



The Ambassador Volunteer Programme

Supporting Families with SEND

The Ambassador Volunteer Programme

Annual Report 2025

(April 2024- March 2025)



Working together to support the development of the Parent Carer Forum Devon

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Overview

The Ambassador Volunteer Programme has expanded significantly over the last 12 months, with the number of active volunteers increasing from 34 to 60. This includes parent carers (50%) and practitioners (50%).

Volunteers have different roles depending on their capacity and involvement with families. The Ambassador Volunteer Co-ordinator provides training and support, sending information weekly to AVs, leading half-termly meetings, delivering induction training and attending parent carer meetings.

Programme Vision

The Ambassador Volunteer programme is a network of empathetic, non-judgemental, caring and respectful volunteers. Ambassador Volunteers have knowledge and understanding of a diverse range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) through their personal experiences and practitioner roles.

Our purpose is to listen and connect with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, signpost to support, share information and give feedback to DIAS (Devon Information, Advice and Support) and PCFD (Parent Carer Forum Devon).

Programme Values



(The full Code of Ambassador Volunteer Practice can be found in Appendix 1)

Programme Aim

The Ambassador Volunteer Programme is jointly managed by DIAS and PCFD; these organisations have a mutual interest in developing a service user network which communicates information regarding support for families of children with SEND and gathering the views of these families in relation to their lived experience.

The main aims of the programme are:

- Increase awareness of DIAS, PCFD and SEND support available across Devon
- Create a mechanism for connection for SEND parent carers
- Increase the reach of DIAS and PCFD to:
- Gather feedback from families
- Share SEND information effectively and widely

Programme activity

- Recruit and train ambassadors
 - Provide ambassador support and ongoing training
 - Build communication mechanisms
 - Deliver parent carer information events based on feedback
 - Deliver training in collaboration with associated projects, e.g. Autism in Schools
 - Feedback to DCC, Parent Carer Forum and DIAS
 - Coordinate coproduction on SEND improvement strategies
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- 60 Ambassador Volunteers across Devon
 - Volunteers have a wide reach on various online platforms (Facebook pages, websites, YouTube channels etc)
 - The programme has trained Ambassadors at the following organisations:
 - Esteem Team
 - Community Links
 - Parental Minds
 - Family Hubs
 - Exeter University
 - Libraries Unlimited
 - South Devon UTC
 - Mill Water School
 - The Link Academy Trust
 - Blackawton Primary School
 - East Allington Primary School
 - Stoke Fleming Primary School
 - East-the-Water Primary School
 - North Devon Autism Forum
 - PDA Devon

PINS 2024-25

The AVC has run parent and/or staff workshops with 24 primary schools across the county as part of the PINS project.

The Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) is a national programme for 2024/2025 which aims to support the education and health needs of neurodiverse children in schools through a partnership approach, with local authorities and parent carer forums working together.

Based on feedback from the successful Autism in Schools programme, PINS is designed to develop approaches that enable earlier support for neurodiverse children in school that will help prevent distress and challenge which may require further intensive intervention across health, education and care.

PINS has been developed around the key principles of the Autism in Schools project:

- *Whole school approach*
- *Good quality training for staff*
- *'Parents supporting parents' groups*
- *Understanding students' experience of schools*

How it works

PINS will bring health and education specialists and expert parent carers into mainstream primary settings to:

- *Help shape whole school SEND provision*
- *Provide early interventions at a school level*
- *Upskill school staff*
- *Support strengthening partnerships between schools and parent carers*

Workshops were delivered to 126 parents, gathering their views of what is working well and what could be better under the Four Cornerstones of:

Welcome and Care; Value and Include; Communicate; Work in Partnership

Data was gathered to feed into the national evaluation and also to inform our schools in Devon. This was shared at 4 online 'Community of Practice' events with schools and parent carers.

Programme growth

16 new Ambassador Volunteers have been trained in the last 12 months in all localities, with the biggest growth in volunteers being in South.

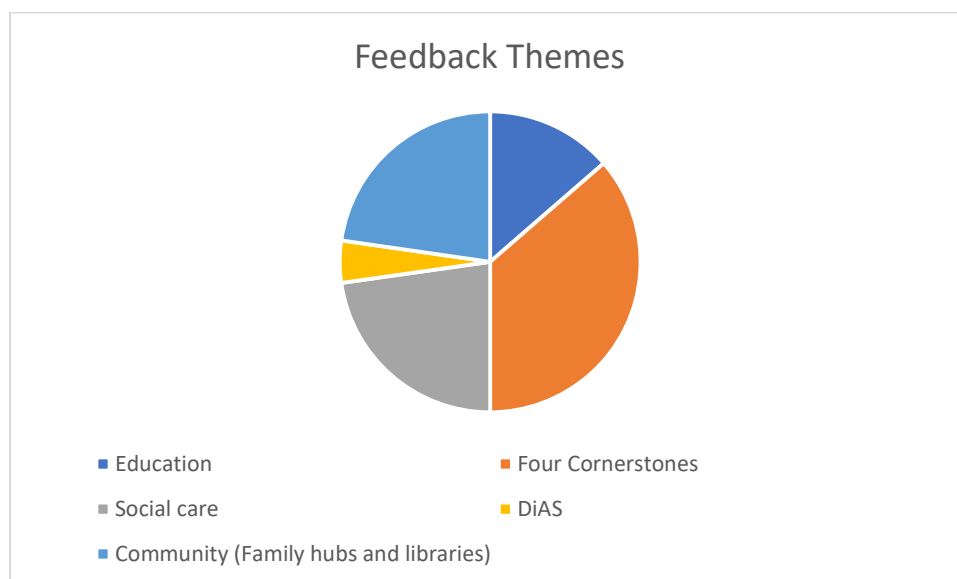
The PINS project introduced the programme to 24 primary schools and there is interest in recruiting and training Ambassadors in these schools.

Partnerships have been formed with some staff from Libraries Unlimited and our partnership with the Family Hubs is ongoing.

