



## Cumbria SEND Information, Advice and Support Service

Offering impartial information, advice and support to children and young people with special educational needs and or disabilities and their parents & carers.

### Annual Report Cumbria SEND IAS Service 2020-21

#### Introduction

This annual report is a summary of the work carried out by the Cumbria SEND Information, Advice and Support Service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Cumbria SEND IAS Service offers impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers with a child with a special need or disability and directly to young people where this is requested.

The manager is working with the newly formed SENDAC and the service will promote SENDAC with parents and young people, supporting parents and young people to have a voice in the improvement programme.

In addition to case work, Co-ordinators attend training, deliver presentations about our work and training to specific parental, school groups and local practitioner forums, attend regional events, support groups and support engagement events throughout the year. The service manager attends the bi-monthly North West Consortium Meetings and annual conference, sharing information with other SEND IAS Services in the North West. Co-ordinators attend the All Of Us Youth Forum and took part in the virtual Transition Fairs to support young people and their families.

IPSEA legal training is provided by the Council for Disabled Children and Co-ordinators must complete level 1, 2 and 3. The levels consist of 10 x E-learning modules per level plus one day of face to face training. Current attainment levels in the team are 6 staff fully trained to level 3. The team are knowledgeable and confident working with families and understand the requirements of SEND law and are familiar with the SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years. Team members have recently completed further training on SEND and national health/social care trial appeals to tribunal.

The service recently took part in a pilot project with the EHRC – trialling exclusion resources to support parents and young people to challenge school exclusions. The service used the resources to support several families to successfully challenge the exclusion of their child. A quote from the service manager was included in the national launch literature of the resources by the EHRC.

#### Challenges

Some challenges/issues the team have faced over this period are:

- Continued unprecedented rise in demand for services from parents and young people.
- The number of children unable to attend school due to anxiety or health reasons.
- Complexity of cases, including those with a health element, requiring high levels of support from the team.
- Supporting parents and young people with attendance at mediation and dispute resolution meetings with complex issues.

- Despite the efforts of the team to work with parents and professionals to broker solutions, we have seen a significant increase in requests for support with appeals to Tribunal. The majority of the appeals are very complex and require a high level of intervention and support from the team.
- The limited numbers of special school places across the county and the expectation of parents that a special school place will be available for their child when they request this. Parents often have the view that only a special school can meet their child's needs, this can be because a professional has recommended a special school and/or the experiences of the family with support in a mainstream setting.
- Some schools not delivering adequate SEN support for pupils returning after school closures due to Covid 19.
- Exclusions of children with SEND on returning to school closures due to Covid 19.
- Continued rise in mental health issues in schools.
- Lack of Post 16 provision in the county and the numbers of parents who want to send their children to providers out of county – concerns about in county provision significantly reducing due to closure of Newton Rigg College.
- Continued need for more alternative provision and places at specialist provision for children for whom mainstream school is not suitable.
- Many parents are approaching the service stating schools are not providing the provision stated in their CYP's EHCP – this can be difficult to resolve between schools and the local authority.
- Some schools continuing to encourage parents to “off roll” their child.
- The perception of some schools and parents that a CYP must be permanently excluded before alternative provision will be provided by the local authority.
- The lack of progress of joint commissioning the service with Health and Social Care despite a large amount of work undertaken by the service manager to secure an appropriate SLA.
- A stand-alone service website remains in draft format with Digital Comms – delays in going live due to Digital staff carrying out work related to Covid and staff sick leave in digital and SEND IAS Service.

### **Future Funding for Cumbria SEND IAS Service**

The IASP recently supplied IAS Services with national comparisons for core funding, Cumbria is currently funded at £0.68 per head for 0-25, year olds. The national average is £1.03 with some LA's funding over £2, Wolverhampton LA fund their IAS Service at £2.47 per head.

The IASP has made an amount of £10,000 available for 21/22 to enable services to continue to offer a service in line with the national IASS minimum standards. The service manager submitted an application to IASP and has since received confirmation the application was successful.

The risk to the service offered by Cumbria SEND IASS from April '23 is significant if the additional funding from IASP remains at the 21/22 level, reduces or ceases completely. Without additional funding from April '23 (either from IASP, core funding from the LA and/or funding from joint commissioning with health) our service offer to parent/carers, young people and support for projects and improvement programme would reduce significantly as we would lose a member of staff who is currently funded by the IASP additional monies. It would be very difficult for us to continue to meet the Minimum Standards in the areas where we are currently compliant.

