

**Northumberland
Information
Advice &
Support
Service**

Annual Report

1 September 2023 – 31 August 2024

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Information, Advice and Support Service Manager

Introduction

Northumberland IASS (Information Advice and Support Service) is an arm's length service which provides free, confidential and impartial information, advice and support (IAS) about education, health and social care for children, young people and their parents on matters relating to SEND (special educational needs and disabilities). This is offered in a range of ways which includes face to face, a telephone helpline, email, website and social media (Facebook page).

The service is for children and young people aged 0 – 25 years with SEND and their parent/carers who are normally resident in Northumberland. It is a self-referral service and covers the full range of education, health and social care as defined in the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

IASS services can either be provided 'in-house' by a Local Authority or outsourced by the Local Authority to an independent organisation. Northumberland IASS is an in-house service.

Minimum standards for Information, Advice and Support Services

The service operates in line with the national IASS (Information, Advice and Support Services) Network [Minimum Standards for Information, Advice and Support Services](#) which are based on the requirements relating to support that SENDIAS services must provide, as set out in the Children and Families Act (CFA) 2014, the SEND Code of Practice and on additional legal advice commissioned by the IASS Network.

Northumberland IASS was compliant with the minimum standards this year apart from the requirement for it to be jointly commissioned by education, health and social care in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014 (Minimum standard 1.1). The service currently only receives education funding.

"1. Commissioning, governance and management arrangements

1.1 The IASS is jointly commissioned by education, health and social care in accordance with the CFA 2014. A formal agreement is set out in writing which refers directly to these Minimum Standards, whilst also considering the need for continuity and stability of the service."

Service staffing and funding:

The service staffing comprises the IASS Manager and IASS Officer.

The budget allocated by the Local Authority for staffing and operational costs in the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was £97,540, with £97,220 allocated for

2024 to 2025. The minimum standards require the budget to be dedicated and ring-fenced and held and managed by the service manager.

Funding varies widely between IAS services nationally and this impacts upon what individual services can offer. All services can provide details of national sources of IAS while some services have the resource to support volunteers or can signpost to local support who can accompany parents to meetings, take notes, offer telephone support etc.

The national IASS Network collects and provides comparative data from all IASS services across England regarding staffing and funding. The table below provides comparative data for the North-East IAS services.



North East

Local Authority	Pop 0-25 post 2022	Area by Square KM	FTE staff to Pop-2023	IAS Total 2023	FTE 2023	Vol 2023	Heath and Social care input	In house out sourced	£ per head 2023	IASS % Diff 22-23	IASS % Diff 19-23
Darlington	29,926	197	14,963	£57,000	2.00	0		In-House	1.90	107%	226%
Durham	152,045	2,226	19,006	£259,547	8.00	0	yes	In-House	1.71	97%	182%
Gateshead	55,665	142		£100,000			yes	Out-Sourced	1.80	100%	200%
Hartlepool	27,191	94	19,422	£70,650	1.4	0		In-House	2.60	113%	275%
Middlesborough	47,310	54		£50,000				Out-Sourced	1.06		361%
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	112,448	113		£150,000			Yes	In-House	1.33	92%	241%
North Tyneside	55,747	82	27,874	£103,599	2.00	0		In-House	1.86	111%	122%
Northumberland	78,865	5,020		£92,450				In-House	1.17	103%	114%
Redcar and Cleveland	37,186	245		No data							
South Tyneside	41,132	64						In-House			
Stockton-on-Tees	56,958	205	56,958	£82,000	1.00	0	yes	In-House	1.44	109%	182%
Sunderland	77,045	137	25,682	£120,000	3.00		yes	Out-Sourced	1.56		211%

(from 'IASS Network Funding, Casework and Staff Data Report 2023-24')

Reflections on the Year

Specific challenges

The main challenges for the service continued to be managing the peaks and troughs of demand regarding casework throughout the year within its staffing capacity, particularly during periods of staff absence. Casework can require a significant time commitment, and this can conflict with staff capacity for other areas of work at any given time. For example, in previous years the service produced a newsletter providing details of local activities and sources of support for families of children/young people with SEND, but no longer has the capacity to gather and collate this information.

The service is based at County Hall in Morpeth, but service staff mainly work from home. Face to face meetings are usually provided virtually but home visits or meeting in a 'neutral' venue such as the Family Hubs can be offered, if required.

The [service website](#) and [Facebook page](#) enable the sharing of information and promotion of the service to service-users and stakeholders. The website had 4100 users this year (compared with 3300 last year) and 7177 views (compared with 6895 last year) and the Facebook page had 561 followers (compared with 403 followers last year) and 441 likes (compared with 331 likes last year).

Progress with Service Development objectives

To introduce and embed the updated IASS Network intervention levels for casework within the service.

The [casework intervention levels](#) developed by the national IASS network were updated in 2022 to better reflect the type of work IASS services do and how they do it. This was in response to a significant increase in both demand and complexity of need across IAS services nationally. It was acknowledged that too many potential service users were not accessing IAS services because they were either unaware of them or were unable to access support due to their local service not having the capacity to respond in a timely fashion.