Feedback

Feedback from AVs has been used to:

- Develop Devon County Council's Preparing for Adulthood webpage
- Create Family Hub and Early Help surveys
- Change the language used on Action for Children's digital resources on school avoidance
- Help Libraries Unlimited purchase SEND resources for their libraries
- Provide information for commissioners on the demand for DLA and PIP form support
- Develop workshops with DIAS
- Evaluate Transitions sessions run by Disabled Children's Services
- Evaluate OAIP resources
- Evaluate wording on CAMHS letters and understanding of MERS
- Gain understanding of experiences around the Four Cornerstones across Education, Health and Social Care
- Inform commissioning decisions via a survey



Information out:

The Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator continues to cascade information from Parent Carer Forum, DIAS, Devon County Council services (SEND, Education, Social Care), health services and other commissioned services. Information was sent out through What's app, emails, face to face at parent carer support groups and during the AV team meeting and training session. Examples include:

- SEND Partnership Newsletter
- SEND Family Fun Days
- Action for Children events
- Devon County Council parent carer webinars
- Innovation grant funding information
- School parent carer coffee mornings
- AV parent groups for DIAS website

The Ambassador Volunteer What's app group continues to grow and there are now separate groups for parent carers and practitioners. These link AVs across the county. Along with Coordinator information sharing, the groups enable volunteers to share events, guidance and resources from their own networks more widely. Examples include:

- Forest school groups
- Autism resources
- Parental Minds Spoke training
- Teignbridge Community Project
- Inclusive drama workshops
- Braunton Family Fun Day
- Carers surveys
- Youth Council Mental Health Survey
- Bounce Parent Support Group
- Youth Hub Skills Launchpad
- Young Adult Carers Peer Support Sessions

Parent Carer and Practitioner support/signposting:

- The Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator visited 24 schools as part of the PINS project, sharing information about the Four Cornerstones and the AV programme with SENCOs, Head teachers and wider school staff.
- A member of staff from St Peter's C of E School, Exeter, worked with the AVC to deliver workshops at the Devon SEND Conference about parent partnership.
- Training was delivered termly on the Autism and Us programme, informing professionals and families about the role of DIAS, PCFD and the AV Programme.
- Two workshops were delivered on Listening to Your Child's Views.
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To expand the reach of the AV programme, the coordinator attends networking and information sharing events, sometimes accompanied by volunteers. 33 events for parents, carers and school staff were attended either in-person or online to give support and signpost to relevant services. Events included: coffee mornings, training events, network meetings, one to one meetings.



Photographs from a Devon Carers event and Engage and Connect event.

Strategic work:

- Ambassador Volunteers have continued to attend meetings with the Director of SEND Improvement and other practitioners throughout the year. The SEND Improvement Strategy they helped to create was published in November 2025. This group has now expanded and become the Four Cornerstones Oversight Committee. Ambassador Volunteers are continuing to attend.
- Ambassador Volunteers have given feedback from their networks in the development of Devon's Family Hubs model. One AV has attended locality meetings to develop the offer in the Exeter and East area.
- Some AVs joined a panel with Action for Children staff and other representatives to make decisions on applications for Innovation Grant funding.
- The Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator met with staff from Exeter University, DIAS, PCFD and Devon County Council's Educational Psychology service regarding a funding bid for centre of excellence hub in inclusive education.
- Ambassador Volunteers met with a Commissioning Officer and shared a commissioning survey with their networks to gain feedback.

Training:

Training sessions have been delivered to school staff, and parent carers in collaboration with schools, Communication and Interaction Team, SEND Support Team, Parent Carer Forum Devon and DIAS.

Practitioner training sessions:

Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools: Staff workshops described in the PINS section of this report.

Family Hubs: In-person training delivered to Family Hubs staff.

Early Help Locality Partnership: Meeting attended to deliver a presentation about the Ambassador Volunteer network.

SEND Conference: 2 workshops delivered to SENDCOs and school staff. Over 60 staff attended.

Parent information sessions:

Autism and Us: Online training for parent carers on how DIAS can support them and their autistic children. (2 sessions)

Listening to your child's views_ - How to help your child express their hopes and opinions on their education and care. (2 sessions)

Four Cornerstones: The Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator visited CATCH group in Exmouth to share information about the Four Cornerstones and gather feedback.

Volunteer training sessions:

Half-termly online meetings: Each meeting has a training element in response to training requests or identified themes. Training from other organisations includes: Healthwatch, Youth Employment Hubs, British Dyslexia Association, Family Hubs (6 sessions).

Group Leader meeting: An additional meeting for group leader AVs took place. This was for sharing support and advice.

Volunteer training day: 2 in-person training days took place in June and January.

Inductions: Every new AV receives half a day's induction training with the AV Coordinator. Where possible, this is done alongside other new AVs (12 inductions).



Feedback on training:

“Staff returned after meeting with you yesterday motivated and energised!”

“My head is exploding with all the useful information I gained!...So glad I came, I will definitely attend the future days.”

New logo

A new logo was created to better communicate the role of the Ambassador Volunteer Programme. AVs now have lanyards to wear bearing the logo.



The Ambassador Volunteer Programme
Supporting Families with SEND

Appendix 1



The Ambassador Volunteer Programme

Supporting Families with SEND

Code of Ambassador Volunteer Practice

Our Vision

The Ambassador Volunteer programme is a network of empathetic, non-judgemental, caring and respectful volunteers. Ambassador Volunteers have knowledge and understanding of a diverse range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) through their personal experiences and practitioner roles.

Our purpose is to listen and connect with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, signpost to support, share information and give feedback to DIAS (Devon Information, Advice and Support) and PCFD (Parent Carer Forum Devon).

This Code of Volunteer Practice is intended to give volunteers clear guidance regarding their role, and the confidence to carry it out effectively and ethically.

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1. Abbreviations

Abbreviations are sometimes used within this document to simplify and shorten the content.

A list of common abbreviations is as follows:

AV: Ambassador Volunteer

AVC: Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator

DIAS: Devon Information, Advice and Support service

PCFD: Parent Carer Forum Devon
SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

2. Ambassador Volunteer Programme Overview

The Ambassador Volunteer Programme is jointly managed by DIAS and PCFD; these organisations have a mutual interest in developing a service user network which communicates information regarding support for families of children with SEND and gathering the views of these families in relation to their lived experience.

The programme is led by an Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator (AVC) and Ambassador Volunteers are situated across Devon. Some run parent support groups; some have practitioner roles in supporting families and some receive information in order to pass it on to others they are in contact with as appropriate.

The main aims of the programme are:

- Increase awareness of DIAS, PCFD and SEND support available across Devon
- Create a mechanism for connection
- Increase the reach of DIAS and PCFD to:
- Gather feedback from families
- Share information effectively and widely

3. Core Values and Principles



We recognise the value of the Ambassador Volunteer role and the importance of keeping to the values and principles of the organisations we represent. At all times we endeavour to fulfil our core values.

