



Department
for Education

Special educational needs and disability pathfinder programme evaluation

Summary of interim impact findings

Research report

December 2014

Meera Craston & Graham Thom - SQW

Susan Purdon & Caroline Bryson - BPSR

Claire Lambert & Nicola James - Ipsos MORI

Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Emerging findings	5
Families' experience of the processes	5
Families' experience of delivery	5
Families' experience of change	6
Outcomes experienced	6
Conclusions and next steps	7

Introduction

SQW was commissioned by the Department for Education in September 2011 to lead a consortium of organisations, comprising Ipsos MORI, Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR) and the Office for Public Management (OPM), to undertake the evaluation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEN and Disability) Pathfinder Programme.

This summary presents the interim findings from the ongoing impact evaluation, through which pathfinder families and a matched group of comparator families are being asked to provide their views on the support they have received. The report reflects the views of 328 pathfinder families who completed their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans between August 2013 and January 2014, and 1,000 comparison families that experienced the pre-pathfinder systems. Fieldwork is ongoing to interview further families who receive an EHC plan; we expect the number of interviews to more than double. Therefore, at this interim stage the focus of this summary is on impacts across all pathfinder families, reflecting the limited number of respondents and numbers still to be included in the analysis at a later stage. **Results at this stage should therefore be treated as indicative.**

A final impact report will be published in summer 2015.

Methodology

The impact of the pathfinder programme on parent and child outcomes is being measured using a quasi-experimental design. That is, outcomes for parents and young people going through the programme have been compared to outcomes for a matched comparison group of an earlier cohort of similar parents and young people going through pre-pathfinder systems. Wherever outcomes differ significantly between programme families and matched comparison families, we have taken this as evidence of a programme impact. Data on outcomes for both groups, covering experiences of the process and outcomes for the child / young person and parent, were collected via a telephone survey of parents, with the fieldwork undertaken between 4th October 2013 and 3rd August 2014.

A range of profiling data on the families was collected both via telephone interviews for all families and via the monitoring data which all pathfinders provided to the evaluation team for pathfinder families. This data has been used to (propensity score) match the survey respondents in the comparison group to the pathfinder group so that, across this range of characteristics at least, the two groups are demonstrably very similar. This helps ensure that the matched comparison group gives a reasonable estimate of the counterfactual for pathfinder families.

Emerging findings

Families' experience of the processes

At the halfway point of the fieldwork stage, the data illustrated varying levels of progress in relation to pathfinder families' experience of the new EHC assessment and planning processes relative to the comparator families' experience of the existing system. The pathfinder families reported statistically significant improvement in relation to:

- Their views being taken into consideration in assessment and reviews
- Their suggestions being listened to during the process
- The decisions made about their child's support reflecting the family's views
- The straightforwardness of the process to obtain support
- The effectiveness of information-sharing among professionals involved in their child's assessment
- Having at least one key worker working with their family
- The length of the assessment and planning process
- Overall satisfaction with the assessment and planning processes.

We found no significant improvement at that stage in relation to:

- Levels of understanding about the assessment and planning processes
- Children and/or young people having a say in the support planning process
- Parents being encouraged to think about what they wanted to get out of the support their child would receive and the goals they should be aiming for
- Parents needing to explain their child's needs on multiple occasions
- Professionals/services working closely together
- The extent to which parents agreed that decisions made in relation to the provision of support were fair compared to other children.

Families' experience of delivery

In terms of the delivery of services, pathfinder families reported statistically significant better experiences than the matched comparison group families in relation to:

- Having the right amount of choice of local provision – including pathfinder families being less likely than comparison group families to report that they did not have enough choice in relation to providers

- Satisfaction with the sufficiency of the services provided to meet the needs of their child
- Satisfaction with the suitability of both the education and social care services that they had received to meet the needs of their child.

No significant difference was identified in relation to the suitability of both the overall services and specialist health services provided to meet the needs of the child. A significant number of pathfinder families reported that they had lacked enough information to make proper choices. Only a minority of parents, in both the pathfinder and comparison groups, had heard of the Local Offer, with no statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Families' experience of change

The interim impact results illustrated that many pathfinder parents reported an improvement in the quality of the support that they had received through the EHC plan, compared to under the previous system. Furthermore, the analysis showed that pathfinder parents were statistically more likely to report an improvement in the quality of the support that they were now receiving, relative to comparison families.

Both pathfinder and comparator families most commonly stated that the support their child was now entitled to relative to the previous 12 months was the same. That said, pathfinder families appeared to be more likely to report that they were now entitled to more support, whereas comparison group families were more likely to perceive that they were entitled to less support than before.

Outcomes experienced

It is still very early to judge outcomes, with most families interviewed having completed their plan around six months previously. Overall however, the interim impact results illustrated that some of the outcomes assessed had had an impact on children and young people's lives, particularly around confidence and aspirations as a result of the pathfinder. Conversely, no evidence was found – at least in the short-term – that the pathfinder had had a significant impact on the perceived health or quality of life of the child or young person, or on assessed parental outcomes around their own health and quality of life.

Conclusions and next steps

The results from the interim analysis provide a range of positive findings. In particular, there are clear signs of improvement around a good number of the process variables which are central to the reforms, such as being child / family centred and generating increased satisfaction with the overall process.

A final impact report will be published in March 2015, following the completion of the primary fieldwork that is being undertaken with a larger group of families. The final report will include:

- The feedback from families as reported here, combined with further feedback from approximately 350 - 400 additional pathfinder families who completed their plans between February 2014 and April 2014
- Sub-group analysis, allowing us to reach conclusions on whether benefits are universally experienced or whether some groups benefit more than others (for example, by the age of the child / young person, or by the socio-economic status of the family)
- Evidence gathered from a set of in-depth qualitative case studies that are currently being undertaken with pathfinder families.



Department
for Education

© SQW, BPSR & Ipsos MORI 2014

Reference: DFE-RR432

ISBN: 978-1-78105-448-2

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

Angela.OVERINGTON@education.gsi.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications