

Education

Mental health problems are being missed in too many children, and particularly boys, according to Government ministers. A Notts campaigner tells **CAROLINE LOWBRIDGE** why it is vital to spot them early

JANICE Heffernan struggled for almost six years to get appropriate education for her grandson Elliott Mannix. He had never fitted into the mainstream education system. As the *Post* reported earlier this year, he misbehaved in class and disrupted the other pupils, which Mrs Heffernan – his legal guardian – believed was because Elliott has autism.

He was given a place at a special school after family friend Grenville Green stepped in.

In September this year, Elliott, 13, was given a place at Westbury Special School, in Bilborough.

Mr Green runs Notts-based campaign group Justice for Carers, and fought a similar battle over one of his own sons. He speaks to parents, grandparents and carers of children with special educational needs on at least a weekly basis.

He might, therefore, be expected to support a planned government review of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

It was outlined by Children's Secretary Ed Balls and Health Secretary Alan Johnson last week.

He acknowledged young people "deserve a better service" than they are getting – especially those with particularly complex needs.

He also said schools need to keep a closer eye on boys under ten, who are twice as likely to suffer mental illness than girls, but far less likely to seek help from any

'Team work, not cash, is way to help'

agencies. However, Mr Green is sceptical of the review, and of CAMHS in general.

"They are throwing money at the problem," he said. "They are increasing the professionals at all levels, but they don't work together at the moment."

The Government has already invested £400m over the past four years, which it says has resulted in increased capacity and shorter waiting times. However, Mr Green

says even when parents and children get appointments, it can take too long for problems to be resolved.

"In Elliott's case, the family went to Thorneywood [Notts Healthcare NHS Trust's child and adolescent psychiatric unit] for help six years ago," he said.

"If they are going to increase the capacity to pull families about, it's not going to help the situation. It's going to make it worse. There's not a test you can do to say this child has autism, so the professionals have got to be on the ball."

However, part of the review will look at staff training – which it is hoped could help mental health problems to be

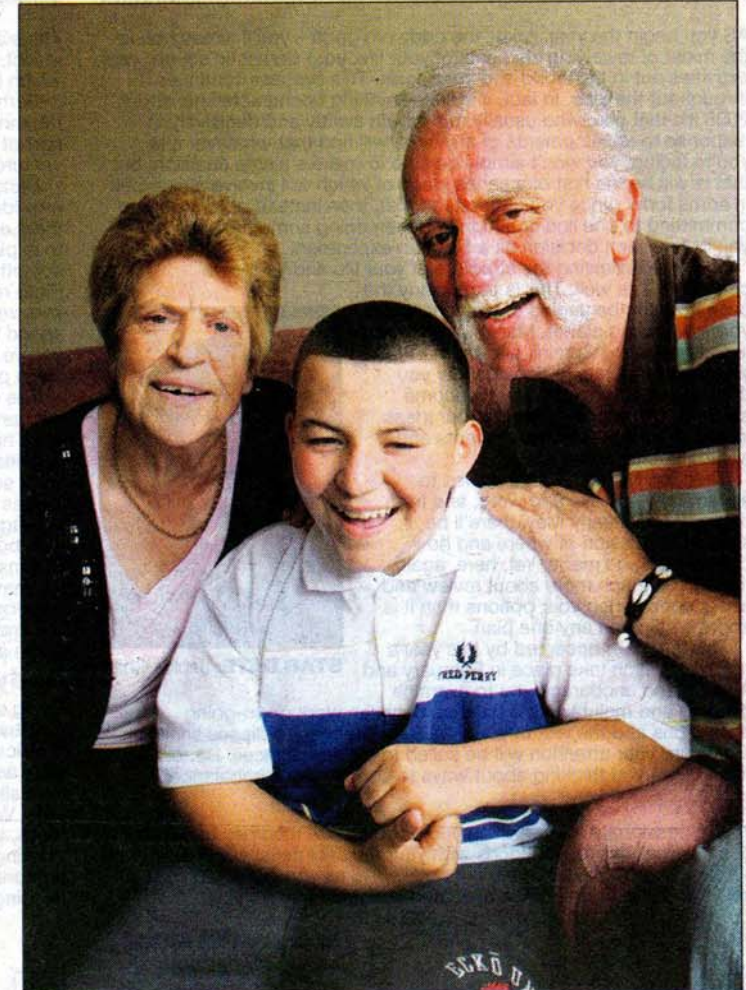
spotted sooner – and better co-ordination of the services.

These are principles Mr Green definitely does support.

"Early intervention is the way forward," he said. "What you've got to do is make people responsible for their actions. The head teachers, the teachers, the classroom assistants, the medical profession. Somebody has got to co-ordinate all of this."

A city council spokesperson previously told the *Post* the first request to them for support for Elliott over and above that provided by his school was during his second year at comprehensive school in January, 2006.

www.justiceforcarers.org.uk



SPECIAL SCHOOL: Mrs Heffernan, Elliott and Mr Green C280907MA4-4

YOUR VIEWS 

What do you think of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services? Please comment on thisisnottingham.co.uk

This is a story about four people named; Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybodys' job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done!

Anon.