Many services, including Northumberland, have triage systems in place to ensure that case work support/advocacy are provided to those who need them, while information and advice are widely and easily available for service users able to self-advocate. Where it has been agreed that support is required, the issue and the support to be offered (the intervention) is agreed with the service user. The intervention is closed once completed and an evaluation form is sent, and the level of intervention recorded. The same service user may come back at a later point with either a continuation of the same issue or a different issue, but this will be recorded as a new intervention.

The updated intervention levels have been successfully implemented by the service. One of the main benefits is that the recording of referrals is much more efficient from an administrative point of view because for most referrals (Level 1) there is no need to take any identifying information, although anonymised data (e.g. gender of child, type of SEN and reason for referral) is collected for reporting purposes.

To ensure that the evaluation system for the service is aligned with the IASSN Intervention Levels

There has been mixed success with this objective. Evaluations are sent for interventions at Level 2 and above. There is a higher rate of return when evaluations are sent as soon as an intervention has been completed but service capacity has impacted on the

timeliness of this happening. It can also sometimes be hard to gauge when an intervention has been completed due to the complexity and longevity of some casework. Refining this process will continue to be a focus next academic year to ensure increased feedback from service users.

To develop and roll out training resources on a range of SEND themes

The service manager has worked with regional IASS colleagues to plan and provide training events and resources for service users on topical SEND themes. Progress has been slower than anticipated because of capacity issues for all services. The initial plan was to develop a series of film clips on different SEND topics, but discussions then moved away from this to look at commissioned training. The decision was taken to pilot an on-line training session using a local training provider (SENETA), which will focus on emotionally based school non-attendance, an issue both regionally and nationally (see Appendix 1).

A local focus has been developing in-house training resources. Training modules have been developed which cover the SEND Graduated Approach and Ordinarily Available Provision, and the content of EHC Plans. Training has been delivered to the North Northumberland branch of the National Autistic Society and a locality event in west Northumberland hosted by the Northumberland Parent Carer Forum.

Improvements to the service website, including accessibility of information, to enable service users to self-serve more easily.

Progress with this work has been limited by staffing capacity but initial improvements have been made. The information on the IASS website has been checked for accuracy and updated, where required. There will be a continued focus on website improvements in the current academic year.

Networking and training

The service engages with regional and national strategic planning and training and works with regional IASSs through the North-East SENDIASS group to inform service development and works with local partners to inform and influence policy and practice in the local area. The IASS Manager is a member of the Autism Partnership Board, and the SEND Network facilitated by the Northumberland Parent Carer Forum. The IASS officer attends the Post-16 Preparing for Adulthood Network meetings and the North of Tyne CHSWYG (Children's Hearing Services Working Group).

Anonymised casework data is provided to Local Authority colleagues, and feedback from service users through casework and service evaluations is shared through the service steering group meetings, through bi-monthly meetings with SEND Strategic leads and through relevant networks.

Networking and training events attended by service staff this year have included:

- The Northumberland Parent Carer Forum SEND Network conference for parents
- A post-16 SEND event at the Kirkley Hall campus, Northumberland College
- Briefings on Northumberland SEND processes and Personal Budgets
- The annual Northumberland SENCO conference
- National IASS Network training covering: Helpline training - Comprehensive Communication and Vicarious Trauma; Equalities Act
- Northumberland SEND Employment Forum

