



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 2021-22

Introduction

It is a legal requirement that all local authorities ensure children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and their parents have access to an impartial Information, Advice and Support service.

This annual report is a summary of the work carried out by the Cumbria SEND Information, Advice and Support Service from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. 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.

Data Collection

Co-ordinators record data on the number of parents, carers and young people they work with.

Over the period April 2021 to March 2022, there were a total of 1,301 interventions (an **increase of 804** on previous year) to support families. Of these interventions, **357** were parents/carers or young people contacting the service for the first time. The level of complexity of case work continues to increase significantly, with an increase of 90 in Level 4 interventions.

The sharp increase of interventions carried out by the service is in part due to the number of children and young people struggling with Emotionally Based School Avoidance, complexity of the cases, timescales involved and the continued increase of request for support with an appeal to Tribunal – resulting in several interventions required per family from the team to secure a positive outcome.

We grade our interventions according to the level of support a family requires from information or signposting (level 1) up through levels 2 and 3 with more time and support needed including supporting parents at meetings with the LA/schools, up to level 4, where a case may need months of research and support and may involve attendance at tribunal in a support capacity.

Intervention levels for SENDIASS cases April 2021 to March 2022 Countywide		Intervention levels for SENDIASS cases April 2020 to March 2021 Countywide		Intervention levels for SENDIASS cases April 2019 to March 2020 Countywide	
Level 1	351	155		209	
Level 2	579	184		209	
Level 3	248	107		153	
Level 4	123	33		21	

The **top three** reasons for a **request** for information, advice and support are recorded as:

1. **Support with EHCP Process**
2. **Dispute with School**
3. **Support with appeal to Tribunal***

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 appeal to Tribunal.

Level 4 of work involves a **very high input of time and support** from the team. Of the **work carried out** during the year 2021/22, the **top three type of education settings** attended by the child/young person are as follows:

1. **Primary**
2. **Secondary**
3. **EOTAS (educated other than in a school)***

*a large jump in the frequency for requests for support with these issues placing them in the top three, overtaking other reasons for the first time in 21/22

Successes for the team

- Our new service website is now available for parents, with a URL independent of the LA and a separate branding and identity, which promotes the impartiality of the service.
- 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. We currently have over 1,000 followers.
- The majority of appeals to Tribunal we provide considerable support for, are conceded before the hearing date, meaning the parents do not have the significant emotional stress of presenting their case to a Tribunal panel.
- The SEND IAS Service Manager meets with Senior SEND Managers on a monthly basis 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.
- Regular virtual team catch up to support the team, to share good practice and help to resolve issues. We have resumed face to face Team Meetings.
- 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.
- The change of working style since COVID means we are in a position to offer support to more parents and young people, helping to mitigate some of the consequences of reduced capacity for a large part of the year due to various staffing issues.
- Tribunal Policy has been drafted to inform parents of the support we offer through the tribunal process and this will help us to effectively manage the sharp increases in demand for Tribunal support which is impacting on our service capacity.

Challenges

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

- Capacity within the team due to long term sickness and increasing caseloads.
- LGR and what this will mean for the team and the service offer to parents/carers and young people.
- Continued unprecedented rise in demand for support from SENDIASS from parents and young people.
- The sharp increase in numbers of children and young people unable to attend school due to Emotionally Based School Avoidance, in part due to COVID lockdowns and restrictions.
- Complexity of cases, including those with a health element, requiring high levels of support from the team.
- Despite the efforts of the team to work with parents and professionals to broker solutions, we continue to see 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 majority of appeals are for placement at Specialist Provision.
- Some schools are not delivering adequate SEN support for pupils.
- Continued rise in mental health issues in schools.
- Lack of choice for Post 16 provision in the county and the numbers of parents who want to send their children to providers out of county.
- Continued need for more alternative provision and places at specialist provision for children for whom mainstream school is not suitable.
- Work continues to secure joint commissioning arrangements with health colleagues, however this is not yet resolved
- A significant number of parents requested a high level of support from our service when the short breaks provision, referral process and criteria changed in this period.
- The trial of removal of family meetings from the EHCP process has meant that some parents have missed the deadline in responding to draft plans, increasing our casework in supporting parents with this issue.
- Ongoing annual issues with transport provision for SEND pupils.

Partnerships

The service continues to work with SENDAC (SEND Alliance Cumbria, Cumbria's Parent Carer Forum) assisting with resources for parents including drop-in sessions for parents in partnership with SENDAC.

We continue to share our knowledge with the SEND Team and the DCO, meeting regularly to discuss emerging trends and new information relevant to SEND.

Co-ordinators work closely with third sector agencies supporting children and young people with SEND and their families, including Mencap and the Cumbria Autism Project

We work with Virtual Schools, Access and Inclusion, Children with Disabilities and Fostering/Adoption teams.

Training and Development

Co-ordinators attend training relevant to their role including SEND Law, SEND Tribunals, Exclusions and School Attendance. The service manager attends the bi-monthly Northwest Consortium Meetings and annual conference, sharing information with other SEND IAS Services in the northwest. Co-ordinators attended 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. Attainment levels in the team as of March '22 were 6 staff fully trained to level 3. The team are consistently knowledgeable and confident working with families, understand the requirements of SEND law and are familiar with the SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years.