Empathy

Every Ambassador Volunteer has extensive lived experience of raising or supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; this makes our programme different to other types of services which may be delivered by practitioners only. Our Ambassador Volunteers understand the challenges parents and carers face; they can therefore respond with empathy and awareness. This is not to say that they assume everyone's experience is the same, or like their own, but they can hear everyone's story compassionately with a background understanding of the wider SEND environment.

Non-judgmental

Ambassador Volunteers understand that every family's circumstances are different and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' approach for all. Anything shared with an Ambassador Volunteer will be met with openness, kindness and understanding.

Well-informed

Navigating the SEND system can be confusing and overwhelming. There is a wealth of information available online which is often valuable but can sometimes be misleading. Ambassador Volunteers undertake training and have access to regular updates and sharing of information which has been quality-checked and comes from reputable sources. This aims to ensure that any signposting by an Ambassador Volunteer is accurate and reliable.

Impartial, Respectful, Confidential

In all interactions, Ambassador Volunteers recognise that every person and family has their own experiences, needs, preferences and hopes. We do not promote any approach or service over another, and we respect that every family has the autonomy to make their own decisions. Our communications will be informative and impartial, and a family's wishes will always be respected.

Experiences shared by families will always be treated confidentially. However, one purpose of the AV programme is to give feedback to DIAS and PCFD regarding the lived experiences of families in Devon. Therefore, consent may sometimes be asked to share information directly or anonymously. Nothing disclosed to an Ambassador Volunteer will ever be shared without consent.

4. Registration requirements and process

We welcome Ambassador Volunteers from diverse backgrounds and experiences. An understanding of SEND either through own family experiences, a job or through another context such as volunteering is beneficial. Anyone who feels they could help others with awareness, empathy and a non-judgemental approach could be an Ambassador Volunteer. The process for registering is:

1. Expression of interest

Discuss the role and your interest with the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator.



2. Submit registration form

Complete the AV registration form and send it to the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator: sarah.lord@devon.gov.uk



3. Discussion with AVC

Online meeting with the AVC about your role and the level of support you would like to give. Discuss any special interests or potential conflicts of the role.



4. Complete online safeguarding training

Logins for Devon eLearning will be supplied so that basic safeguarding training can be completed.



5. Attend induction training

Induction training will be arranged in person; you will be able to meet other new Ambassador Volunteers and go through training relevant to the role with the AVC.



6. Decide appropriate role

The volunteer meets with the AVC (usually on the induction day) to discuss the most appropriate role for them to undertake at this stage. A mutual decision is made which can be reviewed at any time.



7. Get started!

Join the What's App group and mailing list to begin receiving information. Attend half-termly AV meetings online.

5. Safeguarding

Whilst Ambassador Volunteers do not have statutory safeguarding responsibilities, we believe that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. For this reason, it is a requirement that AVs complete the online level 2 safeguarding training with Devon E-Learning. This course will equip them with the knowledge of what to look out for as signs of potential neglect or abuse, and what to do if worried about a child or vulnerable adult's safety. The

Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator is level 3 trained and is available for discussions on request if an AV is concerned. They will then decide the best course of action and support them in carrying it out.

Alternatively, an AV can contact MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) independently on **0845 155 1071** or by following the links on the website:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/child-protection/>

The NSPCC website also has lots of relevant information on safeguarding and child protection: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/>

6. Sharing of information

In order for SEND services across the county to meet the needs of families and children, it is important that the Local Authority, SEND Statutory Team, and health and social care commissioners, know and understand the lived experience of families.

We regularly give feedback to DIAS Managers and PCFD about themes and trends Ambassador Volunteers have noticed, as well as individual situations which parent carers consent to us sharing. In turn, this information may be shared with decision-makers such as those listed above to facilitate effective change.

What's App

When Ambassador Volunteers, or the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator, has information about services that may be of interest to other members of the programme, this may be shared via a What's App group for members only. The What's App group is a confidential space where signposting information can be shared and requested. Specific details of a family's circumstances will not be revealed on this platform, but general requests can be made. For example: "Does anyone know of an Autism support group in the Tavistock area?" Where specific information needs to be shared in order to signpost more effectively, volunteers will request a consultation with the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator.

Social Media

Social media is a very useful way of sharing information. Ambassador Volunteers may run their own social media pages or contribute to others. In doing so, AVs will be mindful of the values of the programme, in particular **impartiality** and **confidentiality**. Information gained through their AV role will not be inappropriately shared and any signposting will be done carefully, recommending only known organisations and services. When signposting to other organisations on social media, a link will be given directly to the source website so that it is clear where the information originates from.

7. Types of Ambassador Volunteer Roles

Individual

Individual volunteers are parents and carers of children with SEND who wish to receive information from DIAS and the Parent Carer Forum Devon to share with their existing network, e.g. their child's school and other families they know. They do not lead groups or have contact from new parents seeking support via DIAS/PCFD.

Individual Connectors

Individual connector volunteers receive information as above to share with existing networks, but they are also available to make contact with other parents and carers who request peer support via DIAS and PCFD. They have a 'This is Me' one-page profile which can be shared for this purpose. They can signpost to support available locally, although they do not give individual ongoing support. Individual Connectors communicate parent views to the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator and can request support and guidance from them at any time.

Group Leader

Group leaders run their own peer support groups in their local area or online. They share information from DIAS and PCFD, and feedback the experiences of families that they support. Group leaders have regular check-ins with the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator. They have a 'This is Me' one-page profile which may be shared with other parents and carers who request support. The groups are the responsibility of the group leaders and DIAS/PCFD are not responsible for any operational considerations, although the AVC will always endeavour to support and advise the leaders where appropriate.

Organisational Volunteer

Organisational volunteers belong to existing organisations such as charities and community interest companies. Their work in these organisations brings them into contact with parents and carers of children with SEND and therefore their Ambassador Volunteer role complements their existing role. Organisational volunteers share information from DIAS/PCFD and feedback the views and experiences of parents and carers.

Organisational volunteers recognise that they may occasionally have paid-for and free services which would be of interest to the parents and carers they support. In the interests of transparent and ethical practice, these services will be declared to the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator who will keep a directory of available support; this will include free and centrally funded services from the local authority and NHS. Organisational volunteers will not approach parents and carers independently in their Ambassador Volunteer role to promote their paid-for services.

Practitioner Volunteers

Teachers, SENDCOs, Children's Centre and Early Years practitioners, amongst others, have a mutual interest in supporting parents and carers of children with SEND. Experience from their practitioner role can be invaluable and many also have personal experience of SEND within their own families.