Casework data

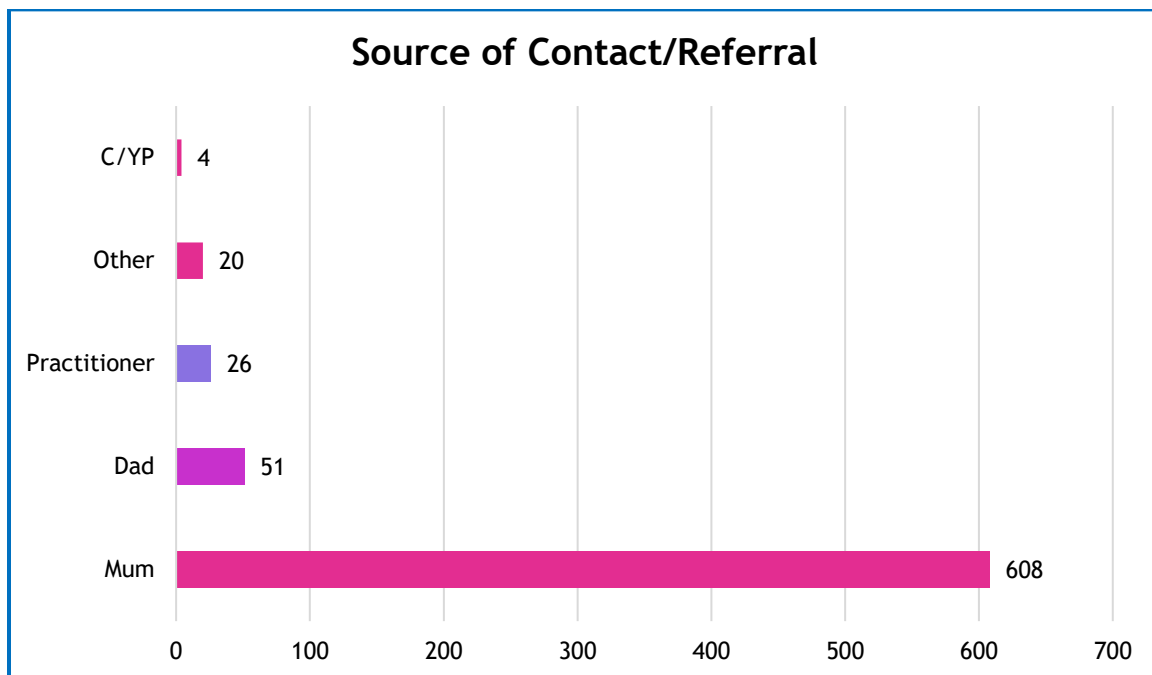
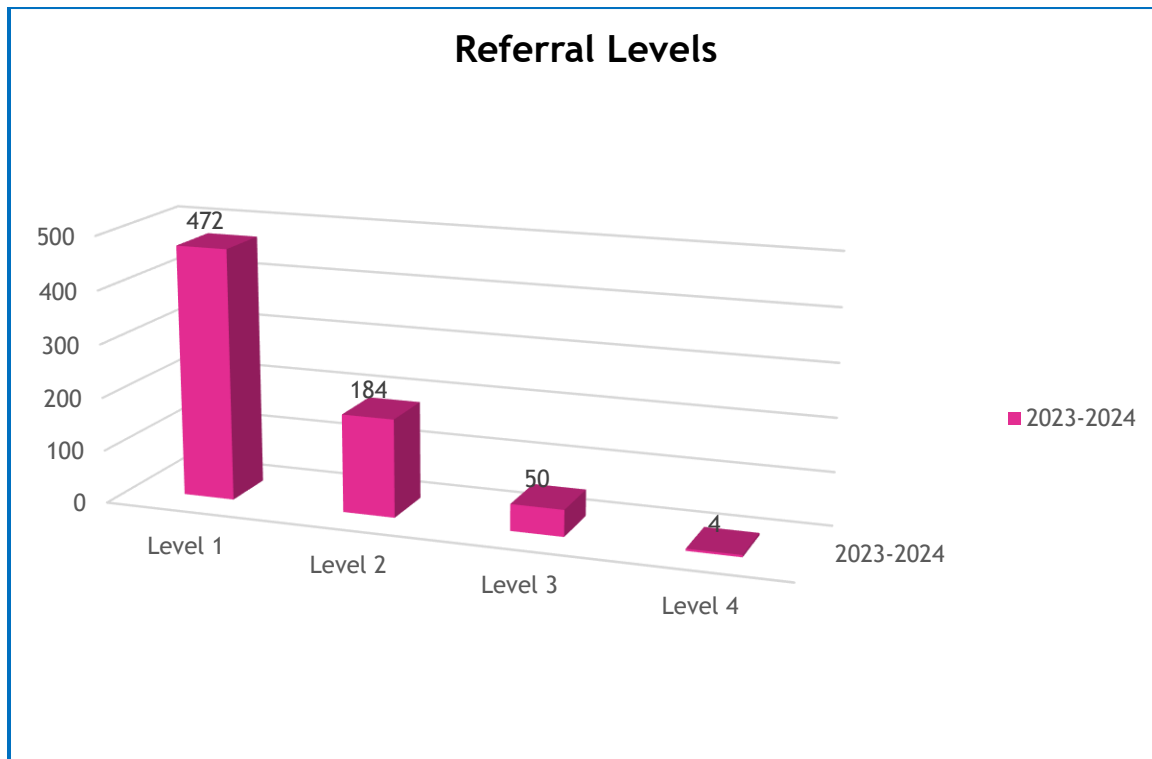
The service supported 711 service users during the academic year. A solution focused approach is used, working in partnership with the service user and involved parties to try to achieve best outcomes for the child/young person, with an emphasis on promoting independence and self-advocacy.

The service still receives a very small number of referrals from children and young people (0.5% of referrals). The service offer for children and young people is flagged up with parents and practitioners, where appropriate, and this tends to be the main way of engaging with them due to staffing capacity. Service staff emphasise how essential it is for child/young person's 'voice' to be at the centre of any SEND processes.

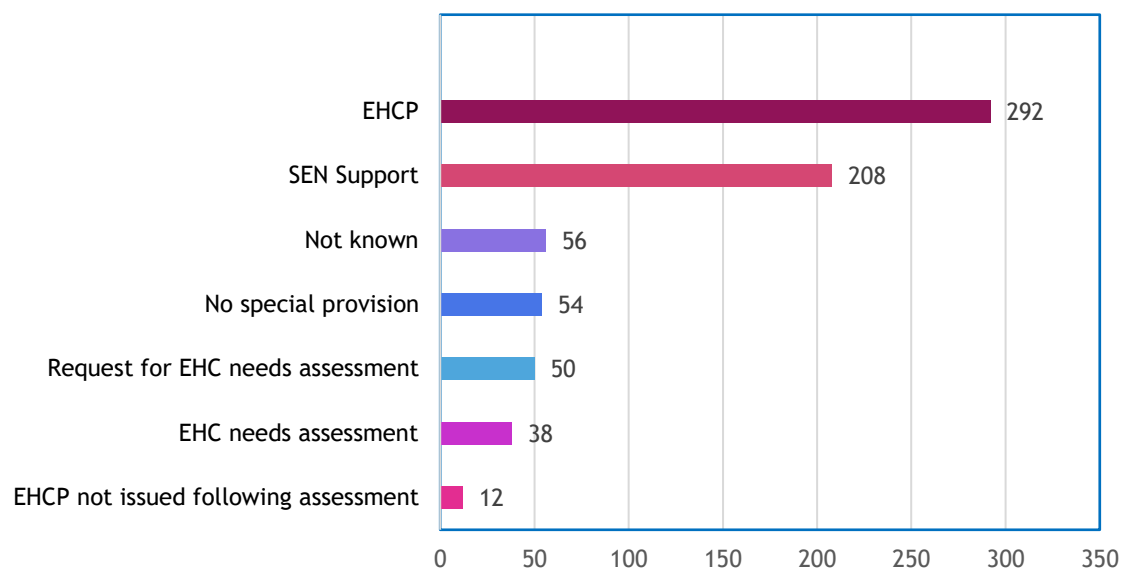
Casework is categorised according to the amount of service time spent on each case. This is the first year that the updated intervention levels have been used for recording casework so comparative data is not yet available:

