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

Annual Report 2017/18

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.’

Staffing Overview

The service has a manager who runs it as well as four other small services. The SENDIASS service has four case workers, see table overleaf for details.
The additional hours and the post funded by government grant help mask the cuts to the service in 2014/15 and the fact no additional funding was received when the services remit significantly increased in 2014. Funding exists to continue the additional hours for the financial year 2018/19, but not beyond.

### Challenges for the service in 2017/18

The increased demands on the service of the Children and Families Act 2014 and funding reductions still means the service is not meeting its requirements in respect of

1) young people – anyone from 16-25 years old and above statutory school age
2) children – anyone under 16 years old.

The service provided to parents continues to be focussed on those with the greatest need. This is also influenced by the fact that the cases are increasingly complex and so require more staff time. In order to meet demand, the service has continued the trend to provide a telephone-only service for larger numbers of parents, concentrating support in meetings only on a small number of cases where it is vital. As a result, the service is spending more time on a smaller number of cases. 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, the service’s non-compliance with its minimum standards in this area has increased.

In 2016/17, we started 591 cases whereas in 2017/18 it was limited to 562. However the total time spent on casework in 2016/17 was 2,882 hours, whereas in 2017/18 it has risen to 3,184 hours, an increase of 10%, see graph below.

More time was spent on emails, seen as more effective than phone calls, as they limit the ‘conversation’ and save time waiting/unable to speak to the person, and more on meetings, as often they are the only way to resolve the more complex cases.

From conversations with colleagues, it appears that 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. This has been confirmed by a national survey of services earlier this year.

Government grant funds extra hours for SENDIASS Case workers as well as a post to provide information and advice around statutory assessments and annual reviews, now called Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Support. This scheme finished at the end of May 2018, but careful use of the funds has enabled the additional support it provided to continue for the financial year 2018/19. There is no funding to continue this extra support into 2019/20. 100% of parents who used the EHCP Support service rated it in the top two categories of satisfaction with 85% giving it the highest category. Service users particularly valued the face to face support with the complex paperwork. Typical comments from the confidential evaluations are “Helped
me understand how to complete the ECHP paperwork and was prepared to meet up at very short notice to make sure we could all meet our deadlines” and “Attending meetings with me has really helped as the meetings can be very emotional as a parent and it is good to have someone with you who can remember everything and help you get your point across”.

National developments

The Department for Education (DfE) funds the IASS Network to facilitate and develop the work of SENDIASS throughout England. Despite the constraints imposed by funding on Cambridgeshire SENDIASS, there is recognition by the IASS Network that what is provided is of a high quality and that its staff provide an excellent service to those it supports. As a result of this, the manager has been involved in two national projects. The first of these was to review SENDIASS services throughout England and a report was submitted to the DfE. The second project was to review the national minimum standards that SENDIASS services have to adhere to. The revised minimum standards are currently out for consultation and are expected to be in place in the autumn term 2018.

Information, Advice and Support Programme (IASP)

This new programme has been set up in recognition of the fact many SENDIASS are not meeting their increased remit from 2014, as well as increasingly failing to meet minimum standards in other aspects of their work. Cambridgeshire SENDIASS submitted a bid and was successful in obtaining funding under this programme for 2018/19.

This funding will provide two extra posts. The first is for admin support, since existing support was withdrawn in 2014, as well as providing an initial response to phone and email queries before they are passed to the relevant caseworker. The second post will work on developing work with young people and children. Both are part-time, term-time only. It is hoped these posts, while the funding continues, will help the service to better meet its requirements.
Details of new cases from 1/9/17 to 31/8/18

Reason for referral

Age of child at referral
Type of SEN

SEN Stage - Current

New referrals - current SEN stage
Themes from casework

At team meetings and 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 before calling SENDIASS:

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) they should take their child home, or keep their child at home or off school as they were finding things difficult  
5) their child’s SEND-related behaviour had to be punished.

SENDIASS 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 limited SEN Support  
3) poor or no implementation of the assess, plan, do and review cycle  
4) parents not being informed about and involved with their child’s education  
5) problem behaviour not being investigated and, where it relates to SEND, appropriate support not being put in or the existing support being revised  
6) a zero tolerance approach to SEND-related behaviour  
7) no common and accurate method of measuring pupil attainment  
8) lack of appropriate post 16 provision  
9) pupils out of school, mainly due to mental health needs, where there was little or no provision  
10) lack of awareness of the need to provide alternative provision (AP) or the need for appropriate alternative provision  
11) pupils with high levels of medical needs not getting adequate support/tuition due to a ‘lack of funding’  
12) support not being provided due to a lack of or limited SEND funding  
13) 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  
14) parents concerns or phone calls not being acknowledged or dealt with by schools, the local authority and other professionals  
15) lack of a clear offer of support to schools based on the needs they, the local authority and parents identified  
16) 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
17) schools’ policies/senior management teams not always supporting good quality SEND practice, which impacts on the schools SEND department and SEND pupils in general.

