



# Annual Report

September 2020

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## Introduction

Wokingham SENDIASS offers impartial information, advice and support relating to all aspects of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, including health, social care, and personal budgets. We support children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and disabilities and their parents.

The information, advice and support that we offer are firmly based in the law and the SEND Code of Practice. We provide unbiased information and advice about Wokingham Borough Council's policies and procedures and about the policy and practice in local schools and other settings.

Support is provided through a mixture of training and workshops for parents, telephone or email support, face-to-face meetings with parents or young people, support in meetings with education, health and social care professionals. We can offer support from initial concerns that a child or young person may have SEND through to requesting and maintaining an Education, Health and Care Plan, advising on the right of appeal through the SEND Tribunal system and support if a child/young person is at risk of, or has been excluded from school.

Currently the SENDIASS team is staffed by 2.8 FTE: a full time manager, an assistant 30 hours term time only (0.7 FTE) and 0-25 co-ordinator to develop the youth service (0.5FTE) In addition we have a third assistant 25 hours per week term time only (0.6 FTE) on a fixed term contract until April 2021. We currently have 1 active volunteer who has been assisting with our data collection and analysis over the last 8 months, enabling us to improve our reporting.

## Impact of Covid 19

The team has been working from home since March 2020. This has been managed smoothly and the team adapted quickly. We have a daily meet up via Teams, offering a chance to ask advice on cases as well as to check in on each other. This has helped to replicate the connection we would have if we were sat in the office together, both in terms of the job to be done and ensuring good mental health at this difficult time.

We are becoming increasingly confident with the new ways of working, making use of Teams for annual reviews and mediation and even taking part in a virtual tribunal. Although we value the technology to be able to continue our work it is not the same as being there in person to support a family. It is much harder to sense when they are not understanding something or perhaps need a break. We have also come across a couple of families who do not have access to the internet and this has been particularly challenging. However the skills we have learnt will prove to be useful in the future to increase access for those who might otherwise struggle to engage or to attend meetings physically.

In the first few weeks of lockdown we saw a significant reduction in the number of calls. We changed our planned priorities in response to focus on the information aspect of our service:

- Working to establish a social media presence to give parents access to good quality, succinct information relating to SEND.

- Gathering information from other teams (SEND and Children with Disabilities) about how they are continuing to work with SEND families.
- Working very closely with the parent-carer forum to help identify problems early

Throughout lockdown requests for support at SEN Support reduced significantly, however support around statutory processes (annual reviews and statutory assessments) continued, and increased. Over the summer term we had an increase in calls from parents regarding whether their child was entitled to return to school. Most appreciated the opportunity to talk things through with someone neutral and to gain a better understanding of the current guidance. Often they came to the same conclusions as the school but wanted some acknowledgement of the risks of the child remaining at home (mainly to everyone's health and wellbeing).

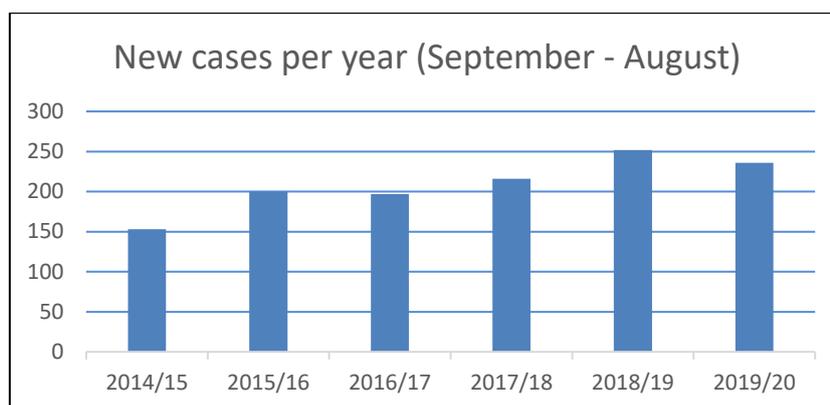
Covid 19 has had an impact on our volunteer programme as our current volunteers are all parents and have been unable to help due to the impact of lockdown and the requirement to home school. It would also be much harder to utilise volunteers currently as we are reliant on access to technology to support parents and young people. Historically volunteers have conducted much of their work on a face-to-face basis.

## Summary of Activity September 2019 – August 2020

### Case Work

#### Demand for service

We have continued to experience a high demand for our service. Prior to the SEND reforms in 2014 our case load was approximately 75. Numbers of new cases rose steadily between 2014/15-2018/19. This year has seen a slight drop (236 new cases compared to 252 last year).



However, there was a significant drop (60% in the last 6-month period) in the number of referrals for SEN support between March – August when children were not in school. There has also been a significant rise in cases for support around EHCPs and Annual Reviews (see Appendix 1) which suggests that when things return to normal we may be faced with another increase. We anticipate that there may be increased demand for information, advice and support regarding SEN support in the coming months. There will be a certain amount of catching up, but also there is a possibility of increased demand due to anxiety and mental health issues and also due to parents having seen at first hand any extent of their child's SEND.

