

The role of the child/student in ASN mediation

Scotland Case Study 1: Child Protection Worries

What's going on at home?

Jimmy is 9 years old and has been diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He has attended a specialist ASD support base attached to a mainstream primary school for 3 years. Recently school staff have become concerned about Jimmy displaying inappropriate over-sexualised behaviour in school. Examples of this behaviour include Jimmy being observed to repeatedly grab the breasts of one of the support workers (a middle-aged lady); and on 2 occasions Jimmy being observed to knock over a small girl in his classroom and lie down on top of her. School staff discussed their concerns with Jimmy's parents (mum and step-dad) who took offence, became defensive and refused to discuss further. Staff became increasingly concerned so they raised a child protection concern with their colleagues in Social Services. (Current guidelines state that professionals should not inform parents that they are formally raising child protection concerns.) Social Services carried out a full investigation into the home circumstances but nothing untoward was uncovered, and the case has been closed. However, the relationship between Jimmy's parents and the school is now badly damaged, with a loss of trust, respect etc. Jimmy's parents ask the local authority for a transfer to another school, but the authority refuses; in their opinion this is the most appropriate establishment to meet his needs. In protest, Jimmy's parents withdraw him from school. A number of weeks pass and now school staff are even more concerned about what may be going on at home, isolation etc. The local authority education officer requests independent mediation.

Questions:

- 1. is this situation mediatable?**
- 2. what are the potential benefits of including the child/student in the mediation meeting?**
- 3. what are the potential challenges of including the child/student in the mediation meeting?**
- 4. what support may the child/student need to be able to fully participate?**