



Cheshire East Information, Advice and Support Service (CEIAS)

Annual Report

1st August 2022 – 31st July 2023

Self-review of the Cheshire East Information Advice and Support Team to establish how the team is delivering on its responsibilities as required by the Children and Families Act and SEN Code of Practice 2014

Introduction

Cheshire East Information Advice and Support Service (CEIAS) is an in-house statutory service. CEIAS provide free impartial, confidential, and accurate information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people 0-25 and their parents/carers on matters relating to special educational needs and disability. The service provides an Annual Report as part of its Service Level Agreement with commissioners.

Cheshire East information, advice and support service helps to promote independence and self-advocacy for children, young people, and their parents/carers.

There are a set of national Minimum Standards for services providing impartial information, advice and support relating to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). The Minimum Standards are developed by the Information, Advice and Support Services Network

[The Information, Advice and Support Services Network \(councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk\)](http://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk)

How we offer support

The CEIAS service operates during normal office hours and throughout the year, including school holidays, except for the period between Christmas and the New Year, staffing may be reduced during school holiday periods; contacts can still be made during these times through email, or the use of the answer machine service and responses will be made upon our return. We have a maximum 5-day response, however all calls this reporting period have had a response within 3 working days. The service also signposts to other sources of support and provides information about a range of local and national SEND organisations.

Support is provided to families in various ways: by telephone, email, virtual individual sessions and attendance at multi-agency meetings with schools and other professionals, the majority of these are virtual to enable the service to offer support to more families. The service has a stand-alone website and provides a range of information leaflets and links to other relevant agencies including mental health support services.

The service has an active Facebook page which is regularly updated sharing information around SEND, there is a direct link from our website to access this. This reporting year the current follower numbers are **1,380** with an average monthly engagement of **1,284** month.

The team share monthly one minute topic guides with a range of organisations and services and educational settings with information on key themes throughout the year.

The CEIAS Team

The team consists of:

1 x caseworker – 36 hours

1x caseworker – 33 hours

1 x caseworker – 10 hours (term time only)

Since the retirement of the CEIAS Manager in December 2022, the service does not have a replacement manager who directly works within the team. The team currently come under Sally Ashworth who is the interim Head of Service for Pupil Participation and Support.

All current caseworkers have completed the IPSEA training up to level 3 and attend refresher training annually as well as other training offered by the National IASS service and IPSEA including recent Tribunal and Exclusions training. The team also engage with training offered by the Local Authority Children's services.

Governance Group

During this period one meeting took place of the Governance Board. The meeting identified areas of development for the CEIAS team which have been incorporated into the team's action plan for the coming year. The meeting was also an opportunity for the team to share what they had been doing, successes and challenges.

Delivery of Information

There are currently 4,368 EHCP's in Cheshire East this is an increase of last year's reporting period where there were 3,789 EHCP's. This increase has placed an increased demand on the CEIAS service due to more parents requesting support around EHCP advice and information.

The team continues to provide information, advice and support by telephone, email, text and virtually; this has included annual reviews of EHC plans, SEND Tribunals, mediations and Early help meetings that have been held remotely.

Using technology, the team have been able to support many more families due to the time saved without travelling to meetings across a large local authority. We have been able to work more flexibly, with staff not being tied to one area within the authority by being able to join meetings remotely. The team can support at some face-to-face meetings, but this is on an individual basis and down the capacity within the team at the time.

Engagement with other teams and services

CEIAS currently attend Local Authority workstreams contributing to policy and decision making, these include:

- The Communication and Engagement Workstream
- The Assessment Monitoring and Quality Workstream
- The Gypsy Romany Traveller Operational Group
- Preparing for Adulthood workstream

CEIAS also engage with the National and Northwest IASS groups to share and gain information on service delivery processes and access to training opportunities. CEIAS attend the North West IASS Conference usually held in March.

CEIAS have positive engagement with the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum, attending regular steering group meetings and identifying opportunities for shared training and events.

CEIAS engage with the LA youth support engagement and participation team to gather the views of young people with the view of continuing to update our website and the information they would find useful to them. CEIAS have attended evening SEND youth forum sessions where direct work with young people has taken place and information shared.

