

Newcastle SENDIASS



Review 2019-2020

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Introduction

This is not a formal service evaluation, but an informative reflection that will give a sense of the achievement of the service.

We wanted to create a document which provides parents and professionals with information about the service enabling them to have a really clear understanding of what it does, how it helps and who can use it.

We have included feedback from parents, carers and young people as their views are important to us. We have also included feedback from professionals to show what they think of the service and working alongside it.

The world of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is complex; in this review we will try to present information in a way that doesn't have any jargon or require any specialist knowledge to understand.

We are here to help so if there is anything in this review that you do not understand, please let us know.

Service values and practice

Newcastle Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) offers **impartial** and **confidential** information, advice and support to parents, carers, children and young people about matters related to their or their child's special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Staff are trained and have accurate and up to date knowledge of

- Education, social care and health law relating to SEND
- National and local policy and practice in meeting SEND
- SEND processes including Tribunal

Support is tailored to the individual service user, with the aim to build on that individual's skills, knowledge and confidence to promote independence and self-advocacy.

The service is free for young people, parents and carers to use.

You choose whether or not to use the service – you contact us not the other way around.

The service is confidential and impartial.

The service can be accessed by children and young people independent of their parents. The service has adapted to include a text line and school drop-in clinics to make the service accessible for children and young people.

Can I access the service?

If your child has Special Educational Needs or a disability you can contact the service. Your child doesn't need to have a confirmed diagnosis. It is the same for young people who would like to access the service independently.

You don't have to wait for things to reach crisis point before you call us – we may be able to help you avoid reaching a crisis.

The service responds to a wide range of issues including

- Breakdown of communication
- Breakdown of trust
- Needs not being met
- Part-time timetables
- Provision at risk of breaking down
- Assessment of need
- Education, Health and Care Plans
- Behaviour management
- Youngsters out of school
- Placement
- Exclusions
- Lack of special educational needs paperwork
- Poor understanding of procedures
- Breach of equalities legislation

And anything else relating to SEN that you have questions or concerns about.

Who delivers SENDIASS?

Newcastle SENDIASS is located at Disability North and consists of

- Two full time workers and one part-time worker, all of who have experience working with children and young people with special educational needs and have completed SEND legal training with Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA)
- One part-time administrator and
- A small team of volunteers who give a few hours a week when required. All of the volunteers have experience of working with children and young people with special educational needs and have been trained by the service.

Meet the team



Judith Lane
Lead Specialist



Sarah Francis
Officer



Helen Bailey
Officer

Newcastle SENDIASS does not work in isolation. Each local authority has its own service and they are all overseen by a national co-ordinator at the National Children's Bureau. The national co-ordinator

- Liaises with government, in particular the Department of Education
- Hosts an e-forum for all SENDIASS staff
- Gathers and publishes benchmarking data for each service
- Provides training on the law, mediation skills and regular updates on SEN policy and practice.

Service developments over the last year

Children and Young People

Changes in legislation (Children and Families Act 2014) gave significant new rights to young people once they reach the end of compulsory school age.

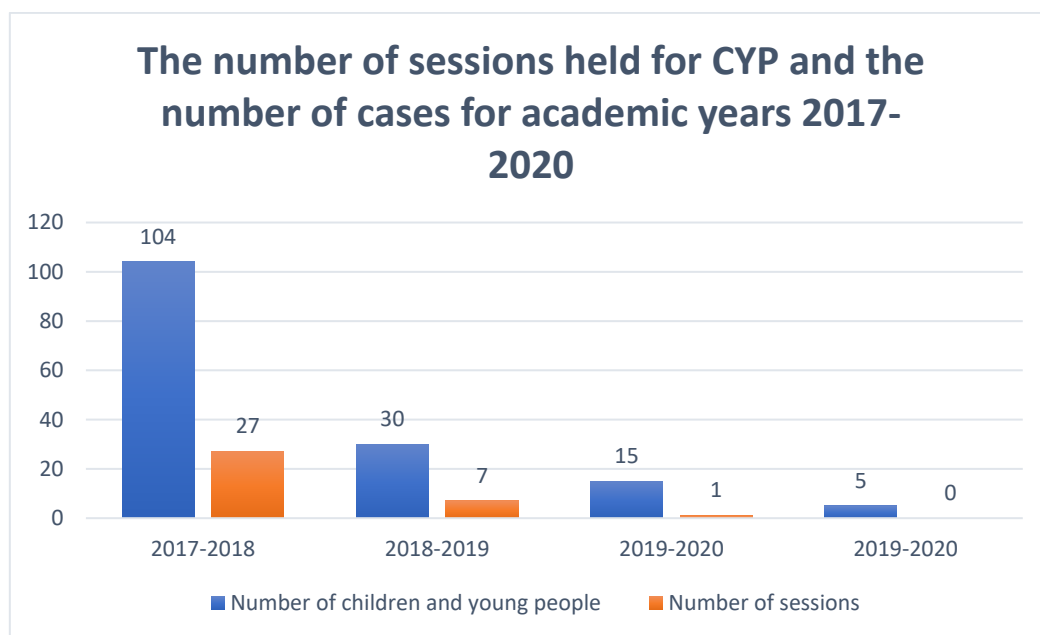
“Local Authorities must have regard to the importance of providing children and their parents and young people with the information and support necessary to participate in decisions.”