## COVID 19

Members of the service quickly adapted their ways of working during the first lockdown in Spring '20 and the team have continued to work from home. We have supported parents and young people with virtual meetings, preparing and 'coaching' parents with this new way of meeting with professionals to discuss EHCPs and support at school. The service regularly updates parents and young people through social media on issues regarding SEND and the pandemic, producing information sheets and supporting parents and young people to understand how the changes may affect the provision available to their child.

### Successes for the team

- Several permanent exclusions have been overturned due to intensive SEND IAS Service support for the family and the successful partnership between Cumbria SEND IAS Service and the EHRC.
- Additional Co-ordinators hours funded by National IASS Project have been used to increase our work directly with young people age 16 and over and this is reflected in 20/21 data. We have also engaged with disadvantaged groups and reduced cultural barriers to receiving support from the service, also reflected in the data, particularly in support of Home Ed families. We currently employ a Co-ordinator on a temporary two-year contract with the funding, the contract has recently been extended to April '23.
- The engagements and shares on the SEND IAS Service Facebook page have continued to increase, other organisations regularly ask SEND IAS Service to promote their services and advertise events.
- The SEND IAS Service Manager meets with Senior SEND Managers to share good practice, discuss issues and share information.
- SEND and health professionals (DCO) regularly attend team meetings to discuss casework and changes/improvements in SEND services.
- Co-ordinators have delivered online training to parents and young people on a range of SEND related topics.
- We continue to offer a comprehensive service through the COVID crisis.
- The adaptation of the team to virtual working and support for parents since March 2020.
- Regular virtual team meetings to support the team, share good practice and help to resolve issues.
- Great service user feedback over the last year showing the appreciation of parents and carers for the way the team support them through the various SEND processes.

### Data Collection

Co-ordinators record data on the number of parents, carers and young people they work with and over the period April 2020 to March 2021- there were a total of 497 interventions (a decrease of 93 on previous year) to support families, 263 of these interventions were parents/carers or young people contacting the service for the first time. Although the number of interventions has decreased, the level of complexity of case work has increased significantly, with a 57% increase in Level 4 interventions.

The decrease in contacts to the service, is likely due to the closure of schools and colleges for all children and young people, apart from those with an EHCP, classed as vulnerable or for the children of key workers. The usual numbers of contact to the service by families of children and young people receiving SEND support is on average 120 per year, this year it has been 61, if schools had remained open and the service received a similar amount of contacts regarding SEND Support in 20/21, the number of contacts and subsequent interventions to the service would have increased.

We grade our interventions according to the level of support a family needs from information or signposting (level 1) up through levels 2 and 3 with more time and support needed up to level 4, where a case may need months of research and support and may involve attendance at tribunal for support.

Level 4 interventions have seen the biggest increase of 12 (57%) on previous year. Interventions at this level require a very high level of time and support from the team, typically Level 4 includes:

- Detailed and continuing assistance and guidance with preparation and support during:
  - First Tier Tribunal (SEND)
  - DDA complaints to Tribunal
  - Complaints to Ombudsman
  - Judicial Review

Intervention levels for SENDIASS cases April 2020 to March 2021 Countywide		Intervention levels for SENDIASS cases April 2019 to March 2020 Countywide
Level 1	155	209
Level 2	184	209
Level 3	107	153
Level 4	33	21

The SEND IAS Service supported the families of 321 boys and 166 girls and worked directly with 6 young people independently who are aged 16 and over.

The reasons for a request for information, advice and support have been recorded as:

Reasons for enquiry	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Disputes with school	12%	17%	21%	20.60%
Annual Review of EHCP	12%	11%	14%	12.64%
Early help assessment	13%	7%	6%	12.32%
Exclusion from school	2.5%	3%	6.5%	11.52%
Transition/post 16	8%	5.5%	7%	9.76%
General SEND advice	13%	28%	30.5%	7.52%
Refusal to assess for EHCP	4.5%	6%	3.5%	5.00%
Preparation for tribunal	11%	6%	4.5%	4.20%
Mediation	3%	-	-	-

Refusal to grant a plan	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	2.48%
Cease to maintain a plan	0.2%	0.6%	0.5%	0.80%
Transport	1%	1%	3.5%	0.80%
Support through EHCP Process	11%	7%	-	-
Cases with an additional Health or Social Care element	11%	2%		

The increase in Level 4 interventions is reflected in the reasons for enquiry to the service above, increased support for parents, carers and young people with:

- Medical issues linked to SEND.
- Early Help process.
- Preparation for tribunal.

This level of case work involves a very high level of time and support from the team.