There have been additional engagement sessions throughout the year including:

- Engagement with the new Family Hub working group to help in discussing provision.
- Engagement with the team from the Dynamic Support register to build links and understanding of their service to support parents and referral pathway.
- A team member attended a Preparing for Adulthood Day and evening event and engaged with families and young people and delivered an activity.
- Online session with SPOTS (sensory processing occupational therapy service) to gain knowledge of their service they offer to settings and referral process.
- Online session with the Short Breaks Team to gain information about their service and ensure all information we share with parents is up to date.
- A team member has attended an evening session with the SEND Youth Group.

- Online meeting with the Early years team to share information about our role and theirs in supporting 0-5 years.

Preparing for Adulthood

The CEIAS Team have attended and contributed to PFA Workstream meetings regularly throughout the year. These have been very well attended and it has supported our joined up working with our professional partners in health, social care, short breaks, supported internships, parent carer forum and other LA Teams. A member of the CEIAS Team has also been involved in a separate working group to plan for two events for young people. Providing information around Preparing for Adulthood/Looking at your Future. These events were held at different venues within the LA and at different times of the day. The group looked at previous similar events and feedback that we had managed to collate from young people, families, providers and other professionals involved. So that we could share as much relevant information to as many as possible.

CEIAS worked closely in the weeks running up to the event with the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum, putting together an ice-breaking activity that was engaging to the young people as they arrived at the event. It involved colourful laminated jigsaw pieces that covered all the areas of PFA and putting them into the areas they thought they should be in. There were no wrong answers! It was positive in opening discussions and encouraging different ways of thinking. Everyone involved, thought that it was a great success.

Workshops and coffee mornings

This year the team have delivered 5 workshop sessions including SEN support, choosing a school with an EHCP, mediation, starting primary school and EHC needs assessments which have been well attended.

The team have hosted 4 virtual coffee mornings with guest speakers from the Youth Support service, Cheshire East Autism Team, Supported Internships and an open questions session with the CEIAS Team.

We have delivered two evening sessions with a charitable organisation that supports families of children with additional needs. We delivered a presentation about our service and parents could ask questions, these were well attended and helped those parents who work during the day to have access to an evening session.

Members of the team have attended primary school SEND coffee mornings in person to speak about our service and answer any questions, this has had positive feedback by the settings.

Meeting Support

CEIAS have supported at **258** virtual Multi Agency meetings in 2022-2023, which is an increase of 66% since 2021-2022. We have been able to offer more support at meetings and meeting preparation due to mainly working remotely, and the feedback from parents has been very positive.

We have also held **92** Individual bookable parent meetings via Microsoft Teams. These are between 30-60 minutes in duration and are offered, predominantly, to parents who are new to the service who contact us with a more complex query e.g., there may be a lot of paperwork which, where appropriate, we would support them to work through. These have received positive feedback and have given us the opportunity to enable and empower parents to make informed decisions and choices.

CEIAS have supported **41** parents regarding mediation, helping to prepare with parents and the mediation service and attending via Teams, some of these mediations have been overturned before the mediation took place.

CEIAS have supported **18** parents regarding appeals to the Tribunal. We have not had the capacity to attend telephone case management hearings, case reviews or hearings this reporting period.