Minimum Standards

Funding has been provided by the National IASS Project over the past four 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 was £10,000 and our service was successful in securing the full £10,000. We used the funding to provide the following support and innovative ways of working:

- Partially funded a full time Co-ordinator.
- 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.
- Developed new IASS digital training resources aimed at young people and parents appealing to the SEND Tribunal - increasing knowledge of SEND law, guidance and local policy.
- Considered how we will ensure we provide a service with increasing contacts from families.
- Trialling new ways of working.
- Producing case studies of work done with service users and the evaluation process.

The team continues to work hard to maintain the progress made towards consistently meeting the minimum standards. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult with the year on year increase in requests for support from families and young people. Without adequate funding going forwards, it is unlikely there will be enough capacity in the service to fully deliver the minimum standards, particularly around: flexibility, full week coverage, working with partners and parents around policy and practice, providing training for parents and professionals and offering support for all the parents, children and young people who come to us for help, as there is already considerable pressure on the service to do this currently.

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 February for the period from March 2021 to February 2022, we have gathered some useful feedback. We received 40 replies from parents and carers around the county.

- 92.5% of parents who responded to the questionnaire said they would recommend our service to other people who may need it
- 92% of parents said the support they had received had met their needs.

The questions on staff behaviours scored highly:

- 97.5% saying they had been treated with respect
- 95% said their calls had been returned promptly
- 97.5% said their views had been listened to
- 92.5% said they found the advice they had received was very helpful or helpful

- 97.5% of people said they had found the service to be confidential.

It is encouraging to see that **Educational Settings** are now the **highest percentage source** of how parents hear about the service, **at 41%** which reflects the work done with schools to promote the SEND IAS Service.

Parents and Carers value the knowledge and expertise of the SENDIASS Co-ordinators and how well they explain the complex SEND processes and systems. They find the staff to be reassuring and offer down to earth and practical advice. One parent said she appreciated how the co-ordinator had taught her how to seek advice and support for her child. Another parent said her Co-ordinator had stopped her from feeling so isolated in seeking help for her child.

These are just a few of the positive comments received:

“Confidential & unbiased. Allows parents to have a voice when they question themselves. I feel like when you don’t know where to turn with issues you can always rely on SENDIASS to be non-judgemental.”

“Quick response and very easy to talk to. Sometimes the information can be overwhelming, but it was all explained in a way I could understand.”

“You help make sense of the process which is really inaccessible and difficult to understand.”

“The support to parents is exceptional, I knew what was happening on an almost daily basis.” “In addition to the “factual” support they are an emotional support. Invaluable .”

“Excellent service tailored to my concerns.”

“The SENDIAS service has been a great support to us and our family in helping get the correct help information and support for our son. We felt listened too and our concerns were understood and dealt with in a professional, timely manner.”

“Excellent prompt discussions, obvious subject matter expert which helped. Good listener.”

“Just being there supporting and advising parents through difficult and stressful times.”

However, parents have expressed concerns about the capacity of the service and the risk of a reduced service offer as the team is continually stretched. Parents and carers suggest increasing working hours for co-ordinators, full time staff instead of part time and additional funding to recruit more staff for the team.

Looking forward

Funding for Cumbria SEND IAS Service

The IASP announced in November '21 no additional government funding will be available to services for 22/23. The funding remaining from 21/22 is supporting a part time Co-ordinator post in the Carlisle area, increased Co-ordinator hours in the West and a temporary increase in Manager hours.

The IASP recently supplied IAS Services with national comparisons for funding, Cumbria is currently funded at £0.75 per head for 0-25, year olds, (this does not include the temporary funded posts/hours) the national average is £1.20. Our closest Statistical Neighbour (using the IASP SN Benchmarking Tool) is Lincolnshire, funded at £2.86 per head, our nearest SN in the northwest is Wigan, funded at £1.55. The highest funding per head nationally is £3.31. These figures supplied from IASSP report Feb 2021 based on figures submitted in 2020.

Staffing/Capacity - We have recently employed two Co-ordinators (Aug '22) to replace the 33 hours made vacant due to a team member leaving the service to take up a permanent post with the LA.

The service currently has 5 x 18.5 hour Co-ordinator posts (1 post is temporary until April '23 when external funding ceases) and 1 x 30 hour Co-ordinator post (the extra 11.5 hours will end in April '23 when external funding ceases). The service Manager role is currently 22 hours (15 hours previously) on a temporary basis until April '23.

We have worked with the LA to secure funding for an additional 18 month period to enable us to extend the fixed term 18.5 hour co-ordinator post. During this time we will also continue to progress joint commissioning discussions with health commissioning colleagues.

LGR

As a result of the nationally mandated Local Government Reform process in Cumbria, from 1 April 2023, Cumbria County Council will be replaced by two Unitary Authorities: Cumberland, and Westmorland and Furness. As a result, the majority of services currently operating on a countywide footprint are being required to disaggregate. This means we will be creating two new SEND IAS services that will be operational from 1 April. We will be working to ensure business continuity and effective transition to the new arrangements. It is likely that additional management resource will be recruited to the service to ensure oversight across both new teams. We are clear that the new services will continue to collaborate closely and share resources where it is in the interests of families in Cumbria to do so.

We will continue to 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.