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 parent’s concerns, addressing them and setting procedures in place to ensure they do not occur again
5) School to school support
6) Academies use of an ‘SEN Manager’ to oversee SEN in all its schools
7) Parents and practitioners actively seeking information to help them as parents and practitioners

Training

The service’s commitment to providing training and advice sessions to parents remains unaltered despite the rising demand for our service. This is the most efficient way for us to reach large numbers of parents and provide them with the information they need to make informed decisions about their child’s support. Areas covered include:

1) SEND Support
2) The Local Offer and schools SEN Information Report
3) Statutory Assessment and requesting an Education, Health and Care Plan.
4) SEND and using ICT to help
5) ADHD – how schools and parents can help and support
7) Sensory issues – how schools and parents can help and support
8) Helping children and young people to prepare for adulthood
9) Going up to secondary school.

Strategic Work

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

1) SEN Support
2) SEND POET – a feedback system for parents and young people on the way services have been provided and the support they receive
3) reducing Tribunal cases and parents’ concerns about the process
4) Children’s Change Programme
5) Revised statutory assessment guidance
6) Statutory Assessment Team and their communications with parents  
7) Early Help and extending to 19  
8) SEND transport charter  
9) SEMH review  
10) Local Offer  
11) Anti-Bullying  
12) Post 16

**Training of SENDIASS staff**

All SENDIASS staff have completed all three existing levels of the IASS Network/IPSEA SEND Legal Training. The existing requirement is that one person per service has reached this level. In addition, our Education, Health and Care Plan Supporter, previously referred to as the Independent Supporter, has completed all this training in to help them support parents on areas peripheral to their role.

The service remains very active within the Eastern Region, supporting the development of SENDIASS staff within the region. Courses provided have covered Early Years, Tribunals and the combined IPSEA/IASS Network Legal Training.

**Parents’ feedback on the service they received**

We carry out an evaluation of our work on an ongoing basis, details in Outcome of SENDIASS Involvement graph – see below. After a case is agreed with the service users as ready to be closed, a confidential evaluation questionnaire is sent to them, to obtain further feedback. Details of the confidential evaluations are in the section ‘Feedback from confidential evaluation after a case is closed’.

Outcome of SENDIASS involvement – ongoing feedback
Feedback from confidential evaluation after a case is closed

How easy was it to get in touch with us?

- 49% rated it as very easy
- 35% rated it as easy
- 11% rated it as moderate
- 3% rated it as somewhat easy
- 2% rated it as not at all easy

National Average 68%

National average 21%

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

- 87% rated it as very helpful
- 10% rated it as somewhat helpful
- 3% rated it as moderately helpful
- 0% rated it as somewhat helpful
- 0% rated it as not at all helpful

National average 81%
How neutral, fair and unbiased do you think we were?

- 83%
- National average 77%

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

- 67%
- National average 67%
Overall how satisfied are you with the service we gave?

- 84% Very satisfied
- 13% Satisfied
- 3% Neutral
- 0% Dissatisfied
- 0% Very dissatisfied

National average 82%

How likely is it that you would recommend the service to others?

- 92% Extremely likely
- 7% Likely
- 0% Neutral
- 0% Unlikely
- 0% Very unlikely

National average 86%
Comparing Cambridgeshire SENDIASS with the last national SENDIASS evaluation, the service is above the national average in all but two areas.

The first is in response to the question about the difference the services involvement made where we achieved the national average. We are unlikely to improve this, last year we scored slightly less, as we increasingly offer a telephone advice service to meet demand rather than actively taking part in meetings to resolve problems.

The second is in response to the question ‘How easy was it to get in touch with us?’ In this, our highest rating was significantly below the national average, but the second highest rating was significantly above the national average. This is not a surprise, as most staff work part-time and term-time, so it takes longer for anyone contacting the service to receive a response. A new post is to be created using the IAS Programme funding to help begin to address this.

The last national SENDIASS evaluation can be found using the link below.


Challenges for 2018/19

The funding to provide EHCP Support, formerly Independent Support, will cease in 2019. Based on current information it is unlikely the funding from the IAS Programme will be sufficient to pay for this post. Given the value parents place on this service, the higher quality assessment requests and EHCPs it can help provide its loss will be significant.

The same funding enables two members of staff to work extra hours, a total of 18 hours per week, to help cope with the demand for the service. This funding will cease at the end of March 2019.

The IAS Programme funding will enable the service to meet more of its minimum standards, but unless additional funding is announced the reduction in service required as a result of the preceding two points will see us become increasingly non-compliant in other areas. This will obviously reduce the depth of service offered and time available for parents, carers, children and young people with increasingly complex needs.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges facing SENDIASS, it continues to provide a very good service to those users it actively supports, which is evidenced by the feedback received, and by the fact that parents often recommend the service to other parents.

The service is committed to doing all it can to continue to advise and support people at often very difficult times and to contribute to raising expectations and increasing the life chances of children and young people with SEND in Cambridgeshire.