- Level 1 – **Information:** Up to 20 minutes on the helpline; maximum 1 hour for email response, to include research, etc.
- Level 2 – **Information and tailored advice:** Booked call/virtual appointment 20 mins - 1 hour. Total time spent, including email exchange, research etc. up to 2 hours. Low need/low complexity
- Level 3 – **Support:** Over 2 hours of time spent- Low Need / High Complexity or High Need / Low Complexity
- Level 4 - **Intensive Support:** Includes all of the support detailed in Level 3 but must also involve representation for parent, child or young person at meetings, appeals, mediation and CETRs (Care, Education and Treatment Reviews). Ongoing and intensive casework/advocacy that includes representation.

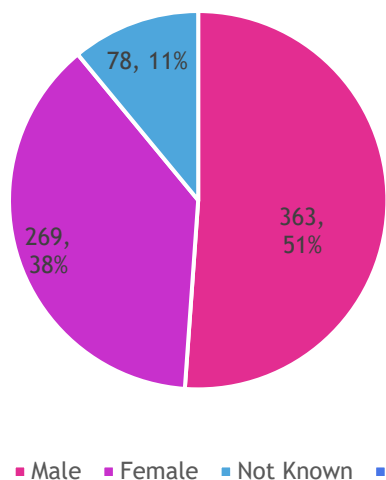
The analysed data is set out in the charts below.



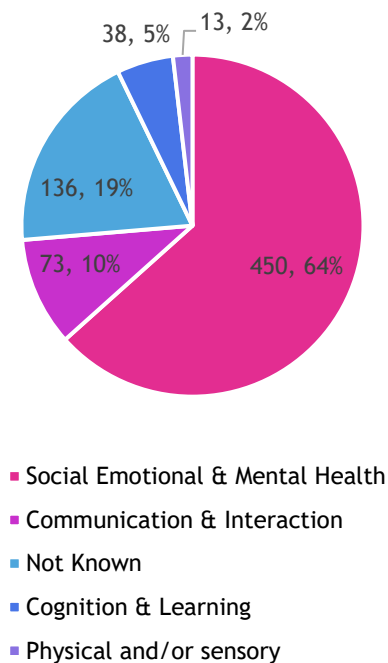
SEND Code of Practice Graduated Approach



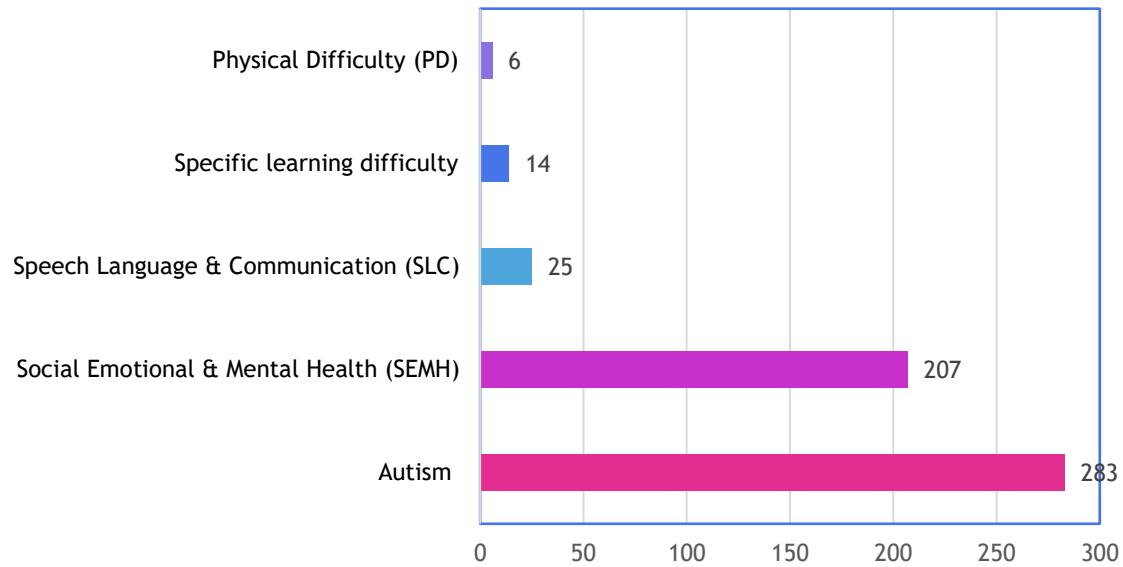
Gender of child/young person - 710 responses



