

BE THAT PARENT

You will see many posts in my groups by parents who have “been there, done that,” urging you to fight for your child at school in order to get appropriate and adequate support for APD and all other conditions – support which they are legally entitled to. Here are some points to consider, issues which come up time and time again.

1. We tell parents to fight for their children because it's necessary. Don't be complacent and think that the horror stories you read won't happen to your child.
2. If you are lucky enough to have a supportive primary school (many people aren't that lucky), don't expect secondary to be the same. They have way more children and less time. They will expect your child to understand and remember everything they are told, complete work at the same pace as their peers, be able to function in timed tests and in noisy environments, do things in the right order, and a range of other things that a neurotypical child does automatically but a child with a disability like APD cannot do without help. Without adequate support already in place, no allowances will be made.
3. An EHC Plan is the only way to guarantee that they get the support that they need, and more importantly it is a legal document, which means that they must stick to it. Push for an EHC Assessment from the local authority - not the school who may well try to obstruct you, which is illegal.
4. Seek advice from independent organisations such as IPSEA. <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/> They have template letters which you can use.
5. APD affects everyone uniquely and should be supported uniquely. It also never exists in isolation, so all difficulties need to be addressed, diagnosed and fully supported. They will impact negatively on the APD, and vice versa. Make sure the EHC Plan addresses all of it.
6. If your child is not on the school's SEN register, they will be seen as not entitled to any help, at primary school or at secondary. Schools receive funding per head of pupils registered. Ask the SENCo, in writing, to add them to the SEN register, or get a reason in writing for the refusal.
7. The transition to secondary school needs to be managed carefully for each child. Often information is passed to the secondary SENCo from the primary school which might not even make it to the teachers, or which they receive and might never read. If they do read it, they might ignore it. Don't rely on the SENCo at either school – personally provide that information to each of your child's teachers yourself, include a photo of your child, and urge them to read it and act on it at every lesson.
8. If your local authority doesn't recognise APD or choose to implement recommendations on a diagnostic report, that is illegal and discriminatory, because APD is a medical condition diagnosed by the leading children's hospital in the UK, GOSH. Education professionals are not medically qualified. Just like they are not allowed to ignore or fail to accommodate a child with diabetes or asthma, or any other medical condition, they cannot do that with APD just because they feel like it. If equipment such as an FM system is recommended by GOSH or another audiologist, fight for it. It is your child's legal right to be able to follow what is going on in class; access to an appropriate education is not a luxury.
9. If you have a meeting or discussion, send a letter/email of understanding afterwards, something like “At our recent meeting on xx you said xxx and the support you offered was xxx.” Or “you refused my request for xxx because of xxx” etc.” Keep copies, both digital and printed.

10. All communication with the school and authority should be in writing, by letter or email, and keep copies – that is evidence if the school/local authority's failure to support your child. Copy everything to the chair of the board of governors.
11. Failure to adequately and appropriately support a child with APD and/or any other conditions merits a formal complaint, in writing to the local authority via their complaints process first, and if they still refuse, make a complaint to the education ombudsman.
12. Get your MP or local councillor involved.
13. Failure to support a child with such difficulties is educational negligence, and you can sue them.

I know from bitter personal experience that it isn't easy to confront professionals – either teachers SENCOs, Ed Psychs, SALTs, local authority officers, advisory teachers etc. – when you feel your child is not receiving appropriate or adequate support, or if they ignore the APD diagnosis. But this is your child and the Education Act states that parents are legally responsible for their education, not schools or local authorities. You have a say, you are the ones held to account by law. Just because you enrol them in a school it doesn't mean you waive those rights or responsibilities. The school is accountable while your child is in their care, make no mistake about that. But "the buck stops with you."

I used to do anything to avoid a confrontation, but there comes a time when you have to be THAT parent. You may feel nervous, scared even, have a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach. But just remember, that could be the way your child feels going into school every single day without the help they so desperately need and have a right to receive. Dreading what each day will bring. Lost and struggling, labelled as lazy, maybe bullied or ostracised by other kids (or teachers), kept in for unfinished work or for asking too many questions, having that work sent home along with homework they can't do (and shouldn't be expected to do because they haven't got a clue what was discussed in class). Exhausted and in sensory overload; children who are constantly being blamed for something that is beyond their control. It happens all too often and it must be stopped. Only you as a parent can stop it, your child has no-one else to fight for them.

Be that parent and don't feel bad about it. Do what it takes. You might want to switch schools or move to a different local authority area. If they are happy at school and their grades aren't that good, so be it. Or home educate instead, if you can. All things considered, your child's mental health and happiness are far more important than education. They can still find their path after school, get qualifications online, make a career from their hobbies, interests and strengths, or find a vocation.

Until they're old enough to make their own choices, your child's education and their happiness are in your hands, not the school's. Take back ownership of that responsibility, if you haven't already done so. You are their only advocate.

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