



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 2016-17

Introduction

This annual report is a summary of the work done by the Cumbria SEND Information, Advice and Support Service from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. 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 6 part time Co-ordinators who work 18.5 hours per week and one part time Manager. The Co-ordinators work in the 6 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 2016/17, one Co-ordinator in the West was on long term sick from June and subsequently retired on ill health grounds at the end of the financial year. Permission was secured for the other co-ordinator in the West to have an extra 10 hours per week during this period to try to cover the gap in provision in the West and she rose to the challenge and despite not being long in the job, worked hard to give a good service to as many parents in the West as she could.

One co-ordinator in Carlisle qualified as a social worker and left in August to work in the Carlisle Social work team and another co-ordinator in the Penrith area went on maternity leave. We recruited 2 new staff to cover these posts and they have settled in well and are working their way through the legal training on offer from IPSEA, which enables them to be well equipped to support parents. Both these new staff have experience in working in schools which has been helpful in their new posts.

To ensure impartiality and accessibility for parents, all our 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.

IPSEA legal training is available 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 London, Manchester or Leeds. Current attainment levels are: 3 staff fully trained to level 3 for E-learning and face to face and 3 staff who have completed the level 1 E-learning and will be completing level 1 face to face in 2017. 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

This year staff were invited to a National SEND IASS Staff Conference in Birmingham, which most of our staff were able to attend. This was a very successful event attended by SEND IASS Co-ordinators from all round the country with top quality speakers on a range of topics including preparation for Ofsted Inspections, working with young people, SEND Tribunals and working with volunteers.

One of our co-ordinators also 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.

As well as case work, our Co-ordinators attend training, Local Practice Group Multiagency Meetings, do presentations about our work to specific groups, attend regional events and support Parent Carer events throughout the year.

Challenges

Some challenges we have faced as a team this year are:

- Maintaining a good service for parents while having staffing issues including sickness, maternity leave and new staff
- Training and supporting 3 new staff
- Increasing numbers of children with SEND being excluded from schools
- Increasing numbers of children who are “school refusers”
- 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
- More families investigating home education
- The tighter financial constraints generally/new stricter assessment criteria where schools have to provide evidence of their contribution

Successes

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 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.

We have updated our website to ensure there are useful factsheets and links to informative website. 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.

The SEND IASS manager has been invited to attend the monthly Senior SEND Managers meetings in order to share good practice, discuss issues and share information on a range of new initiatives.

Cumbria SEND IAS Partnership has continued to bring partners together in Cumbria. These quarterly meetings are 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.

Independent Supporter project

During 2016/17, we received funding to support the Independent Supporter project in Cumbria. One of our Co-ordinators has 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. To date 67 people have been signed up to the e-learning programme for Independent Supporters and 20 of those have completed the 2 day face to face training as well. Independent Supporters can be volunteers or paid staff who give help and support to parents through the 20 week Education Health and Care Assessment and Plan process. We have worked with Inspira on this project who have also trained their staff to be independent supporters. The people who we have trained include LA staff, parents, carers, volunteers, local 6th form staff and children centre staff.

Data – who we have worked with

We collect data on daily interactions with parents and there have been over 1440 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 202 families during 2016-17. This works out at about an average of 7 interactions per family – typically, this could mean, 2 phone calls, 3 emails 2 meetings per family, but support is tailored to need and this may mean a one off phone call with a parent who is asking for some specific piece of information to the other extreme, which may be a case which takes months to prepare for tribunal. Some have come to us for the first time and 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. We have only worked with 4 young people on their own this year, but most of this work is done by our commissioned partners Inspira.

Of the families we have worked with this year who need support, the ratio of their children is 3 boys to 1 girl; so two thirds of the children or young people we support are boys.

Of all the work we did during the year 2016/7, the age of the child is as follows:

3.7%	Nursery
44.5%	Primary
34.5%	Secondary
5.1%	Special School
0.3%	Pru/Indep School
1.05%	Home Educated
9.1%	Post 16
1.75%	Higher Education

Preparation for inspection

The SEND IASS team have been continuing to prepare for the forthcoming Ofsted inspection of SEND provision. We have supported the writing of the LA's self-assessment and written case studies showing the impact on families of our advice and support. We have mapped our provision against the national Quality Standards for IAS and are confident we meet most of the criteria which are in our control. 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. We have worked with the Parent

Carer Forum to inform them of the inspection process and explore areas where we can support them. As part of the pre-inspection preparations, our team has taken part in the LGA SEND Peer Review in March and contributed to focus groups. In the Peer Review Report which came out in June 2017 it stated:

“The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SEND IASS) team is well regarded in Cumbria. Parents and carers believed they were generally well supported with good quality information, advice and guidance. There is a need to ensure all parents/carers are made aware of and can access the service.”

Parent Carer Forum

Over 2016/17 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 help to plan events and have attended 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 also worked with other local parent support groups around the county providing information and attending meetings and discussion groups.

What difference did we make?

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. This is both practical help and information but also emotional support and strategies to help empower parents.

From our Service User Feedback report produced in April 2017 for the period from March 2016 to March 2017, we have gathered some useful feedback to the questionnaires and on line links to our Survey Monkey questionnaire. We had 27 replies received from parents round the county and we had some excellent feedback in terms of staff behaviours. Some of the very positive comments that parents made to the question “ **What difference did the information and support given to you by the IAS service make to you?**”

- *Amazing difference. We have accessed other services but this has been one of the more useful in retrospect.*
- *I had more confidence. I understood more about the plan.*
- *Confidence to push for what we wanted to be included on the EHCP. Knowledge of our rights as parents. Moral support in the EHCP meeting.*
- *I felt supported and that I had someone helping our family for a change.*
- *It was very important as I was able to fully back up my representations with the correct knowledge of procedure.*
- *The moral support given was invaluable to me at that time as I was going through an extremely challenging time in my personal life and I just didn't know how or where to begin with the EHC plan. My co-ordinator made what seemed like an insurmountable task into an achievable task.*
- *I feel like issues have now been resolved and I understand more of how the education system is run. I could not have dealt with this on my own without my co-ordinator's support.*
- *I understand more about the law now and our right to make sure our daughter gets the best.*

- *They are very well informed and extremely supportive. I would simply not have the confidence to attend meetings without their support and the knowledge has been invaluable in getting my son the educational support that he needs.*
- *Felt listened to, empowered, confidence, knowing there is a service to help & support - this made a big difference!*

Another difference we make is that we 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.

Looking forward to 2017/18, one of our key areas for improvement in the coming year is to act on feedback from our questionnaires completed by parents and professionals. We will aim to publicise the service more widely with parents, carers, children and young people by visiting schools and working with headteachers and SENCos and also with parents groups, so more people get the benefit of our services if they need them. We are aiming to work closely with young people 16+ to raise awareness of our service. We have been working with young people in James Rennie School in Carlisle to ask them to help design promotional material for our service and hope to build on this relationship in the coming year.

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.

2016/17 has been a good year for the SEND IAS Service; we have strengthened our team with great new staff, our staff have all done a range of useful training and now hold recognised qualifications, we have regular meetings with LA SEND staff and we have had great feedback from parents and carers about the services we offer.

Helen Leader, Manager Cumbria SEND IAS Service

July 2017