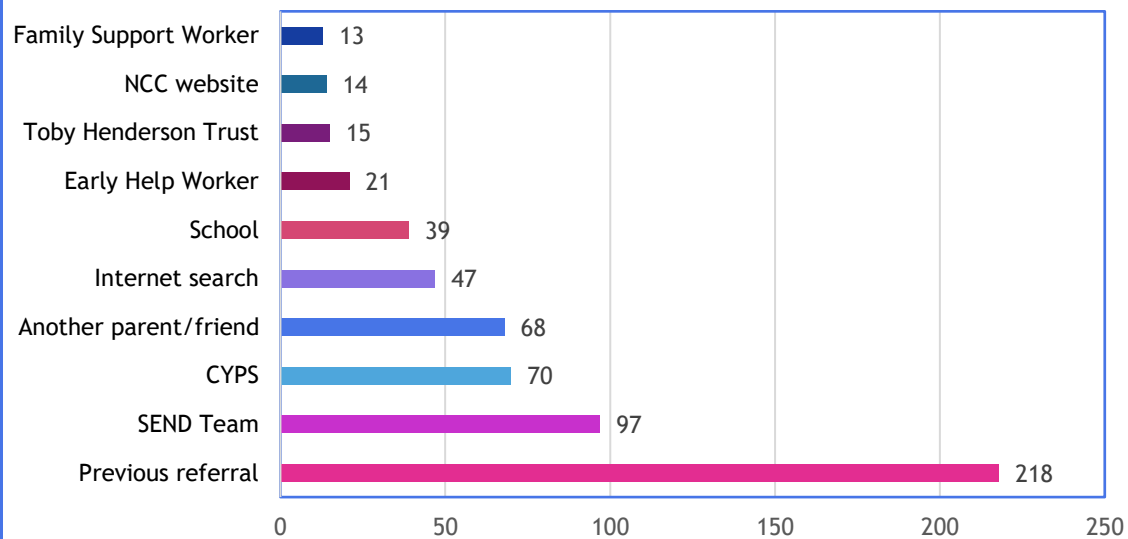
SEN Category



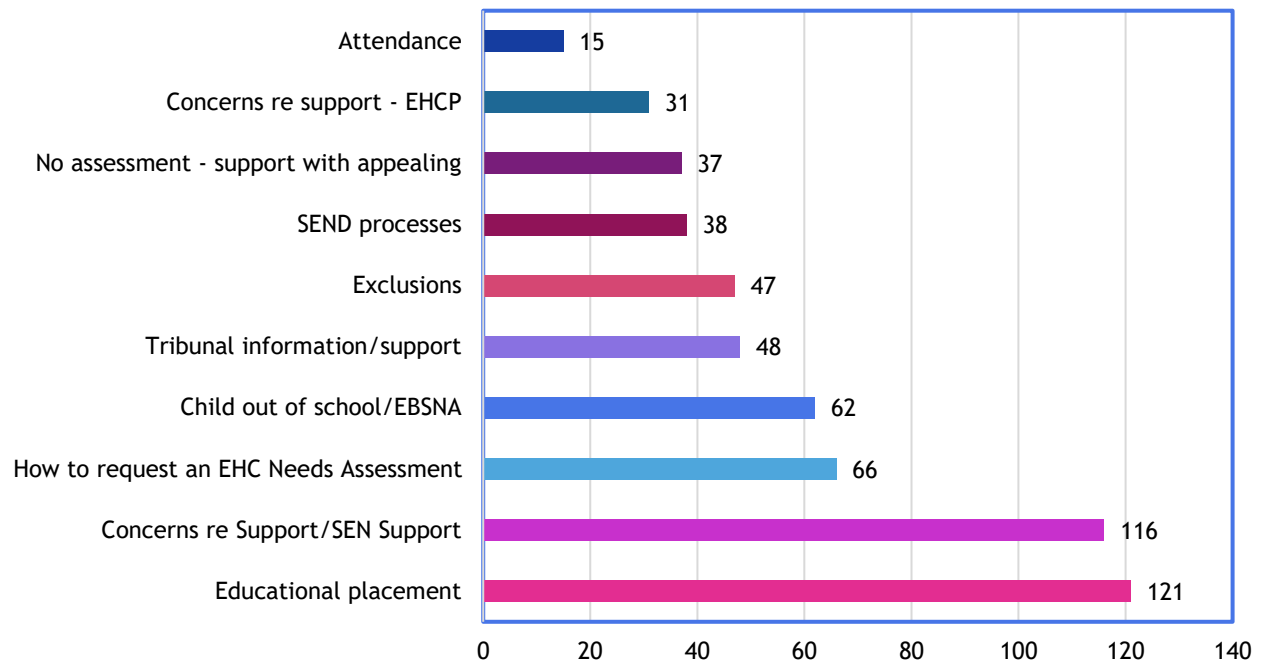
SEND Primary Need (where known) - Top 5



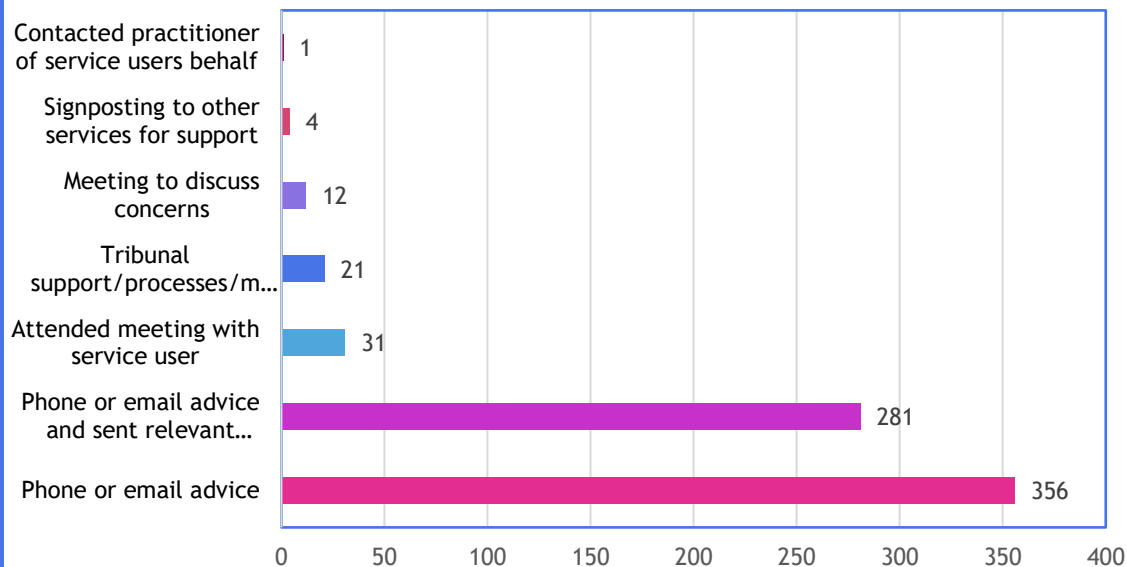
Where Heard About Service (top 10)