Work around placement issues continues to be a high area of need. Pressures on school places locally and the difficulty in identifying suitable placements is a major factor contributing to this area of work. Dispute resolution continues at the same level but tribunal figures have dropped. Hopefully that is an indication that our dispute resolution has been more successful, though it is worth noting that successful dispute resolution also depends on SEND being willing to engage. On the whole that has been easier this year.

We continue to see an increase in the number of cases which are related to poor Mental Health, particularly anxiety and school refusal. We have only tracked these figures since July 2019 so comparison with the data from the previous year is not possible.

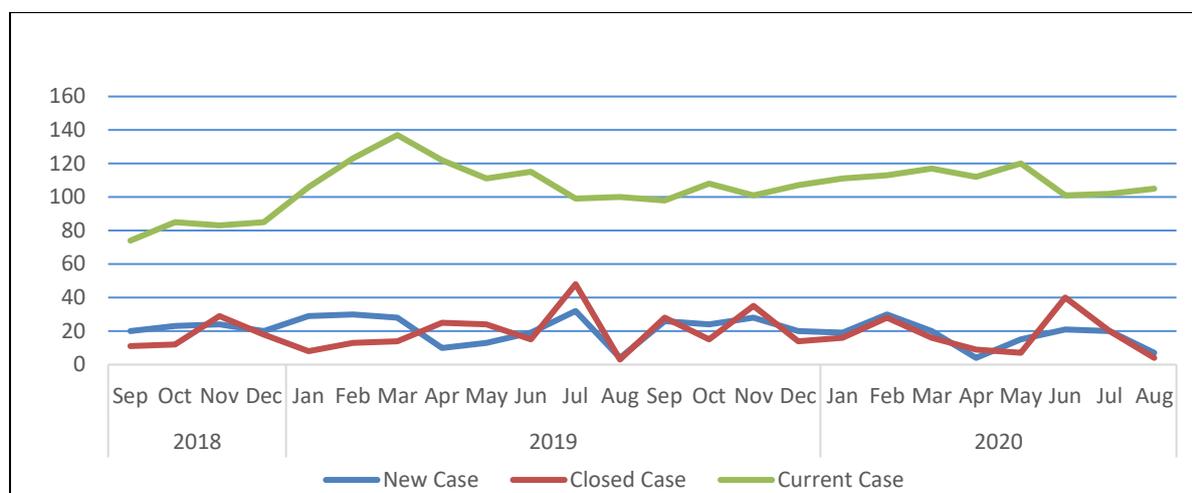
Further analysis of case work can be found in **Appendix 1**.

#### Providing Information, Advice and Support to Young People

We have begun to develop a service specifically for young people over the last 12 months. This has proved difficult during Covid-19 as our plans depended very much on being able to make contact with young people within schools. Further details can be found in **Appendix 3**.

## Responding to demand

The graph below shows the number of cases open at any one time, and numbers of new and closed cases over the period of the last 2 years.



There are some seasonal variations in demand, with August and April having lower demand due to school holidays and peaks often occurring in February as school places are allocated. Figures for open cases are currently 105.

We have worked hard this year to ensure that cases are closed once a piece of work is complete, rather than having some families who remain open to us for long periods of time. This enables us to record each piece of work that is done and will also enable us to gain feedback from users more effectively and to measure our impact (see **Appendix 2** for satisfaction survey results). It also ensures that the team is able to focus on the outstanding action backlog. There has been some improvement with our ability to follow up cases in a timely manner, with 36 outstanding actions to complete on casework, compared to 42 last year. A number of these were actions that had been delayed due to Covid-19.

We have a key performance indicator to respond to 80% of new enquiries within 2 working days. We have only collected this data as a percentage since May and results are below. Previously we recorded the average response time. However there could be quite a range within this. This year, with the addition of new staff our response times have become much more consistent with the majority being responded to within 2 days.

	May	June	July	August
Percentage responded to within 2 days	81%	79%	89%	100%

## Training and Workshops

In February we launched our new training courses for parents covering EHCPs, Annual Reviews and SEN Support. Our parent carer forum hosted these sessions, providing a venue and snacks, giving parents an opportunity to feedback their thoughts on local services at the same time. The feedback we received about the course content from those attending was good and we were ready to roll out a continuous programme delivering each course once per term. This plan was suspended during

lockdown and it looks likely that we will not be able to conduct any training face-to-face for a considerable time. We are currently in discussion with SEND Voices Wokingham about them hosting the courses online. We will need to reduce the number of participants to make this more manageable using a virtual meeting platform and so may have to increase the frequency of the training depending on success and demand.

