



Cumbria SEND Information, Advice & 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 2017-18

Introduction

This annual report is a summary of the work done by the Cumbria SEND Information, Advice and Support Service from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. Cumbria SEND IAS Service offers impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents and carers who have a child with a disability and also directly to young people where this is requested.

The Cumbria SEND IAS Service consists of 5 part time Co-ordinators who work 18.5 hours per week and one part time Manager. There were formerly 6 Co-ordinators but one retired in March and the vacancy has been put on hold. The team have therefore reconfigured the working areas and divided the county into 5 rather than 6. This mainly affects the south of the county. Each co-ordinator has been allocated around 70 schools and settings and could be contacted by parents, carers and young people from any of those settings including nurseries, primary and secondary schools, and further education colleges; the full 0-25 age range.

The Co-ordinators work out in the districts of the county, so all parents have a local service and can meet with staff and have face to face support at meetings, as well as support by email and telephone. During this period, one co-ordinator returned from maternity leave and the person who was covering took over the role in the West following the early retirement on ill health grounds of our Allerdale Co-ordinator back in April.

To ensure impartiality and accessibility for parents, all our staff are based “at a distance” from LA SEND/Social Care staff to ensure the independence of the service and this means staff are based in a Children’s Centre, a Firestation and in council offices away from any direct delivery teams.

IPSEA legal training is provided by the Council for Disabled Children for all Co-ordinators to undertake and staff must complete level 1, 2 and 3. These consist of 10 x E-learning modules per level plus face to face training in Manchester. Current attainment levels are: 2 staff fully trained to level 3, 2 staff fully trained to level 2 and one due to take level 2 this year. Having undergone legal training, Co-ordinators are then confident and knowledgeable to work with families and understand the requirements of the law and are familiar with the SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years.

Staff attendance at events

As well as their case work, our Co-ordinators attend training, Local Practice Group Multiagency Meetings, deliver presentations about our work to specific parental or school groups, attend regional events, visit support groups and support Parent Carer events throughout the year. One of our co-ordinators attends the bi-monthly North West Consortium Meetings where she share information with other SEND IAS Services in the North West and relevant issues are discussed.

Challenges

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

- Reduction of SENDIASS staff from 6 to 5 – co-ordinators managing a bigger area and more cases. Having to develop a different way of working eg: less home visits and support in meetings due to change in capacity as a service.
- A rise in the number of children unable to attend school due to anxiety or health reasons and school not always being as supportive as perhaps they could be.
- Parents report that they are increasingly finding that they are not listened to how they would wish to be by schools and some professionals and communication between school/professionals and parents can be patchy.
- Rise in permanent exclusions with SEND – particularly from Academies with zero tolerance behaviour policies. Lack of knowledge from some schools that disabled pupils are protected by Equality Act 2010 – reasonable adjustments, indirect discrimination etc.
- SEN Support – schools are sometimes unwilling to put in necessary support. More recently, it has become apparent that some schools are actively dissuading parents from requesting an EHCP assessment as they do not want to evidence how they have (or have not) used the £7,160. Other schools are stating to parents that there is “no point” in school applying for an EHCP as they are confident that child “does not meet criteria” and/or “an Early Help has not been in place for 6 months”.
- Mental Health issues in schools – lack of understanding by school staff, unwilling to accept that mental health can be a disability and a duty to make reasonable adjustments. High number of CYP with complex mental health issues. Rising levels of adopted children with trauma, attachment, neglect and disassociation
- Parents’ concern that post 16 provision is being provided over 3 days instead of 5
- Lack of Post 16 provision in the county and the rise in numbers of parents who want to send their children to providers out of county
- Need for more alternative provision for children for whom mainstream school is not suitable
- CAHMS thresholds are so high some children just don’t qualify for any support and waiting lists are very long for those who do qualify
- Schools encouraging parents of some children with SEND to “home educate” or risk exclusion