Reason for referral or contact (top 10)

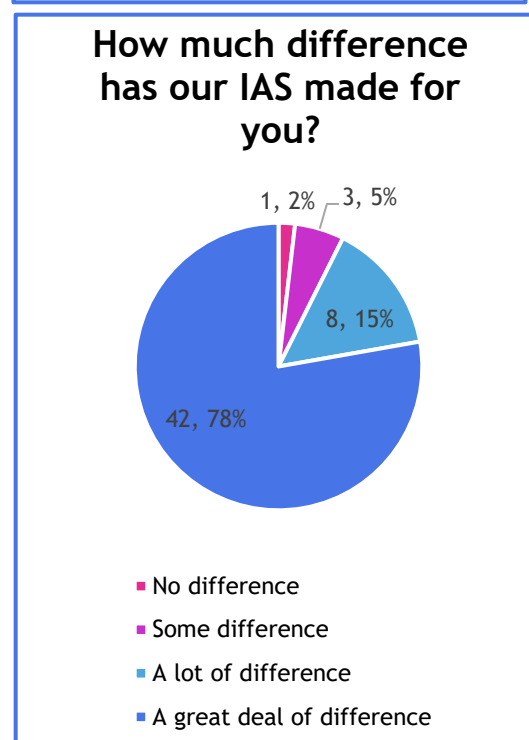
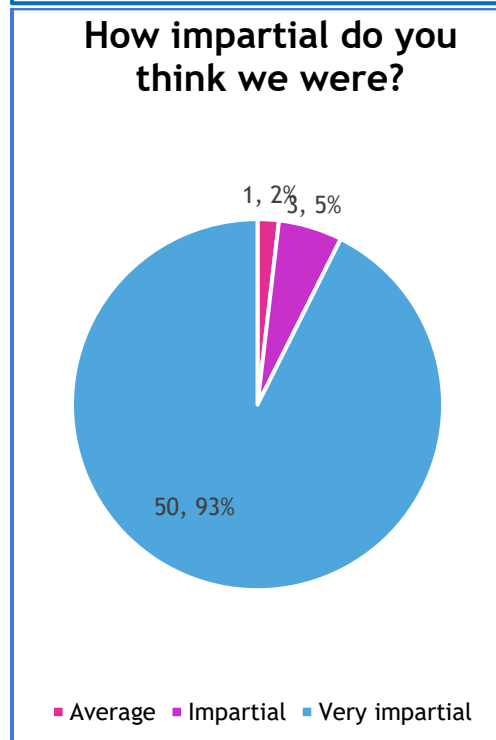
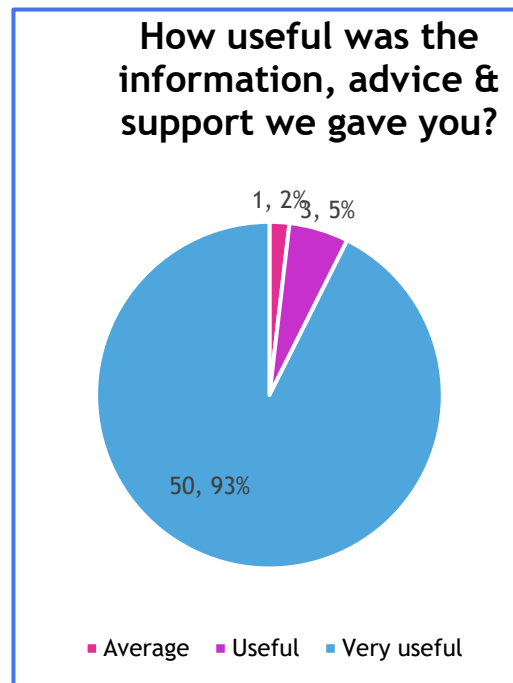
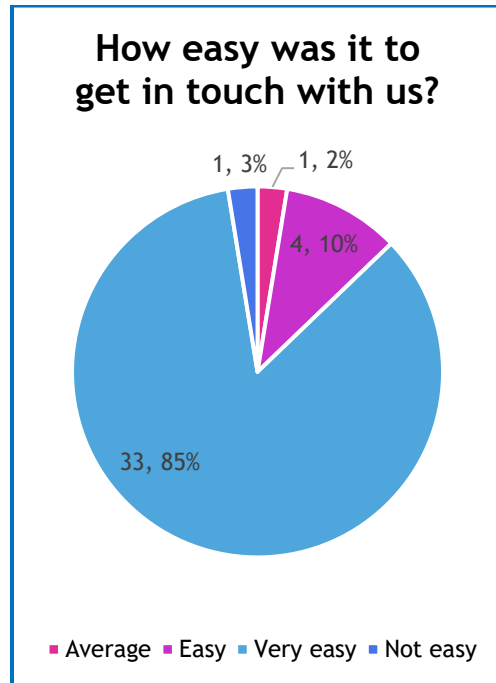