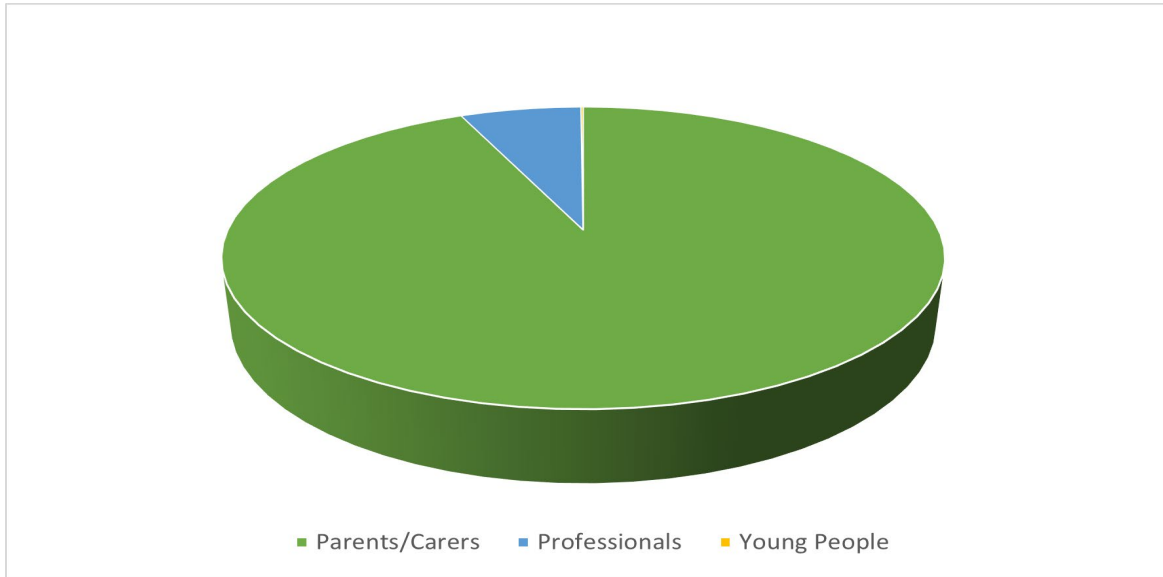
Areas of Enquiry

During the reporting period 1st August 2022– 31st July 2023 there have been **767** parent enquiries to CEIAS; these have either been new callers to the service or callers that have had previous involvement but who are requesting a new piece of work. This is an increase from the last reporting period of **652** new enquiries. There have also been an additional 54 enquiries from professionals requiring information or advice.

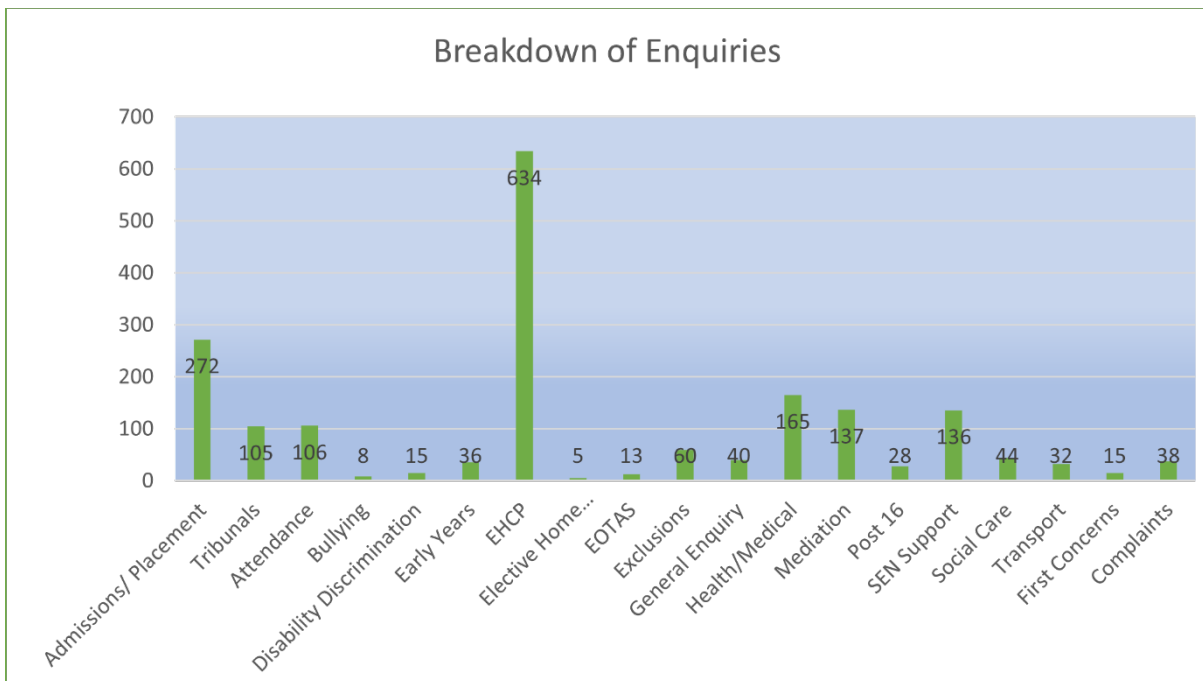
The figures may appear different to the enquiries recorded, this is due to a classification code being added to each enquiry so that we can capture the reasons for the enquiry; each enquiry can have more than one classification code, further enquiries from the same parent may mean further classification codes are added if the call is for a different reason, the actual number of contacts via classification code in the period is **3,657** in total. A new classification code is not always added if the enquiry is regarding the same issue.