Successes for the team

- More parents saying that another professional has recommended our service to support them
- Appreciation of parents of SEND IASS support in meetings as the professionals “behave” differently when a co-ordinators attend meetings
- Giving parents the tools to work with the school to secure the best outcomes for their child
- Adoption and Fostering Teams have passed service details to families experiencing issues with support in school for their CYP resulting in a rise in adoptive parents contacting the service
- Working with Equality and Human Rights Commission to support parents to challenge schools and governors decisions to PEX pupils with SEND. EHRC funded barristers to support two families at IRPs, as a result, two PEXs have been quashed by IRPs. SEND Managers believe this has caused a drop in the number of PEXs in recent figures for the Carlisle area.
- Young People’s Project (Carlisle area) – working directly with YP to ensure their voice is heard in TAC and Review meetings. YP have commented that they were able to express their wishes for the first time due to the relationship our co-ordinator had built with them prior to meetings. Co-ordinator was able to broker a solution for a YP who was out of education for 18 months to access alternative full time provision and is now achieving well. Family have now decided against taking legal action against CCC.

- Two co-ordinators have achieved Level 4 in Good Practice in Supporting People with Autism – the knowledge they have gained has assisted them in supporting CYP and families in school meetings with regard to SEN support, reasonable adjustments, and provision for CYP with ASC
- SENDIASS Facebook page set up and promoting services and useful information to families
- Website updated to ensure there are useful factsheets and links to informative websites. Close working with Local Offer staff to ensure a range of useful information for parents
- The SEND IASS manager attends the monthly Senior SEND Managers meetings in order to share good practice, discuss issues and share information on a range of new initiatives
- The SENDIAS Service worked with parents to raise awareness of the issue of the lack of support for children in nurseries for 15 of the 30 hours child care and as a result the issue was addressed by the LA and families given the appropriate support for their needs and the policy on the website was reframed.
- Tribunal levels are low at present and this is due in part to the work of the SENDIASS team who try to avert cases going to tribunal. Co-ordinators work calmly with parents, who are often angry or upset, to clarify their issues and liaise with professionals from the LA, schools and health to work locally to broker the best solution possible for the child, without parents feeling they have to go to tribunal.

Independent Supporter project

During 2017/18, funding was received to support the Independent Supporter (IS) project in Cumbria. Volunteers and LA staff have completed the e-learning and the face to face training and our staff have continued to act in the capacity of an independent supporter as part of their role supporting families and young people through the 20 week Education Health and Care Process. A small project in the north of the county was set up where our Co-ordinator has engaged with the providers of post 16 provision and got to know them and their young people. The extra staff hours have been funded by the IS project. This has resulted in young people requesting support from our Co-ordinator before and during their annual reviews and several resources have been created to support schools and colleges. The Independent Supporter project will finish at the end of May 2018 and there will be a new funding stream available for SENDIAS Service to apply for specific projects and to ensure the service is compliant with the new commissioning guidelines and quality standards.

Data on service users

Co-ordinators collect data on the parents, carers and young people that they work with and 234 new families throughout Cumbria have contacted the team and have received support. Help and support has also been provided for 667 families who have come back to the team for support. Some of those families just need information or signposting to a website and others need more support, with research and support to write letters or put their case, and others need a very high level of support over several months. Staff have attended 417 meetings with parents and carers and young people either in their homes or at schools and colleges for initial contact, TAC, annual review, EHC plan meetings or school exclusions.

Of the families supported this year, the ratio of their children is 2.5 boys to 1 girl which shows the numbers of families of girls with SEND is rising as a proportion of the families who seeks support, as last year it was 3 boys to 1 girl.

The reasons people come to us for help and support with an issue have been recorded this year as:

Reasons for enquiry	Percentage
Disputes with school	20.60%
Annual Review of EHC plan	12.64%
Early help assessment	12.32%
Exclusion from school	11.52%
Help with Section A of plan	9.76%
Transition/post 16	9.76%
General SEND advice	7.52%
Refusal to assess for a plan	5.00%
Preparation for tribunal	4.20%
Refusal to grant a plan	2.48%
Transfer from Statement to plan	2.60%
Cease to maintain a plan	0.80%
Transport to school	0.80%

Of all the work carried out during the year 2017/8, the age of the child is as follows, showing more work with secondary aged children which was up around 10% on last year and the work with those children going to independents and PRUs has risen too:

Age of children	2017/18	2016/17
Nursery	3.8%	3.7%
Primary	37.9%	44.5%
Secondary	44.2%	34.5%
Special schools	2.3%	5.1%
Independent/PRU	5.1%	0.3%
Home educated	1.3%	1.1%
Post 16	4.2%	9.1%
Higher education	1.2%	1.75%

Preparation for inspection

The SEND IASS team has been continuing to prepare for the forthcoming Ofsted inspection of SEND provision. Case studies showing the impact on families of our advice and support are now available. Provision has been mapped against the national Quality Standards for IAS and most of the criteria are rag rated green. To ensure we collect and collate data on the services we have provided, we have upgraded our management of information and data and will continue to do so.