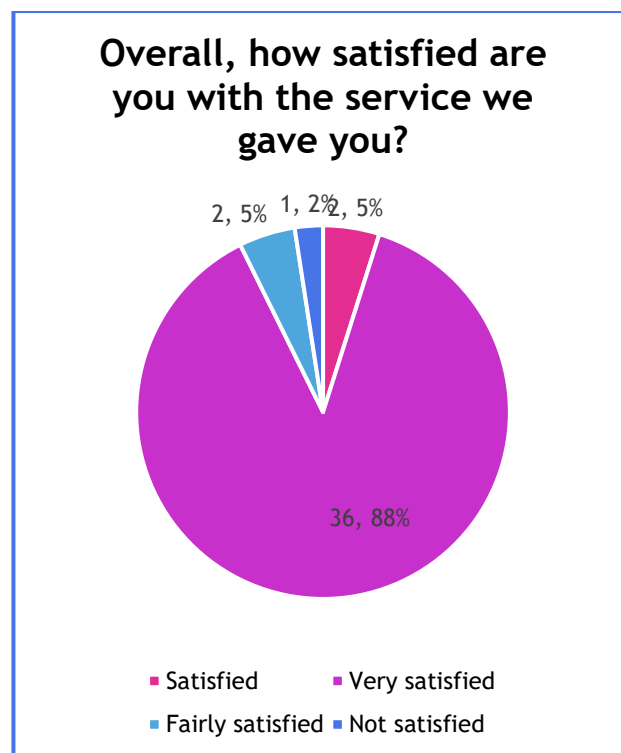
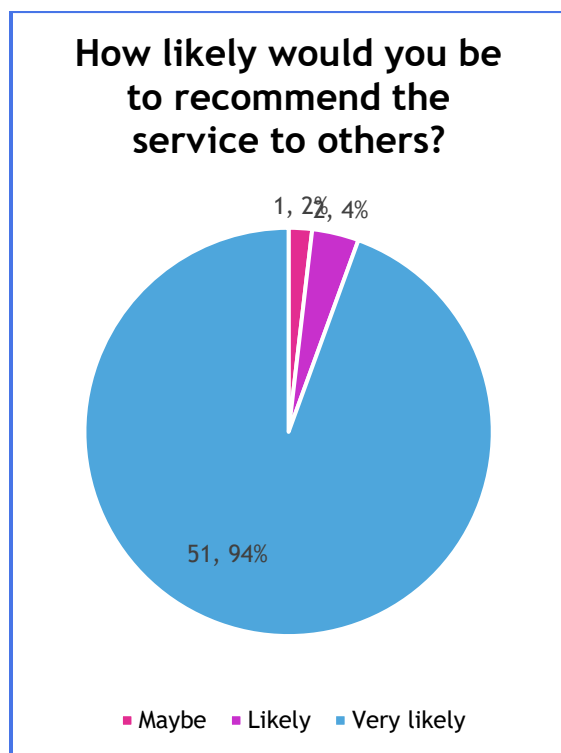
Information, advice and support provided at initial contact



Service User Feedback

Feedback is obtained through an evaluation form sent to services users who received Level 2 intervention and above. 54 responses were received, representing a 23% return.





Impact of the IASS on Improving Outcomes for Children/Young people and their families

Service data and feedback from the service evaluation is used to monitor the impact of the service and inform its future improvement and development. The types of difference service users reported that the service had made (from the list of choices given) were:

- I have a better relationship with my child's school or setting.
- I feel more confident.
- I have a greater understanding of the educational processes for children with SEN.
- I feel more involved in my child's education.
- I feel happier/less worried about the future.
- I feel that my child has benefitted as a result of the service being involved.