SEND Code of Practice Chapter 2 2.1

We set up sessions within education settings and found them to be really successful with children and young people engaging with the service independently.

Unfortunately, due to the increase in the number of parents contacting the service and the increasing complexity in the individual cases we were unable to staff the sessions for children and young people.

This chart shows the decline of this service.



Recognising that the service needs a dedicated children and young person’s worker to be able to provide an accessible service we used some national funding to develop a job role. The post was agreed and advertised, but due to the coronavirus pandemic the interviews have been unable to go ahead. However, this role will be filled as soon as we are able and the service for children and young people will be developed.

Website

The Department for Education alongside the Council for Disabled Children issued national minimum standards for SENDIAS services. One of these standards is that the service needs to have a website.

3.3 The IASS has a stand-alone service website that is accessible to all service users. The website includes;

- Contact details of the service
- Opening hours
- Response times
- Information on a range of SEND topics
- Signposting to other useful groups including parent groups and youth forums and national helplines
- Signposting to the Local Offer
- Key policies including a complaints procedure

We sought permission from the Local Authority to have a stand-alone website in line with the minimum standards. We then worked with a senior IT analyst to set up a basic website.

We set up 3 working groups; one with parents, one with young people and one with children and met with them several times to agree website content and design. We developed a website which had completely different tabs for parents and carers and for children and young people. Parents and carers wanted very clear information about who we are and what we do with helpful links and signposting. The children and young people wanted their information to be more visual and engaging combining the use of images and videos and with documents written in an easy read format.

The website is now complete at www.newcastlesendiass.co.uk and is just waiting to have a formal launch. We will continue to work with our working groups to monitor and develop our website going forward.

Social media

The national minimum standards for SENDIAS services specify that the service needs to have a social media presence.

3.1 The IASS provides;

Impartial information, advice and support (IAS) on the full range of education, health and social care as defined in the SEND Code of Practice to the following service users –

- a) children
- b) young people
- c) parents

This support is offered in a range of ways which includes face to face, a telephone helpline, email, website and social media.

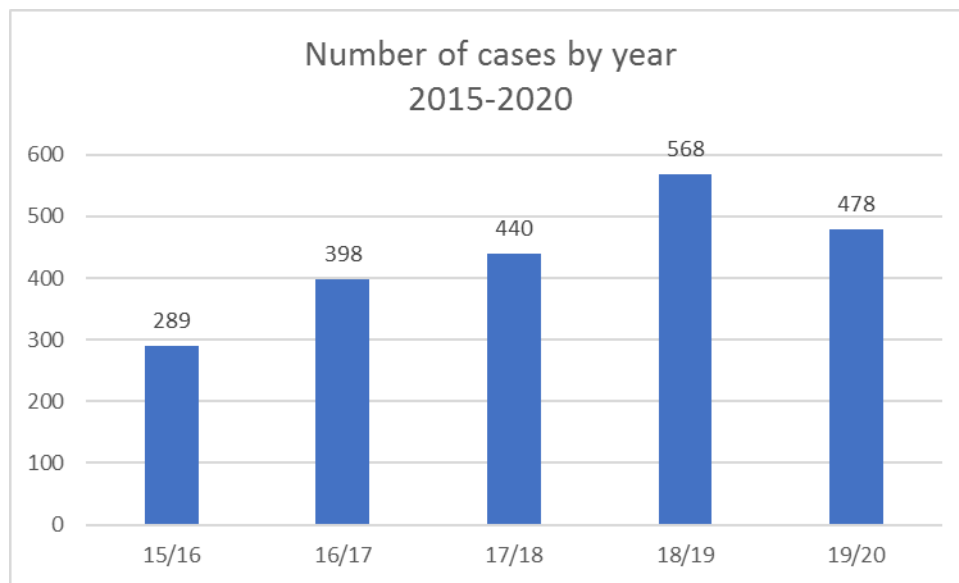
We carried out a lot of market research for which online platforms SENDIAS services across the country were using, how they were using them and the level of engagement.