Our young person coordinator has written 2 new brief training sessions/workshops. Again, Covid has delayed the delivery of these. The first is about the importance of young people participating in decisions about their care and support. This will be delivered virtually to secondary schools in November and then we will work out how to deliver this virtually to a wider audience.

The second workshop is designed to be delivered to young people, to help them to create one page profiles and to inform them of our service and how we can help and support them. We had planned to deliver this through schools and had some initial discussions with one of our local secondary schools. It would be difficult to reach out to young people virtually at the moment and so this has been put on hold.

### **Attendance at Events**

We have attended the following events in order to promote the service to users:

- Local Offer Live, formerly CAN Day (September)

### **Involvement in Strategic Development of Services**

Part of the role of the SENDIASS service is to work with local partners, including local parent and young people forums to inform and influence policy and practice in the local area. We have contributed to a number of the task and finish groups for the Written Statement of Action and other service developments.

- Task and Finish group 1: SEND Strategy
- Task and Finish Group 2: Quality and timeliness of EHCPs
- Task and Finish Group 3: Co-production
- Task and Finish Group 6: Preparing for adulthood
- Short Breaks Task and Finish Group
- Healthy Child Programm

## Service Development: Progress against 2019/20 Action Plan

Our action plan will focus on continuing work on our 2-year development plan:

- Establish a service level agreement with LA/Clinical Commissioning Group based on the Minimum Standards.

We have made good progress on this, working together with our colleagues in commissioning. We have developed the agreement, including an agreed set of KPIs. A few queries remain and some approaches are now being made to the CCG to ensure that the service is jointly commissioned as required by the Minimum Standards

- Agreement of long term staffing requirements required to meet SLA and recruit into agreed permanent posts.

We now have 3 permanent members of staff, increasing our permanent capacity from 1.4 to 2.2.

- Continue work on data collection, reporting and analysis.

We have been fortunate to gain the services of a parent volunteer who is very knowledgeable about excel. She has been able to ensure that the data that we collect is accurate, and easy to understand and interpret. We now have a monthly data set enabling us to track our work internally and this aids our monthly and annual reporting.

- A clear, separate, youth service offer established, initially focussing on 14-25 year olds. We hope that some of our young service users will begin to contribute to the further development of the service.

Our 0-25 co-ordinator has now been with us for a year. We have not been able to develop the service in quite the way we anticipated but have made progress nonetheless. Please see **Appendix 3** for further details.

- Create a stand-alone website accessible to all service users, including the development of a section specifically for young people.

This has been a real triumph this year. After a few Covid-related delays we finally launched our website in July. We have received some very positive feedback so far and hope that it will prove a useful addition to our service. The education sections of the website are now well established and we plan to add information on health and social care over the coming months.

- Develop our use of volunteers, training them to complete a wider range of tasks to ensure we are able to offer the support needed by parents. Aim to begin recruiting a further set of volunteers within the next 12 months.

Currently on hold due to Covid-19.

- Deliver our new training courses to parents, adjusting and improving them in response to feedback and consider what further training is required by parents and professionals.

Our new training proved successful and we now aim to move this online to enable delivery to continue.

- Increase range of leaflets available to parents.

We have revised all our existing leaflets to ensure they are accurate and up to date. We have reintroduced a leaflet giving details of the secondary phase transfer, working closely with our colleagues in SEND. We plan to introduce leaflets for the other phase transfers shortly.

We have published a new leaflet concerning school refusal in time for the return to school and have a number of further ideas to work on in the coming months.

- New staff and volunteers complete mandatory training requirements.

The mandatory training required by an IASS worker is complex and time consuming. The team have made excellent progress. One of our new staff is now fully qualified, a second is due to complete in the next couple of weeks, with the third due to complete her training by Christmas. Congratulations to them all on their progress. As they have worked through their training their confidence and competence has increased immeasurably and so the quality of our service has improved.

- Increase ongoing training and development, both externally and learning more about what services are available locally for children and young people with SEND.

There have been less opportunities for training this year as everyone has struggled with the current situation with Covid-19. More opportunities are starting to emerge again with virtual delivery of training.

- Increase availability and accessibility of the service through increasing the attendance at drop-in sessions and offering a limited number of out of office hours consultations.

Another Covid-19 casualty sadly, but also there has been less necessity for this with lockdown. We will revisit this to see if there are ways to replicate drop-ins virtually as life returns to normal.

- Once the website and service for young people is established we will increase our publicity ensuring that more people are aware of the service we offer. There are still many more parents and young people that could benefit from our service but have not heard of us. Once some of our larger projects are complete we will be able to work on improving our service reach and have the capacity to respond to the increased demand that will bring. This work is ongoing, with a publicity campaign planned for the new year.

- Establish the use of social media.

We had planned to work on our social media presence in earnest over the coming few months. However, with so much information being released at the start of lockdown, reports that parents were struggling to make sense of it all and reduction in demand for advice and support, we made the decision to bring this work forwards and have had accounts on Twitter and Facebook since April.

