

Dentistry for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

Family Voice Norfolk is the parent carer forum for Norfolk, representing the views of families with children or young people (0–25) with SEND. We reported to HOSC in September 2020 about the difficulties experienced by families in accessing dental care for their child or young person (CYP) with SEND.

In February 2021, we have asked families how the situation is now for them and if they have experienced an improvement in services.

They haven't. Concern about dental care for their child or young person is high.

Key concerns are:

1. Lack of regular check-ups means that dental issues become much graver and require more serious treatment when they are finally able to be seen by a dentist, sometimes as an emergency. There is additional distress for CYP with SEND and the families that support them.
2. Lack of regular check-ups means that CYP with SEND do not have the opportunity to become used to visiting the dentist and anxieties are not eased. These CYP also may need considerable support and training to do something even as simple as opening their mouths on demand. Families have been able to make no progress on these vital aspects of their CYP's future healthcare.
3. The lack of NHS dentists and the near-impossibility of finding a new one has meant that some families have been pressured to opt for private treatment for their child, which they cannot afford. This puts them in an impossible position. Many are also made more anxious by the knowledge that in the future their CYP, as an adult with a learning disability, will *never* be able to afford private dentistry.

4. Many families referred to specialist dentistry have had no general check-ups for two years. They have had no information about when regular appointments will resume.

Parents told us:

It's as if we've travelled back in time.

Children's teeth need regular checks before there are issues.

I'm not happy with the treatment my child with SEND is receiving but I dare not complain as there are no other options.

My ASD son has been going to the same dentist since he was a toddler and is comfortable there. They have now gone private and we can't afford to pay.

My son's cardiologist said good dental care is essential for him. The specialist dentist discharged him, saying he could now go to an NHS dentist! No one cared that this is nearly impossible.

Our practice used to have eight dentists and now it has two.

I chased and chased...