Comments from service users included:

“...they gave me power as a parent to navigate the whole process - giving me a broader understanding of the process...”

“...with support from the service, the school took on my ideas for my child. He now thrives in school and has moved up into set 2 for most of his lessons and no longer gets excluded for things he can't control...”

“The service I received was brilliant and I would recommend anyone going through the SEN process to contact this service.”

“...gave me a massive amount of help, and support...and would explain everything in detail, so that I understood some of the school jargon...my child has benefitted from support from the team...”

Service user feedback about how the service could be improved

As with previous years, feedback focused on

Staffing: e.g. “More staff to fully improve and develop this service further. There is so much need for this service.” “Employ more staff.” “Be a bigger team.”

Contacting the service: e.g. “Knowing how to get in contact with you.” “Make it more accessible as it’s a nightmare to get in touch.”

Raising awareness of the service: e.g. “Make more parents of SEN children aware of the service before it’s needed. Let them know the service is there to access before a crisis or facing upset and the task of hunting for support and information...”

There is a continued focus on raising awareness of the service and how to get in contact alongside managing expectation about service capacity and asking those signposting to the service to encourage potential service users to leave a message if their call goes through to voicemail.

Key priorities within the Service Development Plan 2023/2024

- To ensure that the content and accessibility of the IASS website enables service users and stakeholders to find the information they require to enable them to self-serve where appropriate.
- To increase the level of evaluation feedback from services users by ensuring that the service evaluation system is aligned with the IASSN Intervention Levels and feedback is requested in a timely way once an intervention is completed.
- To ensure that training is offered to service users on a range of SEND themes prioritised by service users.
- To ensure that the service is prepared for the next local area SEND inspection

Conclusion

Progress has been made with service development activities this year, although this has been impacted by unforeseen staff absence. Feedback from service users has generally been positive and encouraging.

Future challenges will include ensuring that service capacity and resources meet the strategic and operational requirements of the IASS minimum standards, particularly within the current SEND context nationally with a significant increase in both complexity of need and demand for SEND services.

Appendix 1

Briefing: EBSNA (Emotionally Based School Non-attendance)

A significant number of referrals to the service over the past few years have been for children who experience difficulties with attending school due to emotional factors. This briefing outlines the general issues identified through casework and the information, advice and support provided by the service.

General issues

In most cases, the child's mental health issues, particularly anxiety, were preventing them from accessing education. A high number of referrals were for children who had either already been diagnosed with autism or were on the neurodevelopmental pathway awaiting assessment.

Some children were already accessing EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) medical needs provision through the Local Authority when their parent contacted us, but most were not. Parents may have been told that their child needed involvement from CYPS (Child and Young People Service) or other mental health services to access EOTAS. If the child was already accessing EOTAS, the involvement of mental health services was required to support their return to school. This can be an issue when the child finds it difficult to engage with mental health services which may lead to them being discharged. Waiting lists for mental health services can also be an issue around support for the child and the provision of evidence for making a referral to EOTAS. A few parents had opted for or were considering elective home education to avoid prosecution for non-attendance because they felt they had no other option than to agree to this.

In many cases it may not have been solely the child's mental health needs that were preventing them from accessing education but rather the combination of these needs with the demands of mainstream education in terms of the size of the school setting, curriculum demands, lots of movement around the school, class sizes, potential bullying issues, social and emotional demands, etc. The child may have been masking the difficulties they were experiencing which may have made it difficult for the school to recognise their level of need and identify the support they required.

If a return to mainstream education did not seem likely, a possible option would be to request an EHC needs assessment because an EHC plan would be required to access a more specialist educational setting. Some parents expressed the view that their child may be able to function very successfully in a smaller, less busy educational environment. When a child on EOTAS without an EHCP turns 16 another issue can be what happens in terms of their on-going education if they are unable to access a post-16 setting without a high level of support or unable to manage the post-16 environment. In some cases, parents had been told that the post-16 setting would not be able to meet the young person's needs unless they had an EHCP because the setting could not provide the level of support required. There can then be delays in support/gaps in education while an EHC needs assessment is requested and no guarantee that an EHC plan will be issued.

IASS information, advice and support

After talking through the situation with the parent, we would usually send information from the IPSEA website (link below) which sets out possible steps that might be taken:

[School anxiety | \(IPSEA\) Independent Provider of Special Education Advice](#)

These steps could include:

- Making an appointment with their GP or other medical or mental health professional to talk through the situation and asking for confirmation in writing if the medical professional feels that the child is not currently fit to attend school.
- Speaking to the school about what might be causing the non-attendance and what support can be offered to the child and family; e.g. support from the education welfare service or Early Help.
- Talking through any further steps that might need to be taken regarding the child's special educational needs relating to their social, emotional and mental health needs; e.g. requesting an EHC needs assessment or, if the child has an EHC plan, whether an early review is required.
- Asking about getting temporary education put in place through the Local Authority where it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative.

The North-East regional SEND IASS group has commissioned EBSNA training for parents through a local training provider called SENETA. The demand for this training has already exceeded the places available and it is planned that further sessions will be offered.

Alison Bravey and Vicki Graham, November 2024