## Action Plan for Next 12 Months

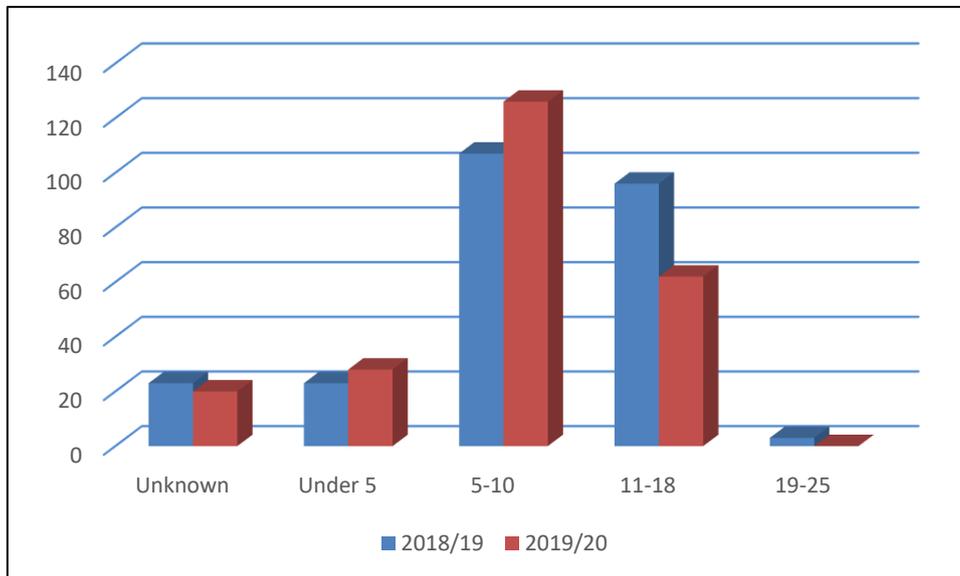
Much of our development work over the last 2 years has been carried out under contract to the Information, Advice and Support Services Network, who have administered funding on behalf of the Department for Education for the improvement of SENDIASS services. This 2 year development programme is due to complete in April. The tasks listed below are part of that action plan. Some will continue as there is always room to improve and expand our work, but further planning will take place over the next few months in coproduction with our steering group. The focus in the immediate future will be on ensuring continuity and sustainability allowing the changes to become embedded.

- Continue to work towards a service level agreement with LA/Clinical Commissioning Group based on the Minimum Standards.
- Further expand our youth service offer:
  - increase the number of young people supported
  - young service users will begin to contribute to the further development of the service
  - develop web pages specifically for young people
- Continue to expand the website adding pages for health and social care
- Increase range of leaflets available to parents.
- Publicity campaign to improve awareness of SENDIASS amongst parents and professionals (early 2021)
- Volunteer programme will be reviewed as appropriate depending on impact of Covid-19
- Increase the availability of the service by offering more drop-ins and trial evening sessions (depending on impact of Covid-19)
- Further increase our range of training and workshops available to parents and professionals, by further delivery of existing workshops and considering options for further training

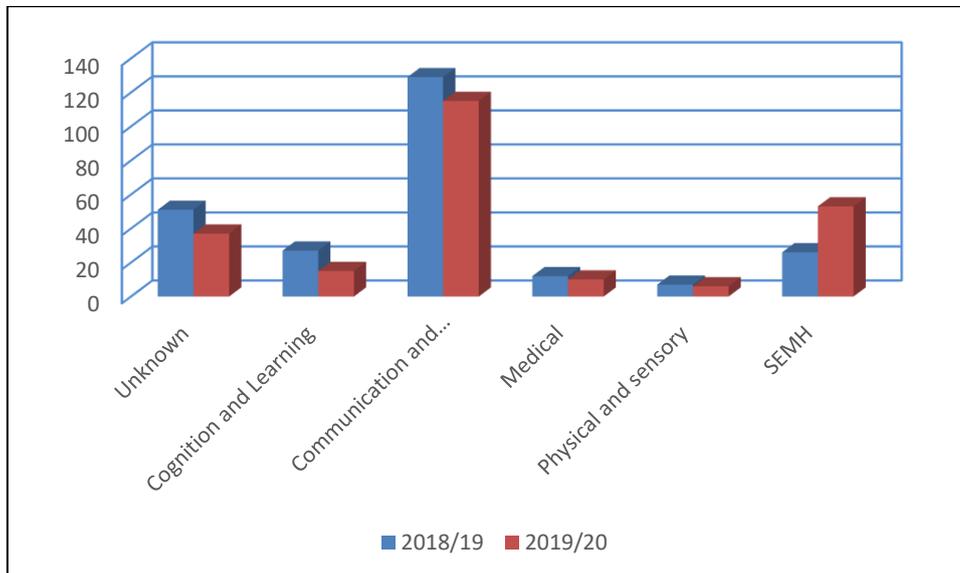
## Appendix 1: Further Analysis of Casework

The following analysis is based on new referrals received between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020, and comparison with the previous 12 month period.