Practitioner AVs share information from DIAS and PCFD as part of their role and recognise that sometimes parents and carers need a safe space to share with peers. They may therefore put parents and carers in touch with other AVs where appropriate and may lead parent groups within their schools and other settings. They will signpost to and promote the work of DIAS and PCFD within their networks.

8. The role of the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator (AVC)

The Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator (AVC) oversees the operation of the programme, supported by managers of DIAS (Devon Information, Advice and Support Service) and the Co-Chairs of PCFD (Parent Carer Forum Devon). The AVC is flexible in responsiveness to the needs of the volunteers, with the core functions of the role being:

- Recruiting and training Ambassador Volunteers
- Networking with parents, carers, organisations and individuals to grow awareness of the Ambassador Volunteer Programme.
- Holding regular meetings with volunteers to deliver training and information, and to gather feedback.
- Keeping up to date with information shared by Devon County Council and partner organisations to disseminate as appropriate.
- Sharing information through a What's App group, emails and meetings.
- Ensuring policies and procedures are clear, up-to-date and well-communicated.
- Collecting data on the effectiveness of the programme and sharing this with managers and commissioners.
- Maintaining mechanisms for gathering feedback from parents, carers, children and young people and presenting this feedback appropriately.
- Triaging referrals from DIAS and Early Help, signposting and supporting as required.
- Ensuring safeguarding concerns are responded to promptly and appropriately, maintaining own training and awareness to the required level.
- Providing guidance and support to Ambassador Volunteers as and when required to enable them to carry out their role safely and effectively.
- Maintain a database of services which can be shared with AVs to assist their signposting support.

The role of the AVC is to support the Ambassador Volunteers and therefore the requirements of the role are flexible to the ever-evolving needs of individuals. The AVC will provide, to the best of their ability, the resources and support necessary for volunteers to fulfil their roles.

9. Ongoing AV activities and support

It is recognised that an Ambassador Volunteer's ongoing activities and support requirements will vary according to their type of role.

All volunteers are required to maintain contact with the Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator in order to receive and share information with and from their network.

Volunteer team meetings take place once every half term and are offered at different times to enable as wide an attendance as possible. Volunteers are asked to attend as many of these as they can to keep their training up-to-date and to feedback themes from their network.

There is an annual training and networking day with DIAS volunteers, and other training will also be offered as and when it is available.

Each Ambassador Volunteer will meet one-to-one at least once a year with the AVC; these meetings will be more regular for those AVs running groups.

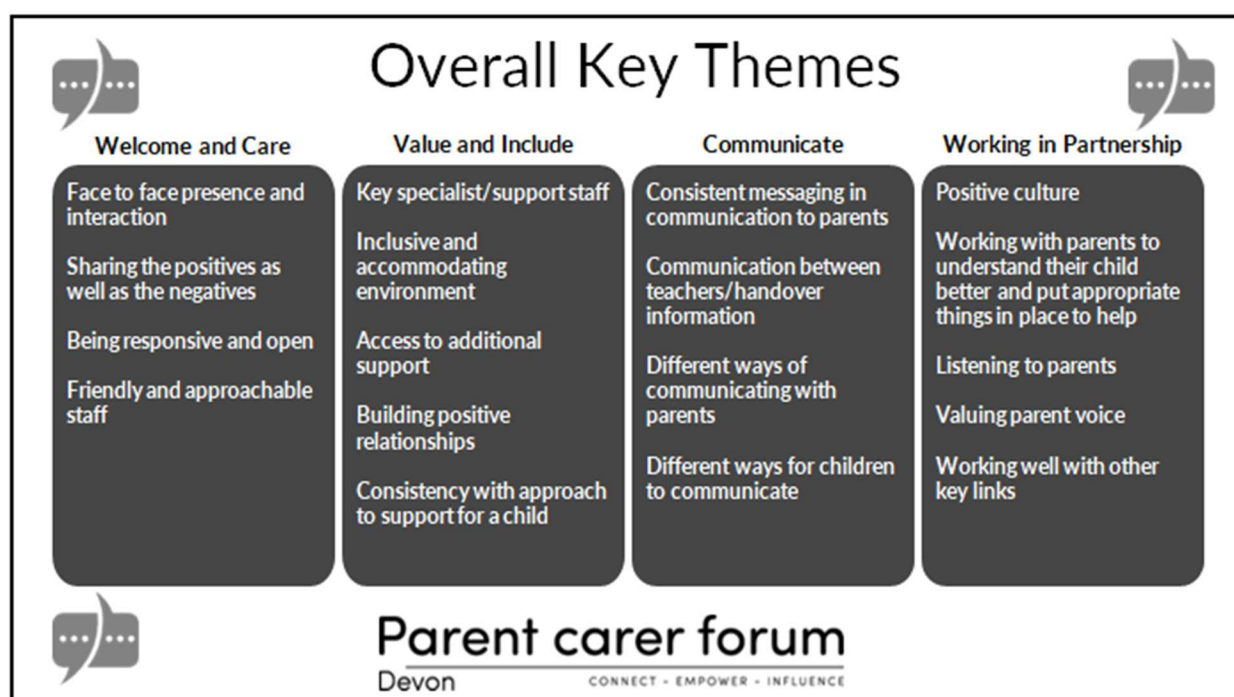
Ambassador Volunteers are invited to attend open days, parent meetings and coffee mornings etc. with the AVC to support the promotion of the programme.

Ambassador Volunteers **signpost** families to support available in their area or remotely and provide **information** which may be useful to them. They will recognise when families may need advice and support from DIAS and refer them to this service accordingly.

