Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) – formerly Parent Partnership

Annual Report 2016/17

Background

The Children and Families Act (CFA) 2014, Sections 32, 19(c), 26(3) and 49 and section two of the SEND Code of Practice 2015, requires local authorities to provide a Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). The service must be impartial and arm’s length from the authority. Its job is to provide information, advice and support about education, health and social care to:

1. parents and carers of children 0-25 years old with SEND;
2. young people, 16 – 25 years old with SEND, and
3. children, up to 16 years old with SEND.

Information, advice and support must be provided by:

1) phone, face to face, email and other mediums used by parents and young people
2) support in meetings with schools, local authorities and health
3) a telephone advice service
4) training/information sessions
5) literature.

The SEND Code of practice advises:

*Information, advice and support should be provided through a dedicated and easily identifiable service. Local authorities have established Information, Advice and Support Services (formerly known as Parent Partnership services) to provide information, advice and support to parents in relation to SEN. In addition, many local authorities provide or commission information, advice and support services for young people. Local authorities should build on these existing services to provide the information, advice and support detailed in this chapter.’*

Challenges for the service in 2016/17

In 2015/16 the extra support for the service to help cope with increasing demand was withdrawn. In addition as no funding was available to help the service meet its increased remit under the Children and Families Act 2014 the decision was made to:

1) provide a reduced service to parents and carers both in terms of the amount of advice and support they would receive and also in a raising of the level at which direct support would be provided
2) not actively promote the service to young people with SEND, 16 – 26 years, or children with SEND, up to 16 years old, who were now entitled to the same information, advice and support as their parents or carers.

The academic year 2016/17 saw a 22% increase in parental referrals to the service compared to academic year 2015/16.

New referrals 2015/16 494 cases
New referrals 2016/17 605 cases

This was managed through a further reduction in the levels of support offered to parents and carers and staff working unpaid hours over and above their contractual ones. This reduction in service has meant a further increase in the numbers of parents who are only offered telephone and email support. The SEND Code of Practice 2014 states that SENDIASS should provide

‘Representation for those who need it, which should include support in attending meetings’

Section 2.19

As a result our non-compliance with our minimum standards in this area has increased.

From conversations with colleagues it appears at a national level smaller SENDIASS services who have had funding cuts and no investment to meet the additional requirements on the service from 2014 are in a similar position as regards their increasing non-compliance with the minimum standards. Larger services and those with increased budgets are in a better position to meet rising demand and their increased remit.

There is a new government contract ‘Information, Advice and Support to Children and Young people with SEND and parents’ to help services look at this but it is not known if this will translate into financial help. It is expected any money available through this grant will probably require either a commitment from authorities to provide a compliant service or at least not to cut any further if money is forthcoming to help look at and address the issues.

Currently the service benefits from funding from the governments Independent Support Programme. As well as providing Independent Support the money is used to provide extra SENDIASS support to parents. This funding ceases from April 2018 and currently no formal undertaking to continue the funding past March 2018 has been received. There will be an outstanding balance transferred from 17/18 to 18/19 which will enable Independent Support and the additional hours SENDIASS staff work to be maintained for one more year. At this point we will need to review again how the service meets demand.
Details of new cases from 1/9/16 to 31/8/17

Reason for referral

Age of child at referral
Themes from casework

At team meetings, during team and individual supervisions staff report concerns and the trends they notice during their support of parents. The following have been noted.

During conversations parents reported being advised:

1) their child’s school had no or very little SEN budget  
2) they should consider home educating their child  
3) other pupils had higher needs so no help was available for their child  
4) as IEPs were no longer required there were no records that could be shared with them about their child’s support and progress  
5) they should take their child home or keep their child at home or off school as they were finding things difficult  
6) their child’s SEND related behaviour had to be punished.

Staff have supported parents and schools in resolving these issues as they are either untrue or illegal.

Main areas of concern related to:

1) lack of quality first teaching  
2) poor or no implementation of the assess, plan, do and review cycle  
3) parents not being informed about and involved with their child’s education  
4) problem behaviour not being investigated and where it relates to SEND appropriate support being put in or the existing support being revised  
5) a zero tolerance approach to SEND related behaviour  
6) no common and accurate method of measuring pupil attainment  
7) lack of post 16 provision  
8) pupils out of school, mainly due to mental health needs, where there was little or no provision  
9) lack of awareness of the need to provide alternative provision (AP) or the need for appropriate alternative provision  
10)pupils with high levels of medical needs not getting adequate support/tuition due to a ‘lack of funding’  
11)support not being provided due to a lack of or limited SEND funding  
12)the guidance in the SEND Code of Practice 2015 being followed rather than the legal test in the CFA 2014 when making a decision about whether the criteria for a statutory assessment is met  
13)parents concerns or phone calls not being acknowledged or dealt with  
14)lack of a clear offer of support to schools based on the needs they, the local authority and parents identified  
15)increasing numbers of parents withdrawing their child from school to home educate as they feel this is the only way their child’s needs can be met.
Examples of good practice include:

1) schools with an inclusive and SEND friendly ethos
2) SENCOs and SEND staff going the extra mile
3) Parents being fully involved in their child’s education
4) Schools recognising parents’ concerns, addressing them and setting procedures in place to ensure they do not occur again.

