

COMMON GROUND MEDIATION ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS MEDIATION SERVICE

Promoting collaboration among parents, children, schools and educational services

REFERRAL PROTOCOL

- A referral can be made by anyone involved in a disagreement and at any stage of the disagreement. Referral to Common Ground Mediation is open to everyone and can be made by telephone, letter or email. It is expected however that steps will already have been taken to discuss the difficulties at local level before considering independent mediation.
- The disagreement must relate to a matter for which the education authority carries responsibility in relation to the identification, assessment and/or provision for a child or young person's additional support needs.
- Common Ground Mediation checks all referral details and asks whether local disagreement processes have been explored. If this is not the case, the referrer is encouraged to get in touch with the relevant contact in the school and/or education authority. **Referrals from parents of children with additional support needs will not be progressed as mediation cases until the education authority has been informed and has agreed in principle to using mediation.**
- Having asked the referrer's permission to contact the other parties, Common Ground Mediation explains the mediation process in more detail including what steps will be taken following the referral. The service information leaflet and a standard letter of confirmation of referral are sent out.
- The service aims to allocate cases to a mediator **within 5 working days** of a referral. The following steps (1 – 3) will therefore have to take place within that time scale:
 1. A decision is made based on information available so far whether the case is appropriate for mediation.
 2. If the case is appropriate, Common Ground Mediation contacts the other parties to inform them about the referral, explain the mediation process, and establish willingness to consider mediation and proceed to the next stage. If willingness is not expressed the service informs the referrer and other parties involved.
 3. Once willingness to mediate has been established, the case is allocated to a mediator. A mediator is usually appointed within 5 working days from receipt of referral. Should there be any delays (for example the mediator not being able to contact a party), the other

parties will be kept informed.

Upon allocation of a mediator, a letter is sent to all parties confirming that the case has been accepted and giving further information such as name of mediator and time scales.

- The mediator contacts all parties to arrange individual private meetings. These serve to explain the mediation process in detail, enable the mediator to gain insight into the case, and to begin to explore what are the issues for each party. Everything discussed in these individual private meetings is confidential. The mediator makes a further assessment about appropriateness for mediation and which issues are mediatable, in discussion with the Director of Common Ground Mediation. S/he also clarifies who the parties in the mediation are.
- If the case is suitable and with the agreement of all the parties, the mediator arranges an informal face-to-face meeting (mediation meeting) at a mutually convenient venue and time.
- Common Ground Mediation is responsible for all costs associated with the hiring of the venue and any refreshments. All parties involved in mediation meetings are responsible for their own transport arrangements to and from meetings and any costs incurred as a consequence of attending.
- A written copy of the resulting agreement or shared understanding is distributed to all parties.
- Where only a partial agreement has been reached (or no agreement at all), a second mediation meeting can be arranged if all parties agree. If this is not considered appropriate, a mediation report is sent to all parties.
- With the parties' agreement, cases are followed up in three months to check that any agreements made are working satisfactorily.

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