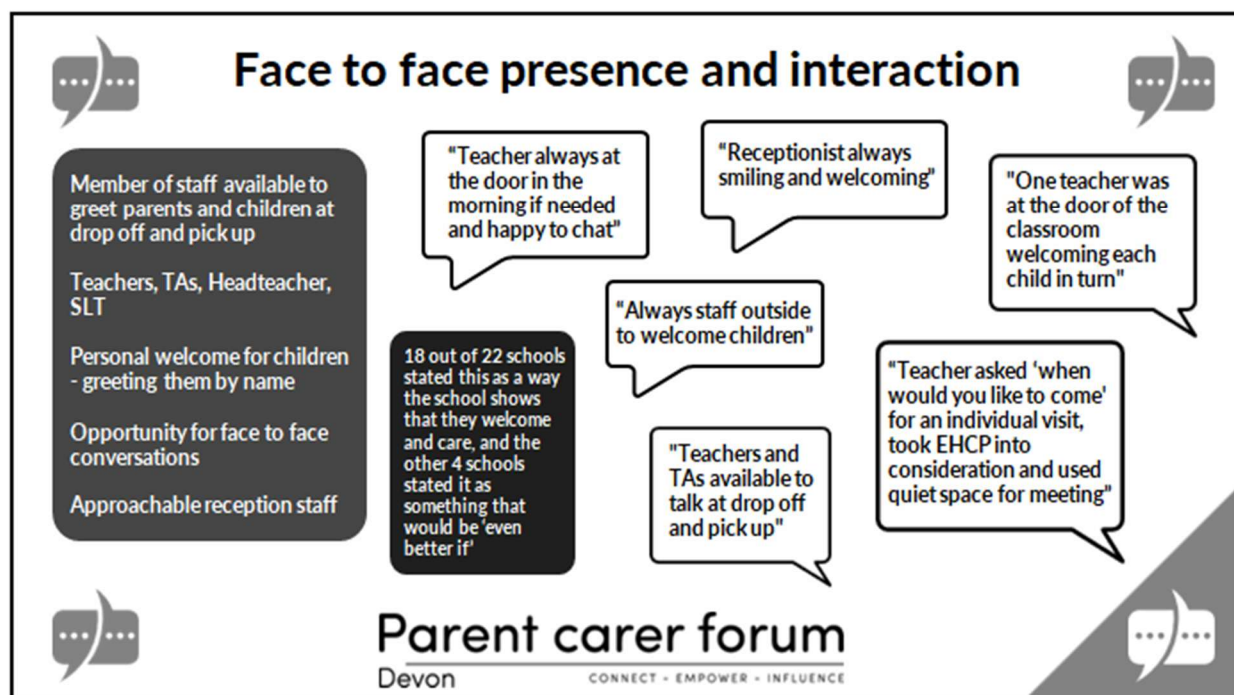
Ambassador Volunteers are **not** mentors or support workers; they cannot provide ongoing one-to-one support, and they do not have caseloads. To protect the wellbeing of volunteers and ensure families receive appropriate support, it may sometimes be necessary to signpost to other organisations and services.

Author	Date written	Review date
Sarah Lord, Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator	April 2025	April 2026