Areas of Enquiry

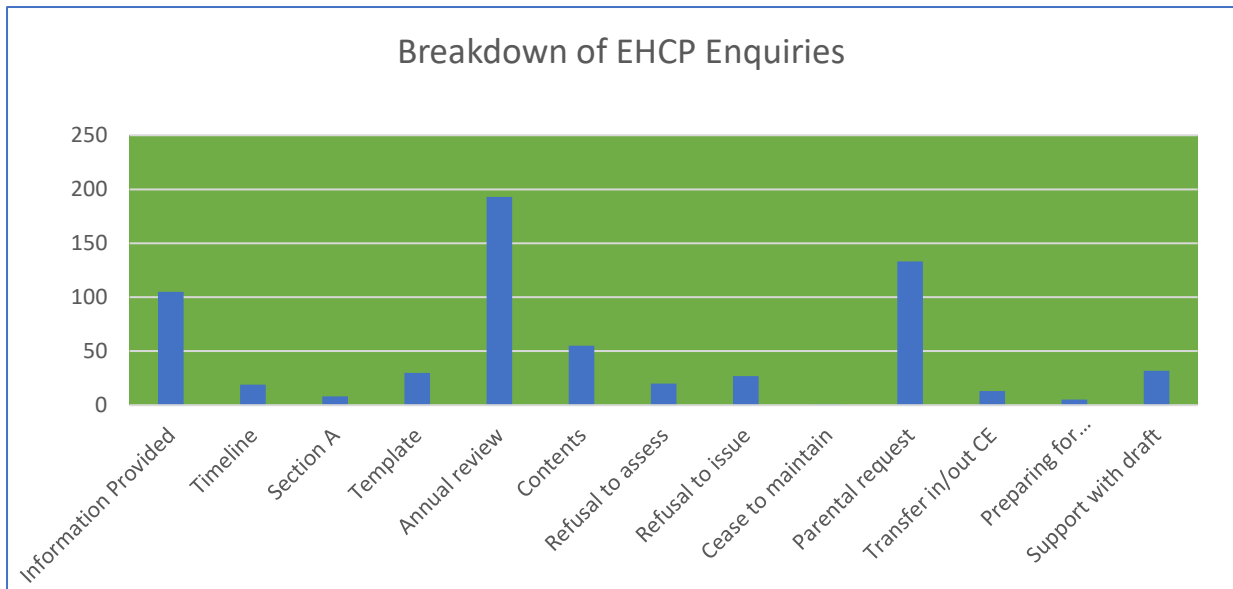
Breakdown of service users contacting the CEIAS Service, most enquiries are from parent/carers. Professionals contacting the service include social workers, family support, NHS professionals, SEND keyworkers, charitable organisations and other local authority teams.



The main area of enquiry is around EHCP's followed by placement/admissions enquiries.



A further breakdown of the "EHCP" category shows that the main areas of enquiry were around annual reviews and parental requests. These areas of enquiry help to inform our workshops for the following year ahead.



Feedback

The Team gather feedback from service users, this reporting year has had a poor response from parents completing a set of 6 questions that are sent out electronically, we are looking at different ways of collecting this feedback for the next reporting year.

The following quotes are taken from direct feedback to the team via email:

"I really appreciate your help on this, it's been so stressful, and you have really helped!"

"We appreciate all your support and kindness to us. More than words can say".

"I am writing to thank you for all the support, time and guidance you have provided in the past few days. Without your help I wouldn't have had the same amount of strength to keep asking for a rightful place for my son"

"I understand what a busy team you are, so I wanted to say thanks you for your quick response to my enquiry".

"I just wanted to get in touch to say thank you so much for joining us this week - the parents found it useful, and it was lovely to see you" (School SENCO)

"Thank you for attending the meeting at school I felt I was not alone, and you helped to explain when I didn't understand".

*“Thanks for attending the meeting at short notice, the family and I really appreciated your input and advice, and it helps to know the parent will be supported by CEIAS going forward”
(Family service worker)*

“Thank you so much for your help support and advice I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it”.

“I would just like to pass on a massive thank to you for the fantastic job you did today”

“Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me on Tuesday. Your advice and support is greatly appreciated “

Future plans for the service

The team are in the process of putting together the next calendar of events for the year and working with the parent carer forum to do some events jointly. These will consist of short workshops and coffee mornings with guest speakers to include a range of topics.

Further evening sessions will be planned to accommodate parents who cannot make daytime sessions.

CEIAS are involved with the new Family Hubs working groups and look forward to being involved with drop-in sessions when these are open to families.

We plan to add additional information to our website and revisit and revise information that is already available.

CEIAS will continue to engage with the SEND workstreams and young people’s forums and explore ways of engaging further with minority groups.

Thank you for your continued support and for taking the time to read our annual report
The CEIAS Team

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