### Number of referrals by age of child

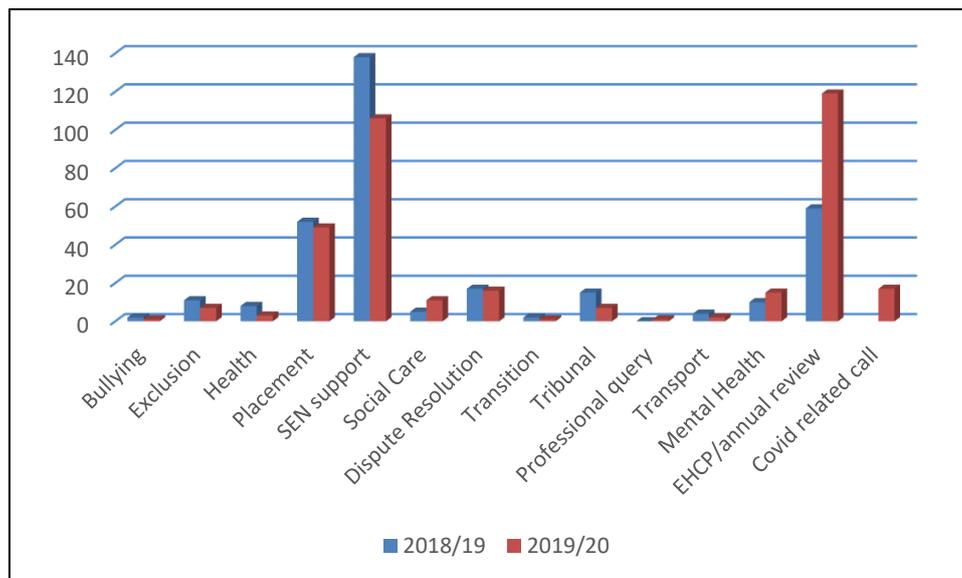


### Number of referrals by disability



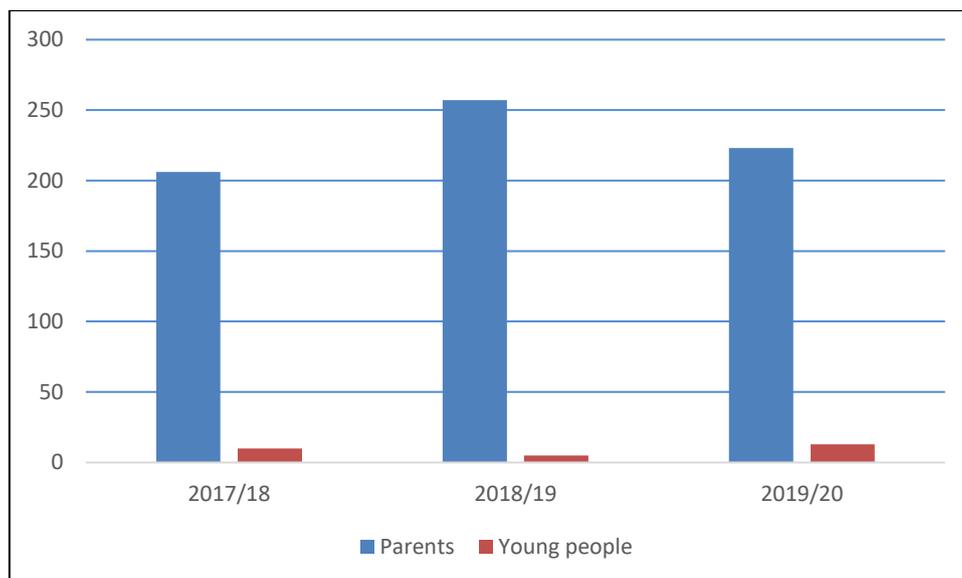
Children and young people with communication and interaction as their primary need continues to be the predominant group, consistent with the SEND population within Wokingham. SEMH issues have shown a significant increase. This is consistent with data from our SEND colleagues.

### Reason for referral.



Sen Support has decreased, possibly due to Covid-19. There has been a significant rise in requests for support for EHCPs and Annual Reviews.

