



KIDS FIRST

Merton's Forum for parent carers of
children and young people with
disabilities and special educational needs
(SEND)

About Kids First

- Kids First is the official parent forum in Merton for parent carers of children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs (SEND) from birth up to age 25, who live or attend a school/college in Merton.
- We support parent carers of children and young people with all disabilities and special needs, including mild to severe learning disabilities, complex medical needs, physical or sensory impairments, autistic spectrum disorders and others.
- We are a project of Merton Mencap and a member of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums.

Funding

- Contact (<https://contact.org.uk/>) administers and pays a grant available to one parent carer forum in each local authority area of England, funded by the Department for Education (DfE). Kids First is Merton's parent carer forum.
- This grant is used to strengthen parent carer forums, so that parent carers can participate in the strategic planning and decision-making around services for children and young people with SEND in their area.
- Kids First also receives funding from the London Borough of Merton.
- Our funding is used to support our parent representative work, help members to have a voice on how services for children and young people with SEND are shaped and delivered locally, and run our very popular events and information exchange meetings for parents which are run termly throughout the year.

What is Parent Carer Participation?

- **Parent carer participation** is when parents and professionals work together, recognising each other's expert knowledge, to design, develop and improve services for children and young people with SEND in the local area.
- A parent carer forum is a group of parents and carers of disabled children. Their aim is to make sure the services in their area meet the needs of disabled children and their families.
- They do this by gathering the views of local families and then working in partnership with local authorities, education settings, health providers and other providers to highlight where local services, processes and commissioners are working well, or challenge when changes or improvements need to be made.

The aims of the forum

- To work in Partnership and Co-Production with the local authority and our local health providers, with respect and as equal partners, in order to improve local services for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
- To make sure the voice of parent carers is heard in the design and delivery of services in Merton which affect children and young people with SEND
- To empower parent carers with information and knowledge
- To provide opportunities for parent carers to meet, share experiences and reduce isolation

The forum does this by

- Supporting parent carers to be representatives at all the important local forums, committees and Boards in Merton
- Providing regular educational workshops and events with experts, local service providers and key decision makers in the borough to give parent carers a voice and influence on local issues
- Providing the opportunity for parent carers to meet the people who could work with their children at our events, to find out more about their services, to raise any concerns or queries, and to meet other Kids First parents.
- Providing the opportunity for parent carers to hear expert advice on managing challenging behaviours, coping with stress, EHCP's, welfare benefits, Wills and Trusts and more
- Publishing a twice-yearly newsletter full of essential information and useful tips, and keeping our members up to date with regular emails about what is going on, including forthcoming events and new local services.

The Kids First Issues Log

Kids First maintain a log of parent issues and positive experiences. These are used to identify common themes that inform our parent representation work with the local authority and health partners. Members can let us know about any issues they are experiencing with statutory services and things that are working well by completing an issues form downloadable from our website, or by emailing us the information.

Information is also picked up at our sessions and issues are also sought on specific topics in advance of some meetings.

The steering group

- Kids First is run by a Steering Group of volunteer parent carers, who decide on the business of the forum. The project is facilitated by paid workers at Merton Mencap who support the work of the forum.
- The Steering Group drives forward the business and planning of Kids First and represent our members on Boards and Forums which design new services or review existing provision to ensure the voices of all our parents are heard at local policy-making level.
- 'We are a friendly supportive steering group of parents of children and young people with SEND from across the whole borough of Merton, who work together on a variety of issues affecting different age groups, to help improve the lives of other parents and carers and their children and young people with SEND.'

Boards and Meetings

Kids First currently have parent/carer representation on 13 boards/meetings :

- Merton's Children's Trust
- Preparation for Adulthood Board
- Multi Agency Transitions (MAT) Sub Group
- CCG Patient Engagement Group
- Autism Strategy Partnership Steering Group
- Kids First SEND Group
- SEND Local Offer Focus Group
- Merton Information, Advisory & Support Service (M IASS) Advisory Board
- CAMHS Partnership Board
- Written Statement of Action (WSOA) meetings
- Carers Strategy sub groups
- SEND Strategy Challenge group
- Project Reference Group overseeing Merton's review of day opportunities for adults with LD/ASD.

Contact us

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