We developed a plan for what we wanted our social media presence to achieve and realistically how we would be able to manage it. Considering all factors, we decided to set up a business page on Facebook. This is a forum that seems to be the most popular, is easy for us to manage and we can share information to a wide audience appealing to all ages. There were parameters we needed to have in place which included removing the ability for the public to post to the page and removing the ability for the public to send private messages, in doing this we are ensuring that for individual casework everyone continues to be directed to our central phone system. As a service we wanted to ensure we had done everything possible to reduce the risk of someone asking for help and it being missed.

The social media presence has been created and is ready for the formal launch.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

During the academic year 2019-2020 the service worked with 478 parents, carers, children and young people to attend meetings with them, help them to make informed decisions, support them to resolve differences with schools or the local authority or help to make their views known. This number of cases was projected to be much higher, but we saw a dramatic decrease of new cases during the pandemic lockdown. Up to the point of lockdown at the end of March 2020 we had 441 cases.



During the period of lockdown we had to adapt our service and the way in which we supported families. As workers we were directed to work from home so we had all calls directed to our email which we were able to access. Using mobile phones we were able to address all calls that came in and maintain our policy of getting back to people within 48 hours. We found that although we had a massive reduction in new cases during the period of lockdown, our work took a lot longer to complete.

We made sure that we kept up to date at all times with the changes in legislation and took time to ensure we understood exactly how these changes would impact on families. We attended national network meetings and national training during this time so we had foresight into more potential changes and so that we had a thorough understanding of all government guidance.

We saw a real change in the issues that people were contacting the service for. We had a number of new cases and existing cases contacting the service regarding risk assessments for their children to attend school, key worker children's rights, Education

Health and Care Plans and the provision during lockdown and children's needs becoming more apparent as they were being home schooled.

When supporting individuals to review documents or gather views it was a much more timely process than sitting face to face. We accessed documents virtually and took the time to go through it with individuals, step by step. We have supported parents and carers to meetings virtually. Again in order to do this successfully it is more time consuming as we needed to have a phone call prior to the meeting to ensure we were able to support them appropriately, and then a phone call afterwards to debrief and ensure they understand what the next steps are. As we had a reduction in new cases during this period it enabled us to have the time to work effectively with our families.

Due to the changes in guidance and policy we have had a lot of professionals contacting the service for advice and to ensure that their practice remains lawful and compliant. This has included officers from the Local Authority, Head teachers, SENCOs and health professionals.

Case study

We have included a couple of case studies so that you can read about real things happening to real people. We have changed any names to protect the confidentiality of the service users. The case studies give examples of the way in which we provide advice and support.

	Early intervention
Case study 1	During an initial appointment Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) signposted a parent to the service. We were able to become involved at the earliest stage and support the parent through age phase transfer.

Introduction

This case involved a child going through age phase transfer to Secondary School. Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) signposted the parent to the service. We supported the parent through the transition and helped to ensure that the Secondary school was able to provide the correct support from the start.

Background

The parent attended an initial appointment at the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) in April 2019. During that appointment they mentioned Newcastle SENDIASS and the benefits that the service might bring to families.

The parent contacted the service to check what SEND IASS could do for her. The child has a range of needs and although she was being well supported in the Primary school, the parent was really concerned about the transition to Secondary School.

Aims and objectives

Our objective was to ensure that there was a good supported transition process.

We wanted the Secondary School to gain a good understanding of the child's needs, and how the Primary School were meeting those needs. They would then be able to form a plan for how they were going to implement strategies and meet her needs from the first day of her attending.

At the end of the process we wanted the Secondary school to be able to provide the correct level of support and successfully meet all her needs. Both schools and all the professionals involved would understand the impact a well-supported transition can have and their role in the process.

Approach

When the parent contacted the service, we spoke at length about how things were going for her child at school and what her concerns were for moving forwards. The parent was very clear that although her child has a range of needs, the Primary School have been able to meet them.