Of the work carried out during the year 2020/21, the type of education attended by the child is as follows:

Age of children	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Nursery	6%	4%	4%	3.8%
Primary	45%	44%	45%	37.9%
Secondary	33%	32%	32%	44.2%
Special schools	2%	2.5%	4%	2.3%
Independent/PRU	1%	3%	3%	5.1%
Home educated	2.5%	1.5%	3%	1.3%
Post 16	11%	8.5%	6%	4.2%

## Minimum Standards

Funding has been provided by the National IASS Project over the past three years to support our service with working towards meeting the Minimum Standards for IAS Services. The funding amounts available to services for the 21/22 period has remained at £10,000. To apply for the funding, we were asked to describe how we will:

- Ensure children, young people and families receive ongoing impartial information, advice and support within the wider service offer in line with the duties outlined in the Minimum Standards for SEND IAS Services.
- Develop new IASS digital training resources aimed at external local education, health and social care professionals, children, young people, families and volunteers - which increases knowledge of SEND law, guidance, local policy, issues and participation.
- Think creatively about how we will ensure we provide a service with increasing contacts from families.

- Trial new ways of working.
- Consider innovation which improves the service offer to parents, young people and children.
- Review the SEND IAS Service regularly and produce a rag rated Operational Plan.
- Produce case studies of work done with service users and the evaluation process.
- Submit 2 detailed funding bids for funding to carry out the actions in the funding application and Operational Plan for 2021/22.

The team continues to work hard to maintain the progress made towards consistently meeting the minimum standards and in April '21 the funding bids for 21/22 were approved and a task order drawn up.

Some of the minimum standards we will be working towards in 21/22 are:

- Addressing cultural barriers to service engagement.
- Focused work to improve the digital information service we offer to children, young people, families and professionals.
- Strengthening tribunal support.
- Training for parents, carers and young people.
- A service level agreement in place between CCC and the SEND IAS Service.

### **What difference did we make to families in Cumbria?**

At the end of an intervention with a family, a link to a Survey Monkey questionnaire is sent out to request feedback on how they found the support received from the SEND IAS Service. From our Service User Feedback report produced in March for the period from June 2020 to March 2021, we have gathered some useful feedback. We had 42 replies received from parents and carers around the county.

95% of parents who responded to the questionnaire said they would recommend our service to other people who may need it. 97% of parents said the support they had received had met their needs. The questions on staff behaviours scored highly with 97.% saying they had been treated with respect, 100% said their calls had been returned promptly and 97% said their views had been listened to. 90% said they found the advice they had received was very helpful. 98% of people said they had found the service to be confidential.

Staff are rated as being knowledgeable about the law relating to SEND and about the services that are available across the county and nationally.

The service has had a very positive impact on parents, they report increased confidence levels, improved support for their child or young person and becoming more knowledgeable about SEND matters and more empowered through the EHCP process. The service is obviously effective as 97% of people who responded said they had had their needs met and 95% said they would recommend the service to others, many parents tell us they come to us from word of mouth recommendations. Other parents tell us that support from SEND IAS Service means their child has now returned to school with the appropriate support now in place for them.

These are just a few of the positive comments received:

*“Professional, friendly service. Susan was very knowledgeable and was always prepared to support me in meetings, even on her days off. I couldn’t have done it without her help.”*

*“At difficult times SENDIAS can get things moving. They attend meetings, provide input and support, explain situations. They listen to and understand the family dynamics.”*

*“They provide genuine information that is easy to understand - this is all still quite new to me and I have struggled with feeling quite 'abandoned by the system' and although not much has changed in terms of the school issues (this is partly due to Covid) I am feeling much stronger and able to deal with the situations we come across and stand up for my family.”*

*“Being there for parents with children who have special needs or might have and helping parents through the minefield that involves.”*

*“Give legal information I wouldn't have known which has helped move things forward quicker, gave me confidence as I gained more knowledge. I don't feel rushed. I can be myself about my situation and not feel judged.”*

*“Parental support and providing someone with an understanding of the legalities and procedures. This service is invaluable to us parents. Please do not reduce or remove funding!”*

## **Looking forward**

Cumbria SEND IAS Service are continually looking to deliver SEND information, advice and support in innovative ways, to navigate IAS service challenges around meeting national minimum standards and to continue to deliver the high quality service the parents, carers and young people of Cumbria expect from a high quality IAS service. We will plan, design and deliver new approaches to service delivery in co-production with stakeholders to deliver the best possible service to parents, carers, and young people, continuing to ensure positive outcomes for our service users.

