



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 SENDIAS Service 2015-2016

Introduction

This annual report is the first one for several years and is for the Cumbria Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service, known as Cumbria SEND IAS Service which replaces the former Parent Partnership Service.

In September 2014, new legislation came into force for the whole of the SEND provision in the country and this also meant a change for the former Parent Partnership Services and the national body which has now become the Information, Advice and Support Services Network.

Cumbria SEND IAS Service still gives information, advice and support to parents and carers but it now also includes direct support for children and young people where this is requested.

The Cumbria SEND IAS Service consists of 6 part time staff and one manager. The co-ordinators work in all 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. Two co-ordinators have left or retired in the last couple of years and new staff joined the service in 2015 and 2016, one in Carlisle and one in the West. These staff bring with them a range of experience in different fields which enhances the skills and experience of existing staff.

Staff are based “at a distance” from other LA 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.

The new legislation of 2014 introduced a new way of working for everyone connected with the delivery of SEND provision and the support of families. Instead of a Statement of SEN, children and young people have an Education, Health and Care Assessment and Plan (EHC Plan). The process takes a much more holistic approach to identifying and assessing need and ensuring the right provision is put in place to improve outcomes for the child or young person.

The co-ordinators have had to retrain to become familiar with the requirements of the new legislation and are working their way through the excellent training provided by IPSEA at levels 1 and 2. Level 3 is also now available and includes the face to face 2 day sessions available at each level for co-ordinators to attend. This training ensures co-ordinators are 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.

They are able to advise families about the new way of working and the new processes and paperwork that have been introduced, while still working with the old system of Statements which are still current for some families as the Statements are being transferred to EHC Plans in a set process which concentrates on transition periods in a child’s life, such as changing schools. New applications for assessment and additional support are going straight onto an

EHC Assessment and Plan and the transfers from the Statement to an EHC Plan for the 2,000 existing families must be completed by 2018.

Restructure

Against a backdrop of cuts to the County Council which are affecting teams across the Children's Services Directorate, the SEND IAS Service is at present being considered for restructure and managers are looking at how the service can be best served and most effective. There is consideration where it should be placed in terms of within or outside the council and also the makeup of the team, in light of the broader remit from education to education, health and care requirements of the Plan.

The SEND teams within the council who support parents and draw up EHC Plans are also being restructured so it is a time of great change for all concerned.

Challenges

Some of the challenges the team has faced since the introduction of the new legislation, have been:

- the amount of work generated for the team by parents wanting help and support, which is inevitable at times of great change. The legislation has meant that support is needed for young people up to the age of 25 instead of 19 which has also increased demands on co-ordinators.
- The mediation service has been commissioned out to a new provider and there have been some teething problems with this service who are new to the SEND arena.
- We sometimes have to raise issues with the LA where parents are reporting to SEND IAS Service staff that the LA don't seem to be keeping to the legal duties as laid out in the Code of Practice such as keeping to timescales, informing parents of commencement of transfer time lines or sending out draft plans which occasionally is not happening.
- The increasing amount of exclusions of pupils, mostly primary and sent to the PRUs with SEND and this has led to a greater demand for our services by distraught parents.
- Learning the new legislation and processes and having to still be fully versed in the legal details of the old legislation for children and YP still with Statements.
- Having to now be aware of how processes work within Health and Social Care

Successes

For the past 12 months, we have been sending out links to a service user feedback questionnaire at the end of our interventions with families and the feedback we have received has shown how successful our service has been and how much parents and carers appreciate the service they receive from all our co-ordinators. They 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.

Our staff have been successful at retraining and currently we have one new member of staff working towards level 1, 2 staff have achieved level 1 and 3 staff are at level 2 IPSEA legal training. 3 of the staff are now working on the online elements of the IPSEA level 3 training and we are expecting an announcement for the face to face element this summer. 4 staff are also trained Independent Supporters.

We have successfully rebranded the service as a SEND IAS Service and alongside the training, have new publicity, website etc. We have also worked with staff running the Local Offer to ensure that there is a range of useful information for parents to access from this website.

Independent Supporter project

2015/16 has been the second year of the Independent Supporter project. Cumbria SENDIAS have applied for funding and have been able to employ one of the co-ordinators to work on this project for 10 hours per week. She has successfully promoted the new SEND IAS Service to parents and carers, worked with our voluntary sector partner Inspira who also provide Independent Supporters and recruited and supported 23 people through the official Independent Supporter Training.

Independent Supporters can be volunteers or paid staff who support parents through the 20 week Education Health and Care Assessment and Plan process.

Independent Supporter training – a range of people have completed E learning and face to face training on the legal information and skills need to support families through EHC Process – these include staff from the Barrow 6th Form College, LA Staff, Inspira, Children’s Centre providers (Actions for Children and Barnardos), parents, volunteers, Parent Carer Forum members.

Data – who we have worked with

We collect data on daily interactions with parents and there have been 748 interactions in Cumbria where our staff have been supporting a parent at a meeting, doing research, giving support on the phone, helping to write a letter or emailing information.