Through the discussion the parent informed us of the various professionals that are currently involved with her child. We were able to establish two key pieces of information that we look for:

- The right people are involved
- They are doing the right things

We explained to the parent how a well-supported transition can work and what would need to happen to facilitate this. We attended a transition meeting with her Mum soon after the May half term holiday. The Secondary School SENCO made a note of what support is needed and all the professionals involved were able to feed in to the process.

However, at the start of the September term the parent contacted us to say that things were starting to go wrong, and she felt her child's needs were not being met. We supported the parent at a meeting with school to discuss what was successful and what was not working. We were able to draw on the expertise of professionals involved who advised school with alternative strategies and adapting existing successful strategies to suit the Secondary setting.

The meeting was productive and enabled the school to form a clear plan moving forward. The parent felt reassured that school understood her child's needs and would be able to make a few tweaks to the provision which would make it a success.

Challenge

The two schools involved in the process did not have a clear plan for the transition. Our involvement helped get things right for this individual child and helped the schools to gain a better understanding of how a supported transition can work.

There were a number of professionals involved with this child, who were doing the right things within their area of expertise; however, none of them were experts on SEN processes. Our involvement helped to draw on their expertise and apply it to the process to ensure a smooth transition happened. It also enabled the professionals to stay within their remit and prevent any bad advice or misinformation being given as part of the process.

Things started to go wrong once the child had transitioned to the secondary school. Our involvement enabled us to work with the parent and the school to resolve these quickly, to get things back on track and ensure the child's needs were being met.

Successes

Having delivered a presentation to the team at the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) the worker had a good understanding of our role and signposted the parent to us at the earliest opportunity. This enabled us to have a positive impact and get things on track without the parent waiting until things had reached crisis point before being signposted to us.

Supporting the parent through this process gave both schools a greater understanding of how to implement a supported transition. The Primary school gained insight into what is possible in the secondary setting.

The meeting at the Secondary school enabled the SENCO to take advice from a range of professionals and understand their responsibilities in their duty to meet the child's needs.

Conclusion

The support we offered the parent with this case helped her to feel reassured that the right things were being agreed. She felt supported at a time of high anxiety and was able to reach out as soon as she felt that things were no longer working.

This case highlighted the importance to us of publicising our service to the teams within health and social care, as well as local voluntary services. The knowledge and understanding of our service enabled the worker from the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) to signpost the parent to us at the earliest opportunity. This meant that we were able to be more effective and help to put things right, avoiding the situation reaching crisis point.

All professionals who were involved in the case have a greater understanding of our role and the difference that we can make. This will help them realise when to signpost to us when they come across future situations.

The Secondary school now has a better understanding of how a supported transition should be implemented, how flexible they can be with their provision, their duty to meet need and who they can contact if they need further advice.

	Disagreeing with the Local Authority over placement
Case study 2	The school SENCO recommended parents contact us after they had requested a change of placement at Annual Review. The child was currently at a mainstream Primary school and they were requesting an independent special school, the Local Authority were not in agreement.

Introduction

This case involved a child going through age phase transfer to Secondary School. The child was currently placed in a mainstream Primary School where they received over 15 hours 1:1 support, the parents were requesting an Independent Special School to be named on the EHCP for Secondary school. They had held an Annual review in the Autumn term and submitted their request which had been turned down. They had worked with the school and were holding another review with additional evidence; it was at this point they contacted us for support.

Background

Their child has a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, he was in Year 6 and was working at around year 1 academically. School had requested an EHCP when the child was in Year 5 and had since been providing 15 hours 1:1 support to teach him numeracy, literacy and phonics in a separate room to his class.

When preparing for the Year 6 Annual Review they were considering Secondary options and given his academic abilities they felt very strongly that a mainstream Secondary School could not meet his needs. The Local Authority presented the evidence from the review to the panel and then made the decision that mainstream could continue to meet his needs.

School contacted numerous professionals that had been involved to pull additional evidence together. They then co-ordinated a second annual review and recommended parents contacted our service and invited us to attend.

Aims and objectives

Our objective was to support the parents to express their views to the Local Authority.

We wanted school to understand what criteria the decision will be based on and the evidence they needed to present to the Local Authority. They would then be able to present the correct information which would enable the Local Authority to understand the child's needs.

We wanted the parents to be clear on the criteria that the Local Authority would be using to make their decision so that they could present their strongest argument. The parents were very concerned about bullying and transport, and although they needed to express their concerns, we wanted them to understand that his cognition and ability to access learning was the strongest evidence for his need for a specialist setting.

Our aim was for all professionals to be on the same page and ensure that all concerns were recorded and presented to the panel so the decision would be based on all of the information.