### Referrals by person supported (parent/young person)



The large majority of our work continues to be with parents. We are seeing a slow increase in the numbers of young people supported

### Intervention levels

Following advice from the IASSN we record intervention levels, which are defined as follows:

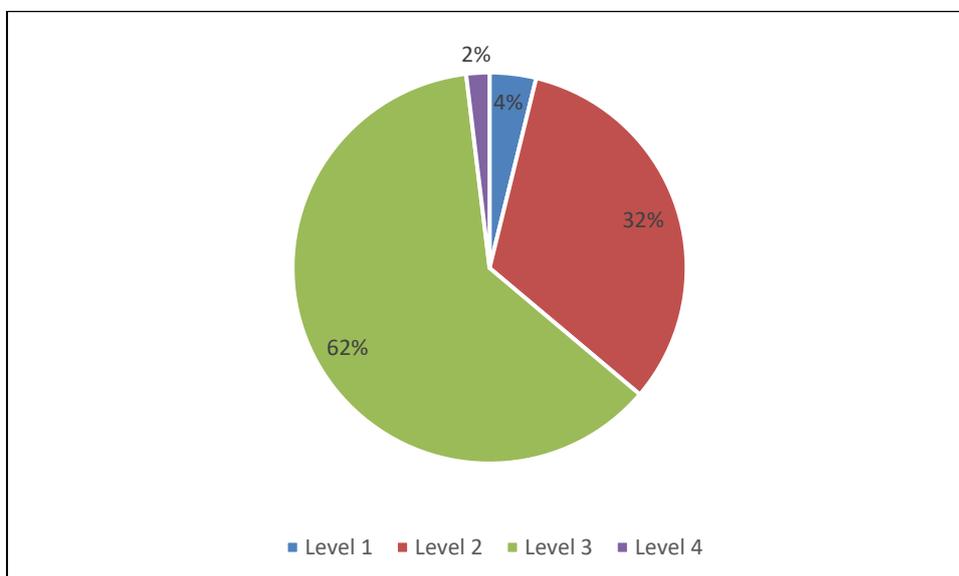
- **Level 1:** Phone or email support – single intervention.
- **Level 2:** Phone or email support over a period of time. This may include support at a meeting, a home visit, or liaison with other agencies.

- **Level 3:** Provision of support at or for a series of meetings over a period of months; ongoing support through statutory process (eg EHCP); assistance with preparation for exclusion appeal.
- **Level 4:** Intensive support during legal processes, eg Tribunal.

The chart below shows cases that have closed at some point during the last 12 months at each level and the average time each case has taken. Level 3 and 4 cases can be quite variable in the amount of time required, depending on how quickly problems are resolved. A few will take significantly more than the average over a period of many months.

	Number of projects	Average time (minutes)
Level 1	85	70
Level 2	78	96
Level 3	53	284
Level 4	14	751

Our current open case load is divided as follows. The majority of cases are at Levels 2 and 3. It should be noted that we have some very complex Level 3 cases which require a significant amount of attention. Our future service developments aim to reduce the amount of support required for Levels 1 and 2 so that we can focus more of our attention on Levels 3 and 4. We are concerned that sometimes we are unable to give the detailed support that some of these cases need, because of time constraints and trying to ensure that everyone can access some advice and support.



## Appendix 2: Parent Carer Survey Results

Parents are asked to complete a survey when we close a case at level 2 or above.

We have the following KPIs in relation to our surveys:

100% of cases at Levels 2-4 will be surveyed: we have made contact with 100% of cases, either by phone or email.

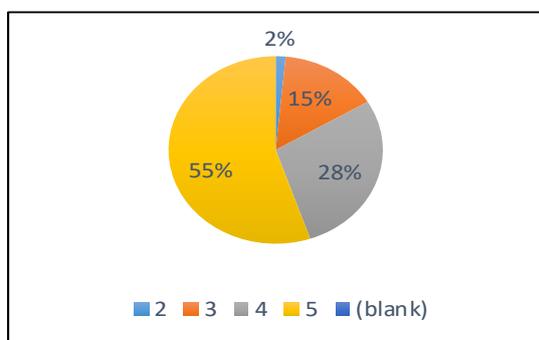
75% of customers respond: our response rate this year has been 49%. We need to improve this. We get a good response if we are able to contact people by phone, but it would seem that returns are lower from those we contact by email.

Target 75% satisfaction rates of those who responded.

The following are the responses received in the academic year 2019-20.