We have worked with 217 new families during 2015-16. Many other families come back time and time again for support for a range of issues including refusal to assess, help with an EHC Plan, problems with school, exclusions etc. We mainly work with parents together with their children/young people. Following the SEND reform legislation of 2014, our remit has been extended to work with young people alone but we have only done so on 3 occasions. We work in partnership with Inspira who are specialists in the field of working with young people so they tend to do this work in Cumbria.

Of all the work we did during the year 2015/16, the age of the child is as follows:

5%	Nursery
40%	Primary
24%	Secondary
8%	Special School
4%	Pru/Indep School
4%	Home Educated
15%	Post 16

Preparation for inspection

The SENDIAS team have been involved in preparing for an Ofsted inspection of SEND provision. We have supported the writing of the self-assessment, we have produced case studies showing the impact on the family of our advice and support, we have mapped our provision against the national Quality Standards for IAS, we have collated and upgraded our management of information and data and informed parents about how they can participate in inspections.

Parent Carer Forum

The SEND IAS Service continues to support the Parent Carer Forum in Cumbria offering help, advice, information and capacity building. We help to plan events and have attended the 6 information exchange days that the PCF have held round the county over the past year, where we have promoted the SEND IAS Service to parents alongside many agencies and groups in the voluntary and private sector, and LA staff who give out information. We have lead workshops and given information and advice to parents and carers. There are also opportunities at these events to seek information, suggestions and feedback from parents and carers.

We have also worked with other local parent support groups around the county providing information and attending meetings and discussion groups.

SEND Local Practice Groups

SEND IAS Service Co-ordinators attend and contribute at the three LA SEND Local Practice groups on a regular basis. These are multi-agency meetings including SENCOS, headteachers, LA staff, held regularly to discuss and look for solutions to local SEND issues in their part of the county.

Cumbria SENDIAS Partnership

The SEND IAS Service has set up the SENDIAS Partnership for Cumbria. There are quarterly meetings chaired by an independent person and attended by a range of partners including several from health, Designated Clinical Officer, Clinical Commissioners, LA staff, Early Years, Children's Centres, Colleges, Schools, Local Offer, Inspira and a representative from the Parent Carer Forum. There is a joint approach to providing information, advice and support for parents and carers and children and young people aged 0-25, and there are regular presentations from members, information sharing opportunities, discussions of relevant issues, promotion of shared quality standards, production of leaflets with details of all support and a joint approach to preparation for Ofsted & CQC Inspection of the Local Area SEND provision.

What difference did we make?

In order to consider what difference our service made to parents, carers, children and young people, we ask parents and carers to comment on this in our service user questionnaire. Some of the feedback shows the difference the Cumbria SEND IAS Service has made to parents and how much they appreciate it. These are some quotes of comments written by parents and carers from a report written February 2016 made in response to the question:

What difference did the information and support given to you by the IAS service make to you?

- *"She made a big difference to my life - without my support worker helping me I couldn't have done things on my own. She has given me the strength and will power to keep going.*
- *Helped to make sense of the process.*
- *It gave my son the chance to achieve the best he can be.*
- *Totally what I needed at the right time.*
- *The service made a lot of difference to our circumstances in explaining tribunal rights, support with regard to composing an accurate statement and appealing against decisions which we did not agree with. They were extremely helpful and came to offer their support whenever possible, even at short notice.*

- *Felt more informed about the process.*
- *Clarification amongst services and helped develop joined up thinking.*
- *I couldn't have done it on my own, the difference was amazing.*
- *Very timely advice. Great signposting to relevant information and reassurance.*
- *The support and information from the SEND IAS has been amazing and continues to be, without this service I would have felt very alone and unsure of where to obtain a lot of the information."*

To summarise, we think we have a strong SEND IAS Service in Cumbria which is highly valued by parents and carers throughout the county. Our Co-ordinators are knowledgeable and skilled and support families both for short one off interventions and sometimes for many years, as a child goes through nursery, primary, secondary schools and beyond and returns to seek our help on a range of issues.

We build up good relationships with families and offer bespoke advice and support on an individual basis. We provide good, independent and impartial information for families, research specialist conditions or issues where appropriate and also signpost on to other organisations who can provide specialist help.

We also have a strong relationship with professionals, working with members of the local SEND teams, voluntary sector organisations and staff in schools, settings and colleges.

The SEND IAS Service also offers help and support to the development of high quality SEND provision throughout the county for all children and young people with SEND.

Looking forward to 2016/17, one of our key areas for improvement in the coming year is to act on feedback from our questionnaires completed by parents and professionals and try and publicise the service more widely with parents, carers, children and young people by visiting schools and parents groups, so more people get the benefit of our services if they need them. We also aim to promote our service with professionals both inside the LA and from other organisations involved with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities so they can use our services or signpost parents to them.

Helen Leader

Manager Cumbria SEND IAS Service

June 2016