At the end of the process we wanted the Primary school to have a better understanding of the process and the evidence they need to present.

Approach

When the parent contacted the service, we spoke at length about how things were going for his child at school and what his concerns were for moving forwards. The parent was very clear that although the Primary School have been able to meet his needs it has taken an extensive amount of 1:1 support and he felt there was no way a mainstream secondary provision would be able to.

We talked about the upcoming review meeting and supported the parent to write down key points that were pivotal to his request. The parent had a lot of concerns and needed support to prioritise which points were the basis for his argument, which points provided additional evidence and then his other concerns that needed to be expressed to give the whole picture.

The parent was really concerned that school have been really supportive and have provided loads of evidence, but the local authority had said that there was a lack of evidence for the need to change placement. I explained to the parent that sometimes there is confusion over what to provide as evidence and agreed to speak to the school SENCO to ensure that she had everything she needed in preparation for the review.

We called the SENCO and were able to provide her with structure to present the evidence to the local authority. For a lot of the evidence she had there was no context which made it difficult for the local authority to gain a real insight into the support required for this child to access education.

We attended the annual review to support the parents, but due to the pandemic this was a virtual meeting. During the course of the meeting we were able to keep the conversation focused. The conversations we had had prior to the meeting were evident as both parents and school were able to express their views and evidence very clearly and concisely. The SEN caseworker from the local authority gained a real insight into the concerns and understood why a special school placement was being pursued.

After the meeting we spoke to the parents to debrief and answer any questions they had. They felt that meeting had gone much better than they were expecting because of the preparation they had been able to do for it.

The parents contacted us a few days after the panel date to say that they had still not heard the outcome. We got their permission to call the Local Authority and do some fact finding. We called the SEN Caseworker and were told that a decision had not been made but the panel were recommending mainstream placement based on a lack of evidence. We commented on the evidence that had been raised at the meeting at which point it became evident that there had been no notes taken at the meeting.

We called the SEND assessment, provision and review manager and explained to him that we were really concerned that panel were still recommending mainstream provision. We explained that it had been clear in the meeting that this child is not able to have his needs met within mainstream settings and it seems that has not translated onto the information that the panel reviewed. He assured us that he had not made a decision yet and he would like an Education Psychologist to provide advice before finalising a decision.

We called the parents to inform them of the next steps. We helped them to prepare for their discussion with the education psychologist by structuring their points, and we helped them to understand what information the psychologist would need to understand why mainstream is unsuitable.

Challenge

Everyone involved with this child had a really good understanding of his needs and how to support them and were really clear that it was not possible within a mainstream setting; however, they were not clear on how to present that information to the Local Authority. Our involvement helped to draw on their expertise and apply it to the process to ensure the Local Authority were presented with all of the relevant information to make an informed.

There was a breakdown of communication which was resulting in the panel making a recommendation which would not meet the child's needs. Our direct communication with the SEND manager meant we were able to relay the information from the review meeting that was not presented clearly to the panel.

We had to manage parents' expectations throughout the process. We were very clear that we would help them to express their concerns and help all parties to understand the evidence that was needed, but we could not guarantee the outcome. This came to us at the end of the summer term when the child was in Year 6 so we also had to prepare the parents for the child transitioning to the mainstream secondary school, as the timing meant if the local authority named mainstream the next academic year would start before there would be time to appeal the decision. We had regular contact with the SENCO at the mainstream secondary school and he was preparing to do some transition work in the summer if the Local Authority named mainstream.

Successes

Unfortunately, things were already at crisis when the parents contacted us, however our involvement helped the professionals to gain a better understanding of the process and the need to signpost parents to us at the earliest point.

Supporting parents through this process gave school a greater understanding of the evidence that is needed for the Local Authority and the importance of the timing for going through such processes.

This case highlighted the need to record the information that is given during the discussion at review meetings and to ensure that the information is passed to the panel. Our communication with the Local Authority officers also drew attention to this point as something that should be considered moving forwards.

Conclusion

The support we offered the parents with this case helped them to feel empowered, they were able to express their views in meetings and understand the process. They felt supported at a time of high anxiety and we were able to provide clarity and structure at every stage of the process.

This case highlighted the importance to us of publicising our service to the teams within education, health and social care, as well as local voluntary services. The parents were signposted to us when the situation was already at crisis point, rather than at the earliest opportunity. All professionals who were involved in the case have a greater understanding of our role and the difference that we can make. This will help them realise when to signpost to us when they come across future situations.