### 1 How easy was it to get in touch with us?

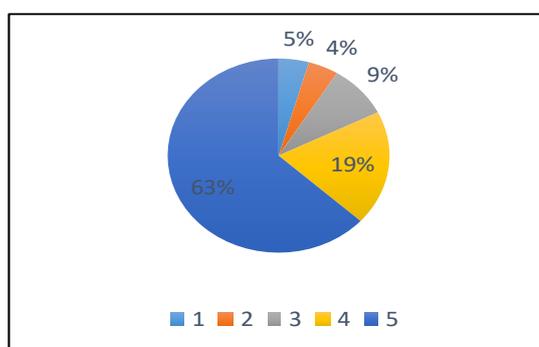
1 Not at all easy - 5 Very easy



83% found it easy or very easy

### 2 How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?

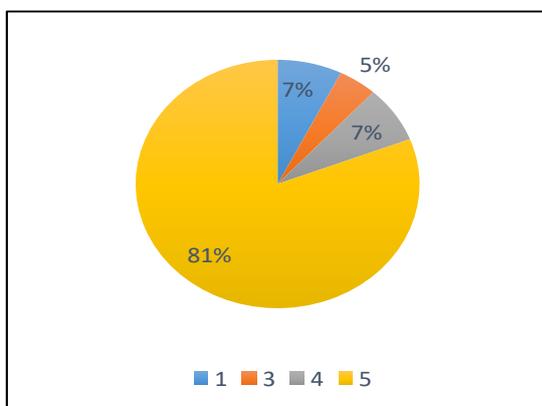
1 Not at all helpful - 5 Very helpful



82% found the information helpful or very helpful

### 3 How impartial, fair and unbiased do you think we were?

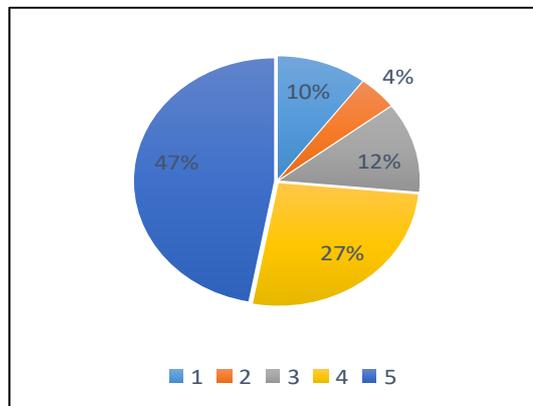
1 Not at all - 5 Very



88% said we were impartial or very impartial

### 4 What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made for you?

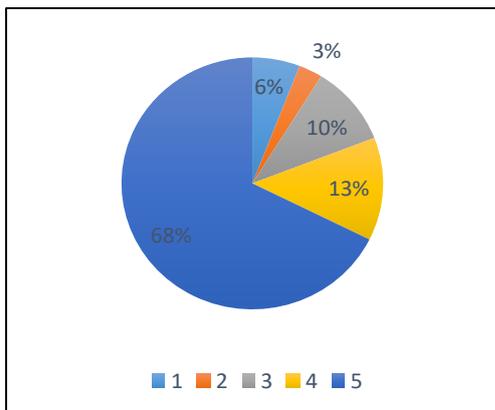
1 No difference at all - 5 A great deal of difference



74% said we had made a difference or a great deal of difference.

**5 Overall how satisfied are you with the service we gave?**

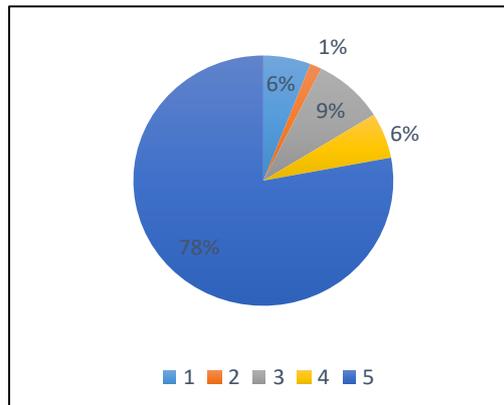
1 Very unsatisfied - 5 Very satisfied



81% were satisfied or very satisfied

**6 How likely is it that you would recommend this service to others?**

1 Not at all likely - 5 Extremely likely



84% said they were likely or extremely likely to recommend the service

The average satisfaction response is 82%. Only one question was slightly below the 75% target. This is the hardest to achieve as it is sometimes not possible to achieve the results that people hope for and this can influence their view of our service.

**7 Do you have any other comments about our service?**

We received 24 comments on our survey: 15 were positive, 7 negative and 2 neutral. A selection are included below:

**Positive comments**

- Has been a godsend, really struggled with school relationships before, good advice, annual review help and advocacy great. Wouldn't have been able to cope otherwise.
- Trying to fight for your child's educational rights isn't a small task, not everyone can afford private legal help when things go wrong. Having SENDIASS supporting my son to voice his wishes and advise me what next steps are was invaluable.
- You were really supportive throughout and there was a candid honesty and transparency about the advice and what we could and could not expect.

**Negative comments:**

- The person who helped me did not have sufficient knowledge about transport appeals *We have addressed this with further training and support around transport issues.*
- I found everything very hard to understand and sometimes ended up more confused after speaking with you. I could have done with more support than I got as I found the whole process very emotional. *We try to target our intensive support to those that need it most, whilst trying to promote independence and resilience.*
- Did employ a SEN consultant to look through plan as was not sure of the experience of the SENDIASS case worker as it was the first coproduction meeting she had done. Also had inexperienced case officer from SEN.
- *We have had 2 new staff this year and so it is true that there has been a lack of experience. However new team members are always closely supervised and we continue to support each other by sharing knowledge on more complex cases.*

## Appendix 3: Service for Children and Young People

In September 2019 Wokingham SENDIASS employed a Children and Young People's Co-ordinator to develop the service offered to young people, on a 1 year fixed term contract for 18.5 hours per week. The appointment has since been made permanent. Prior to this time we had no dedicated time to work on developing this area of our service and had supported children and young people on an ad hoc basis as the opportunity arose. The aim of the appointment was to ensure there was dedicated resource to develop publicity and to build relationships with young people, as well as additional resource to complete case work with the young people, without reducing our capacity to help parents.