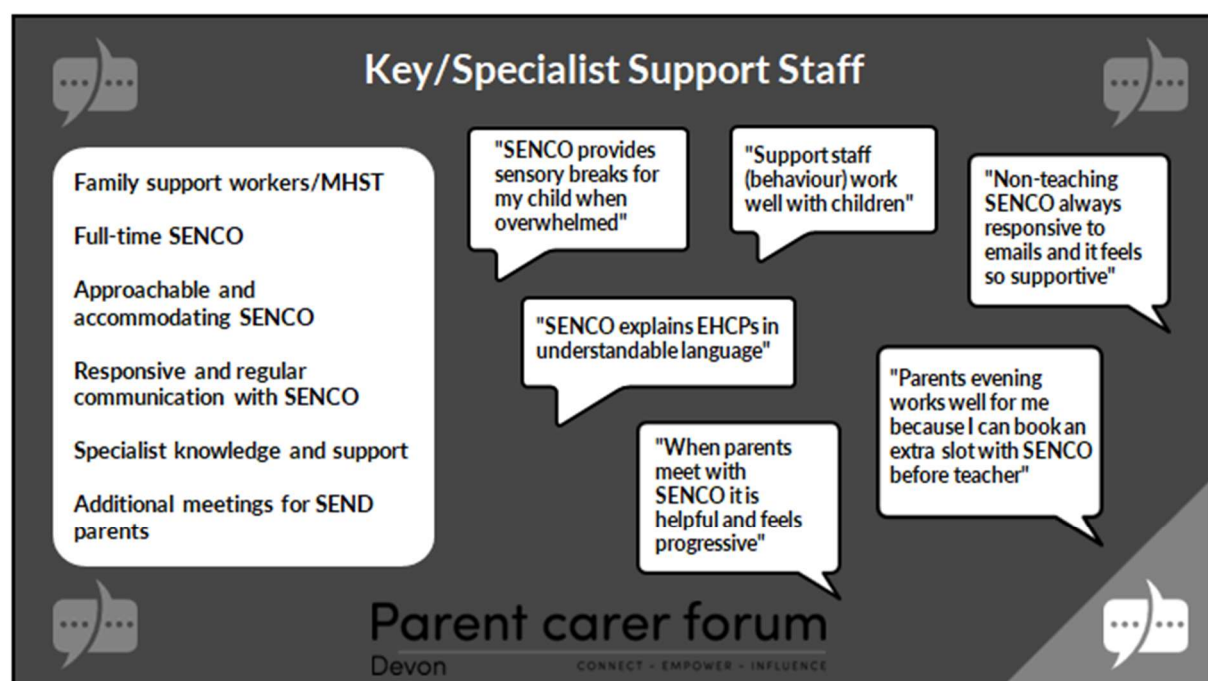
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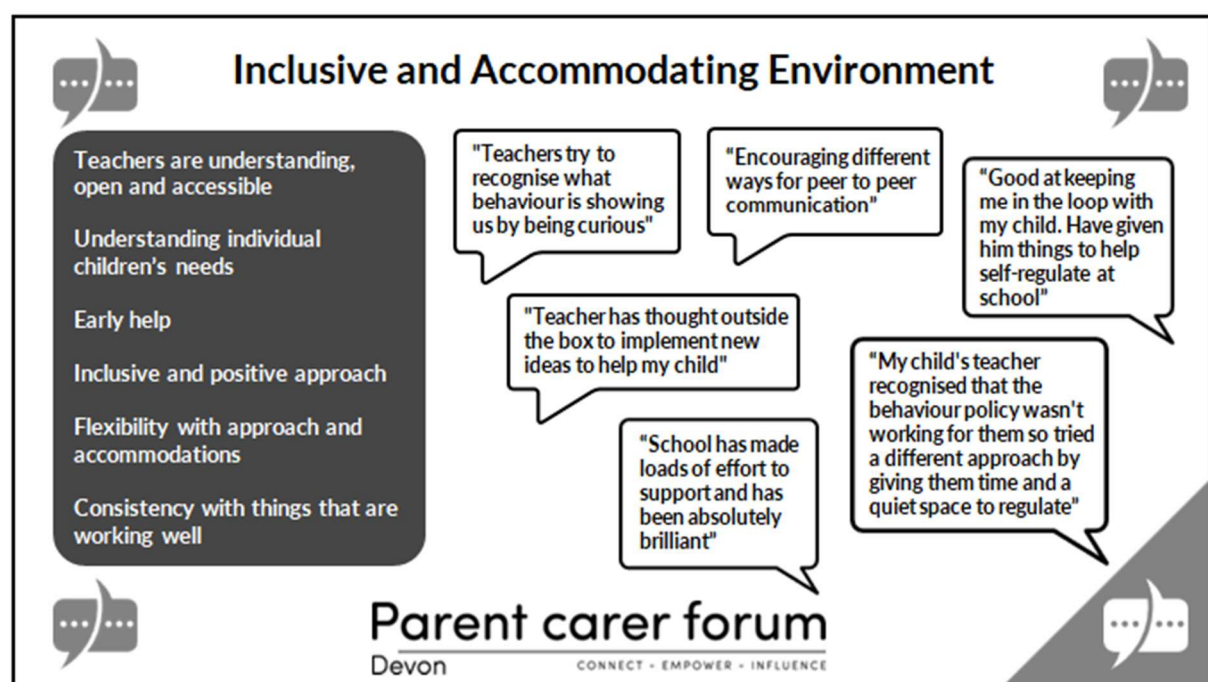
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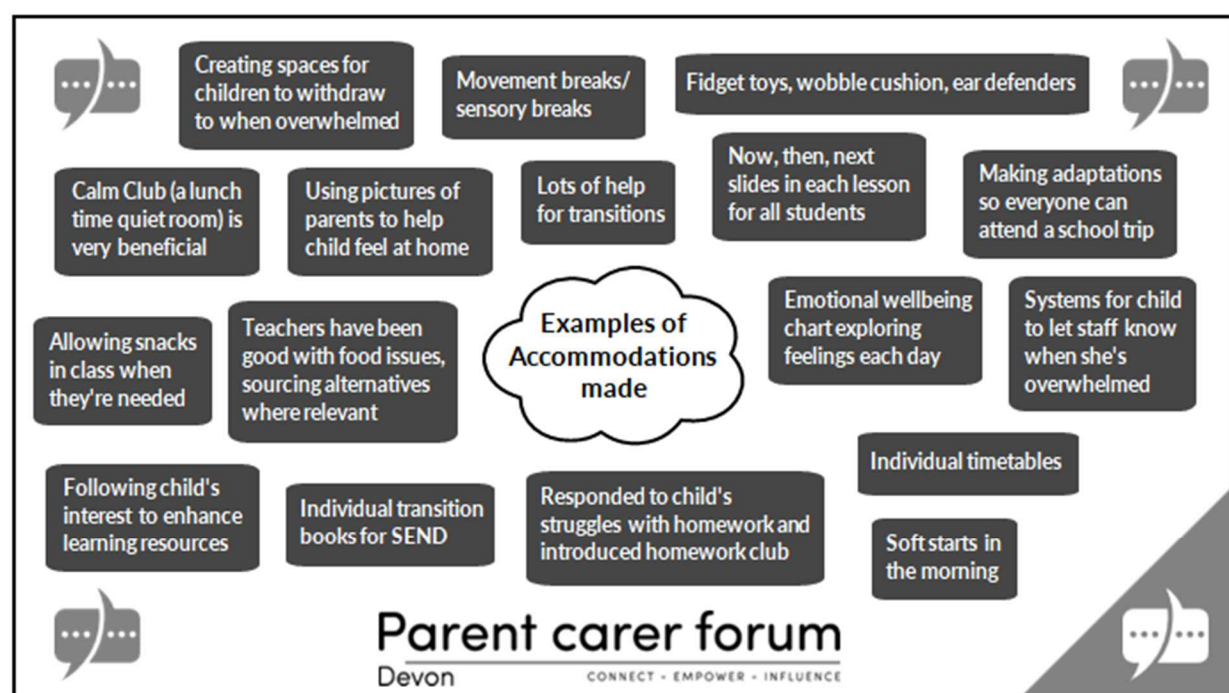