The Primary school now has a better understanding of how to present evidence and the evidence that is needed to help the panel make an informed decision. They also have a better understanding of the process and how important the timing of going through the EHC process is.

The key issue in this case was communication, we enabled the parents to communicate their views clearly and prioritise the key points. We communicated with all parties to ensure the vital pieces of information were not missed and, we highlighted the need for verbal information to be recorded at key meetings.

The Local Authority named the independent special school in the final plan. When we spoke to the Primary school we were able to make it clear that we do not have any power over the decisions that are made, but rather we had ensured that all of the information had been presented so the Local Authority were making an informed decision. The Local Authority made their decision based on the evidence which clearly demonstrated his needs could not be met within mainstream.

Parent feedback

“We wouldn’t have got the outcome if it wasn’t for you. You made it really clear what information was needed from all of the professionals and helped the Local Authority to understand. You were brilliant, thank you.”

Feedback from parents, children and young people

“I was really grateful for the help that I got from the SENDIASS worker who use to come in to school to help us with our problems”.

“None of my teachers would listen to me and I don't think that they even understood me or my needs as I have ASD. I often use to feel alone and isolated at school I was struggling. The SENDIASS worker used to actually listen to me, she understood the difficulties that I was having, it was good having someone who understood to talk to me. She also used to make school staff listen to my views especially at reviews.”

“You've been brilliant. I don't know what I would have done without you – being able to ask you all the silly little things, as well as the big stuff.”

“Thank you. You've been the most understanding person I have spoken to in 4 years.”

“Many thanks for your time earlier today. I really enjoyed the openness and the faithfulness of your advice. As discussed, we would be speaking to the school and other experts involved in this matter and I have already started to feel that we would be speaking soon. You have consoled (at least momentarily) a troubled parent.”

“Thank you for a lovely positive meeting yesterday and for helping H resolve any worries he has had at school, we all slept much better last night!, and it's lovely to see a nice smiley H again, thanks again.”

Feedback from Professionals

I really appreciate your swift reply and your colleague's advice! It was extremely helpful, thank you!

Primary school SENCO

CYPS have always found the team extremely approachable, supportive and knowledgeable. They offer a service that is easily accessible and available to parents even during times of high demand and need.

It is so good to know that I've got you there to ask! The support and advice provided to both families and staff by the team is invaluable. They encourage parents of children with SEN to play an active role in their child's education. Providing parents with accurate and neutral information on all aspects of SEN policy and procedures. Offering individual support to parents during the educational assessment process. Facilitating and Improving communication between the local authority, parents, schools and other professionals. Encourage links between parents and voluntary groups and organisations. Encourage and support schools in further developing their links. All of these are carried out in an empathetic and understanding way, ensuring the very best provision is provided for all children.

Primary school SENCO

Parents report that they find contacting the service for advice and support really easy. The staff are very friendly and approachable. It is fantastic that they will help parents to prepare any paperwork and to complete parental view forms for EHCP applications. One of the greatest things they do is to attend meetings to support parents.

Family support worker

Thank you so much for making our first Safe Spaces coffee morning such a success. I appreciate that it lasted significantly longer than planned but I felt the discussion was so valuable, it seemed a shame to cut it short.

Primary school SENCO

I personally find the staff are all very knowledgeable about SEND and legal issues; they can explain things in simple terms to make it easier for parents and other practitioners to understand.

Family support worker

Learning, Development and Growth

Continuing to develop

- Collaborative working. We recognise the need for SEND information providers to be working together. The service has been instrumental in the development of the SEND information, advice and support network. This network consists of local organisations that are working strategically to improve the service within Newcastle. They are committed to ensuring the right information, advice and support is being provided at the right time by the most appropriate provider.
- Accessibility. We have adapted the service to young people yet, we need to continue to grow this service and increase the reach across young people with SEN in the city. We are in the process of recruiting a worker dedicated to the children and young people's service so we can extend this service and work into more settings.
- Online. We plan to launch our service website and social media platform increasing our reach, publicity and accessibility.

Questions for the future

These are the questions we are asking ourselves as we develop the service and plan for the next year.

- How can we ensure that the service can accommodate the ever-increasing demand?
- How can we ensure that parents, carers and young people know about the service and access it when they need it?
- How can we encourage more joined up working between Education, Health and Social Care services?
- How can we ensure that the voices of parents, carers and young people are listened to and responded to by schools, the local authority and the government so that we respond to the needs of all?



You can contact the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SEND IASS) at

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