Training

The Service’s commitment to providing training and advice sessions to parents remains unaltered despite the rising demand for our service. Doing so enables us to provide groups of parents with information and advice about the SEND system to enable them to take part and make informed decisions about their child’s education and provision. This remains a very efficient way of reaching a large audience and hopefully limiting the need for one to one support. Areas covered include:

1) SEND Support
2) Local Offer and schools SEN Information Report
3) Statutory Assessment and Transfer Reviews i.e. transferring statements to EHCPs.
4) Best Buddies - a peer support programme for children and young people
5) ADHD
6) DCD/Dyspraxia – in partnership with health
8) Dyslexia
9) Looking after your back – in partnership with health
10) Going up to secondary school.

Strategic Work

SEN DIASS in partnership with Pinpoint ran in the summer term 2017 sessions on SEN transport with the aim of producing a transport charter setting out the expectations of everyone in the system to try and reduce the problems and dissatisfaction that parents are reporting.

The service has input to the authority’s work on:

1) Bullying
2) SEN Support
3) SEND POET – a feedback system for parents and young people on the way services have been provided and the support they receive
4) reducing Tribunal cases and parents’ concerns about the process
5) their Local Offer
6) schools’ SEN Information Report
7) Legal Services tender
8) Children’s Change Programme
9) admissions pathway for children and young people moving into Cambridgeshire

Training of SENDIASS staff

All SENDIASS have to have at least one member of staff that has fully completed the IASS Network/IPSEA legal training, where possible this includes the more recent level three training. Through work within the SENDIASS Eastern Region group all Cambridgeshire staff have fully completed all three levels and it has been acknowledged that Cambridgeshire and other services in the Eastern Region are some of the best trained in the country.

Parents’ feedback on the service they received

We carry out an ongoing evaluation of the work we do, details in Outcome of SENDIASS Involvement graph, and after a case is agreed closed a confidential evaluation is sent to the parent to obtain further details.

Outcome of SENDIASS involvement – ongoing feedback

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Outcome of SENDIASS Involvement

- Informed and confident for meeting: 50%
- Informed and confident to progress: 0%
- Caller felt listened to and understood-case ongoing: 8%
- Issue fully resolved-case closed: 6%
- Issue resolved as far as possible-case closed: 8%
- Caller felt no difference made: 28%
Feedback from confidential evaluation after a case is closed

How easy was it to get in touch with us?

- 61% of respondents rated it Very Easy.
- 9% rated it Easy.
- 0% rated it Very Hard.
- National average: 71.5%

How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?

- 82% of respondents rated it Very helpful.
- 14% rated it Helpful.
- 2% rated it Somewhat helpful.
- 0% rated it Not at all helpful.
- National average: 82%
How neutral, fair and unbiased do you think we were?

- 0% Not at all
- 2% 1
- 0% 2
- 10% 3
- 88% 4 Very

National average 82%

What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made to you?

- 0% No difference at all
- 2% 1
- 14% 2
- 21% 3
- 63% 4 A great deal of difference

National average 71%
Despite the reduction in the service’s size our neutrality is still rated 6% higher than the national average and the quality of advice and information given is still the same as the national average.

The reduction in the service offered has meant we are below the national average in:

- scores for the difference we made, we increasingly offer a telephone advice service to meet demand rather than actively taking part to resolve problems
• overall satisfaction, we have to advise parents we cannot offer the service they would like to help resolve their concerns.

Challenges for 2017/18

The period 1/9/17 to 11/10/17 saw a 17% increase in new referrals compared to the same period the previous year which caused increased pressure on staff. There is no indication that this will decrease over the rest of the year.

The service has benefitted from funding from a government grant to provide Independent Support and help SENDIASS’s with capacity. This funding ceases at the end of March 2018. Unless it is replaced with something similar Independent Support will no longer be available to parents when the balance transferred from 17/18 is spent and the service will see a further reduction in the support it can offer.

Conclusion

Despite offering a continually reducing service and increasingly not meeting some of its minimum standards the service is still effective in supporting the majority of the parents that contact it.