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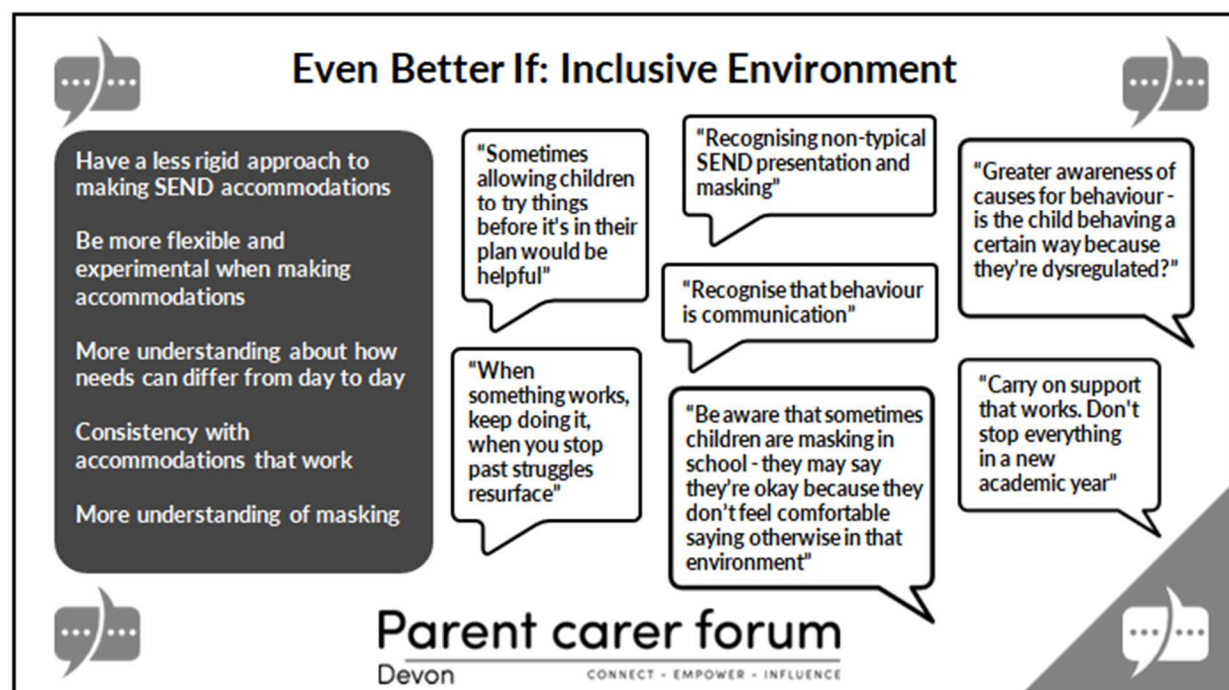
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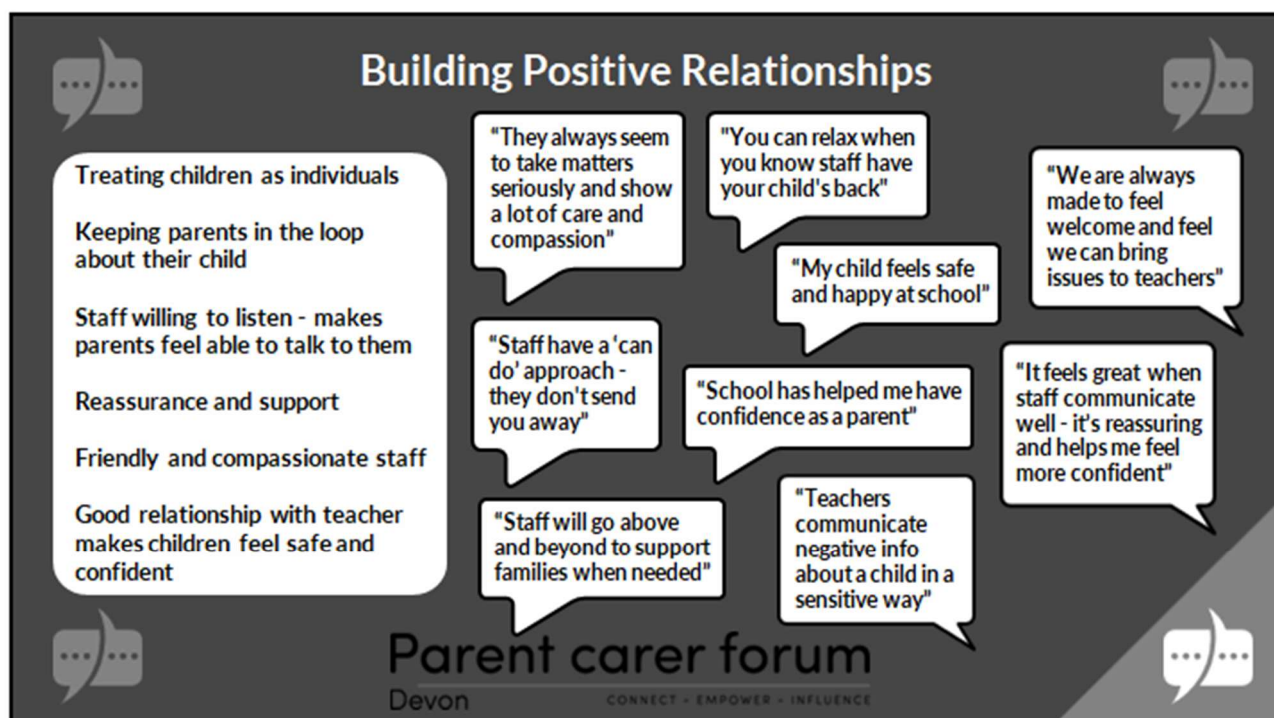
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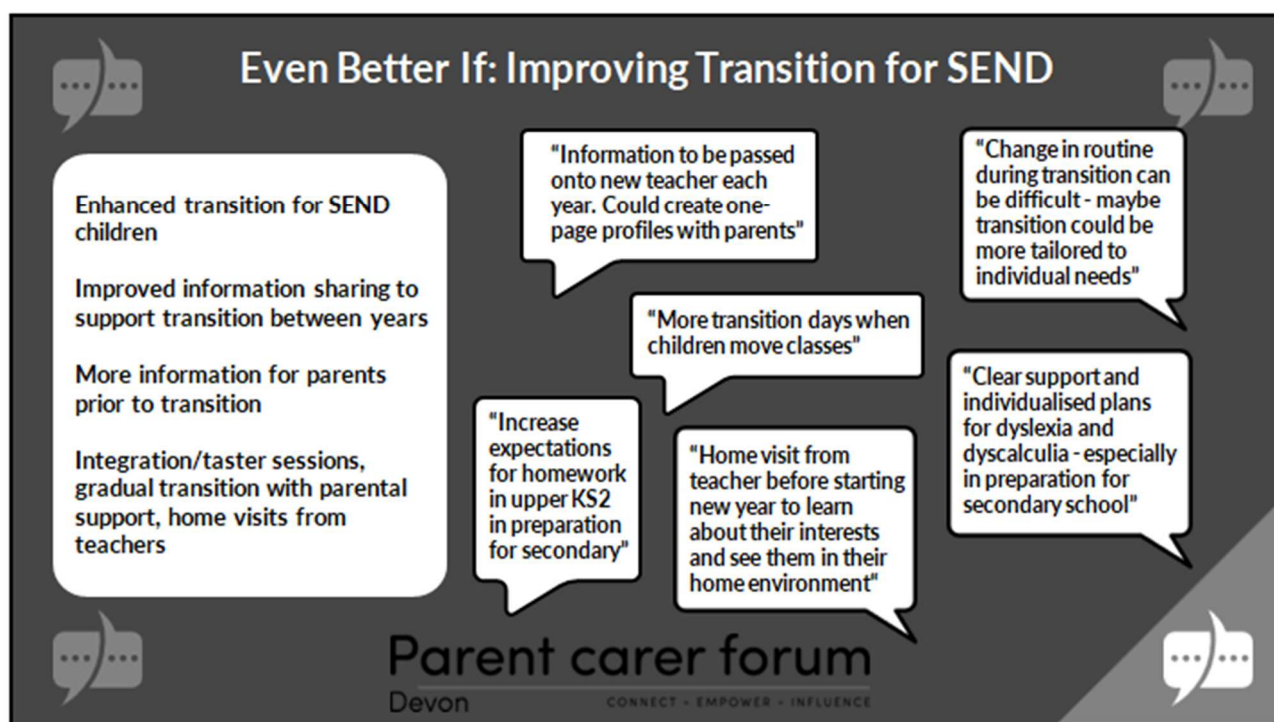
