



Ann Mroz

Editor

TES

26 Red Lion Square,

London WC1R

24th May 2018

Dear Ms Mroz,

Re: 'How to work with challenging parents'

We are writing in response to Gemma Corby's article in the TES (22/5/18) entitled 'How to work with challenging parents' in which so-called 'challenging' parents of young people with additional needs are placed into three "common" categories: angry, pandering and non-engaging.

As parents, we find the content and tone of the article unhelpful to say the least. The use of "challenging" is particularly loaded for those of us who have experienced the brutal consequences of this label on our children's lives. Young people with additional needs are far more likely to face exclusion from school and often experience a disrupted, substandard education that is lacking in aspiration and appropriate resource. Social opportunities are equally limited and young people are often educated outside their communities and thus precluded from developing friendships and social networks where they live. Cuts to youth and leisure services disproportionately impact upon our children and shrink their lives and life chances. Yet we are apparently supposed to be grateful and compliant in the face of entrenched systemic discrimination and condescending "expert" professionals sharing tips on how to manage us?

We need to remind the author that to categorise parents in this manner tells us a great deal about who has the power in these relationships. It is symptomatic of a refusal to listen to parents or to empathise with our experience of an education system and society that remains unaccommodating if not hostile to our children. It is particularly inappropriate in the context of recent inquests into the deaths of Connor Sparrowhawk, Oliver McGowan, Danny Tozer all of which revealed professionals all too ready to label concerned parents as "toxic" or "challenging". Blaming parents is convenient and we recognise that listening to us might feel uncomfortable at times but, as these inquests revealed, it might be the difference between life and death.

We would like to invite Gemma Corby to talk to "challenging" parents like us and to engage in a meaningful dialogue with us rather than to put a name on our attitudes in order to dismiss or "manage" our concerns. We would also like her to consider how SENDCOs may feel about an article about 'how to work with challenging SENDCOs'. At Learning Disability England, families have come together with adults with learning disabilities, service providers and commissioners to find a way to work together based on common ground, we would suggest that this is an approach that needs to be taken in the SEN sector if we are to find the best ways to support our children.

Lucy Burke (co-chair), Claire Crossley, Wendy Burt, Learning Disability England Elected Family Representatives

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