved understanding of the barriers families face. Schools and families alike viewed the project as an inclusive, visible symbol of support within the school environment.

Next Steps

WPCF plans to continue expanding the project to the remaining schools waiting to take part, produce more topic-based leaflets, and strengthen ties with external services so sessions can continue responding directly to parent priorities.