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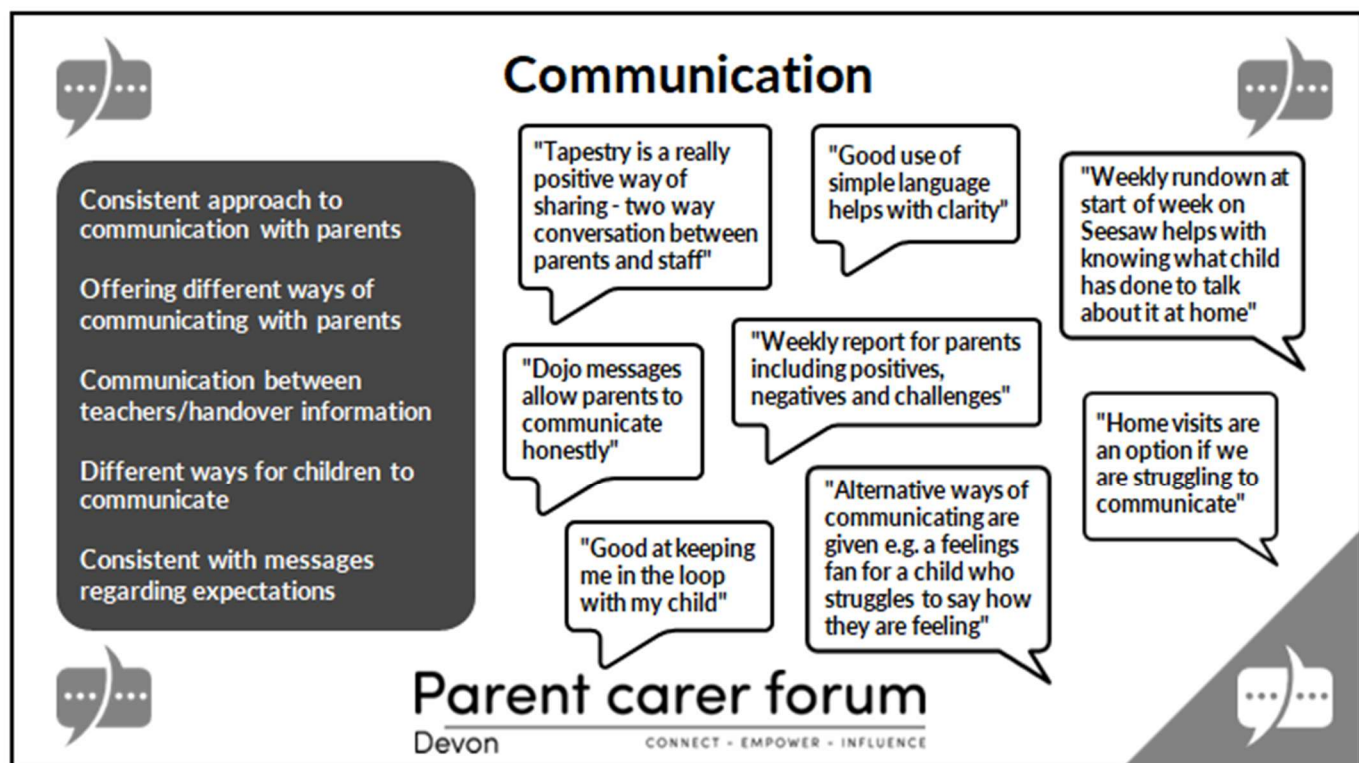
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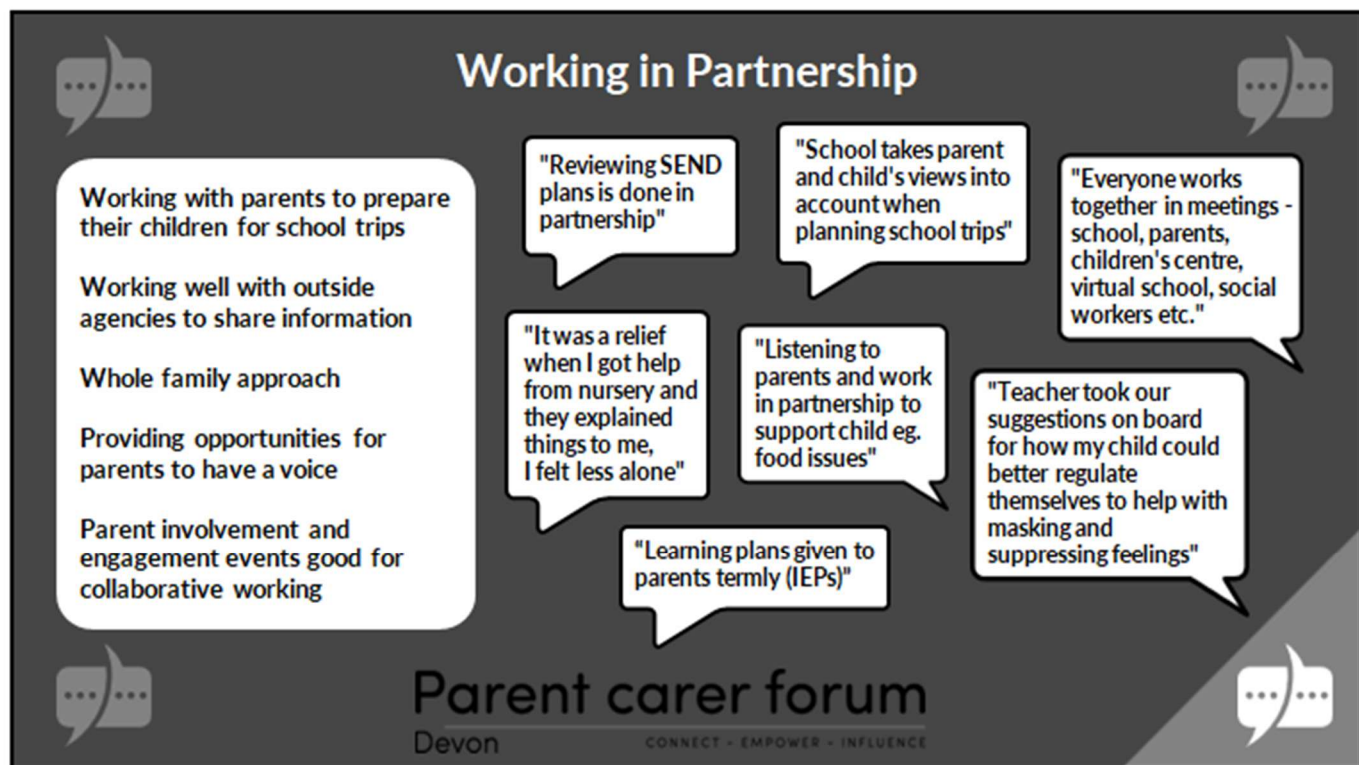
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