Parent Carer Forum

Over 2017/18 various members of our staff have attended the Parent Carer Forum monthly meetings to offer advice and support on how to develop the service and promote the recruitment of new members. We have also supported the PCF to set up and send out service user feedback questionnaires on transport and their children's SEND provision and to write reports analysing the findings. We have also supported the production of an electronic flyer to advertise the PCF and worked with LA staff to ensure they distribute this flyer when they are in contact with parents. We have also started working with the LA and Parent Carer Forum on a Co-production Strategy.

What difference did we make to families in Cumbria?

Parents and carers that our team work with in Cumbria often give verbal and written feedback to our individual co-ordinators throughout the year about how much they appreciate and value the help and support they have been given and some even send flowers!. This is both practical help and information but also emotional support and strategies to help empower parents.

Some of the comments made by parents and carers direct to our co-ordinators:

“Thank you for your help. You are the first person who has really listened to me.”

“Thanks for yesterday hun. Just having you there made me feel more confident. You really are fab and we couldn’t be more grateful.”

“A token of our appreciation of all your help and support.” – message with flowers for one of our co-ordinators

At the end of an intervention with a family, a link to an on line questionnaire on Survey Monkey is sent out to parents and carers for them to give some feedback on how they have found their service. We have had some very positive feedback and this demonstrates how successful our service has been and how much parents and carers appreciate the practical help, the wide ranging knowledge and the support at an emotional time for them that our skilled SEND IAS Service Co-ordinators provide.

From our Service User Feedback report produced in May for the period from April 2017 to March 2018, it is clear that we have gathered some useful feedback to the questionnaires and on-line links to our Survey Monkey questionnaire. We had 28 replies received from parents and carers round the county.

86% of parents and carers said the information and advice they had received was very helpful, 86% said the service was neutral and unbiased and 93% said they had found it very confidential. 75% of people said they had found the service had made a great difference to them and some said the difference was “huge” and some “amazing” and other said it was “invaluable”. On the closed questions on staff behaviours, the answers were 93% and more positive for parents and carers who were happy with how they had been treated by SENDIASS Co-ordinators. 89% said their needs had been met by the SENDIASS service and 89.5% said they would recommend the service to other parents. Parents said the service reduced their anxiety, gave them confidence, helped them find their way through the SEND processes and explained the law and their rights to them.

These are just a few of the positive comments received:

“Sally was fantastic in helping diagnose and help our son. I often contacted her out of the blue and she was able to pick up where we left off. My calls and e mails were answered very promptly .I felt Sally went well out of her way to help and support my family.”

Your support gave me the confidence to complete the EHCP paperwork and your help at the draft meeting meant we all able to walk away feeling more positive.”

“Tracey is amazing, a fountain of knowledge and very supportive. I wouldn’t dream of going into any EHCP meeting now without her help! Knowing there is someone who knows the systems inside out on your side is so reassuring, especially at a time of great stress (which EHCP meetings always are)!”

“It has made a huge difference as I wouldn’t have been able to do this on my own.”

Looking forward

During 2018/19, one of the key impacts on our work will be the new guidelines for commissioning the SEND IAS Service which were published in March. The LA needs to ensure the SEND IAS Service complies with guidelines and works jointly with health partners in the CCGs and other partners to commission information, advice and support across the 3 areas of work: education, health and social care.

Other changes include the creation of a new national funding stream which SENDIAS Services can access to raise standards and work towards becoming fully compliant with the minimum quality standards for SENDIAS Services.

2017/18 has been a positive year for the SEND IAS Service; the team is well qualified and knowledgeable and works well with a range of other agencies through out Cumbria. There is good networking and SENDIASS works actively to support the Parent Carer Forum. Many parents have used the service and given good feedback. The challenges in future will include meeting the needs of parents with a reduced workforce and engaging more directly with young people and this will mean the team will have to look at our ways of working to ensure an efficient and effective service.

Helen Leader, Manager Cumbria SEND IAS Service

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