### Our approach

#### Casework

We knew it would take a while for young people to come to us and so we have proactively encouraged their involvement when we are working with parents. Most parents of children and young people over the age of 14 are allocated to Katharine for support. She encourages the parents to enable their children to be involved in discussions as much as possible, offering to talk to them either separately or with their parents about their views of their difficulties. Parents have been generally very receptive to this idea and found it helpful. The approach has had to be individually tailored to each family's circumstances. For example some children have been very reluctant to talk due to anxiety or mental health, whereas other have been very able to participate as the 2 case studies below show. In all cases the child's opinion has been captured in some form, either via Katharine or through encouraging the parent to actively seek it.

#### Case study 1: John

I started working with John in November 2019

When I first meet John he was very shy and reluctant to speak. I have built up a rapport over several weeks working at a pace that suits the individual.

John had been on the CAMHS waiting list for some time and his mum felt she wanted him to have a private assessment. This took place in December he was given a diagnoses of Autism. I've done some work with John around his diagnosis and helping to explain to him what this meant using books from the library. We went through them together and John felt this was helpful.

I've attended two meetings at school supporting John's mum. John was asked if he would like to attend these meetings. He has declined on both occasions but he was willing to sit down with me and use my laptop to type up in his own words how he felt things were going at school, things that were going well and things that were not working. This was then read out by myself at the meetings on John's behalf. We discussed that John struggles to organise himself and his mum wondered what could be put in place at home and school to help him with this.

As a result of my support the following is now in place:

- A pupil action plan in place for all school staff to be aware of the needs of John, a positive behaviour card to be put in to place and the use of a laptop for long pieces written work, and extra time for exams.
- Home task list from his mum to follow his own calendar and to write his tasks down so he can keep track of his week.
- To support John with his social skills I suggested a teen club. John went along with his mum for a visit and is willing to try the group. He is now on the waiting list.
- More importantly, John's views and wishes have been taken into account throughout the process, even though he felt unable to attend meetings and express those views in person.

### **Case study 2: Elizabeth**

I was contacted to ask for support for a young lady who has a diagnosis of autism and had been at a private school but due to her mental health needs no longer attends. Elizabeth's mum asked for support with the EHCP process and asked me to gather Elizabeth's views for the application. Due to Elizabeth's sensory needs I needed to think carefully about the room setting for her as certain noises bother her. Elizabeth brought her own lap top with her and we went through the questions for the application. She typed up her thoughts and how she felt she coped with different situations. The EHCP application was completed and the SEN department agreed to issue a plan. Elizabeth is now looking at settings where she can complete a BTEC.

Working with the young people can be quite time consuming due to the level of needs each person has. A lot of them struggle to deal with new people and new situations. They have very high levels of anxiety and need to work at their own pace. Most of the young people we have worked with don't feel able to attend the review meeting but with some support are able to verbalise their thoughts and ask that we read that out on their behalf at the meeting.

Working with the young person also often means supporting the parents as well, as you will ring up to speak to the young person but start talking to the parent first and then get asked for advice on a situation. Care will be needed in the future to ensure that young people and parents each independently get the advice and support they need, especially if their views differ. At that point we may require 2 workers to work with the young person and parent separately

### **Publicity**

We spent some time developing a leaflet that can be sent to schools, children and young people with EHCPs etc, explaining in simple terms what we do and how we can help them. This was a challenge. We did not want multiple leaflets for multiple abilities, so we decided to have a very simple summary of what we do on one side, with a little more detail on the reverse. We consulted with the young people we were working with at the time and took on board their suggested improvements.

We also need to make young people aware of our service more directly. We have developed a workshop to deliver to young people in schools to help them to develop 1 page profiles. This will be a way of starting to introduce them to the idea of having more involvement with planning for their needs, but will also serve to introduce them to our service. We aim to deliver this to children and young people in mainstream schools initially.

We have promoted our service to other departments within the local authority. In particular our autism service and our Children’s Rights Officer, have commented that this will be a useful service that they will refer young people to in the future.

### **Promoting the voice of young people**

We are aware that the voice of young people is not always at the forefront of people’s minds when discussion young people within education. We have developed a presentation highlighting the importance of the young person’s voice, both in terms of the legal requirement and the benefits. This will be delivered to SENCOs initially and later to other professionals.

### **Impact of Covid-19**

The closure of schools in March has had a huge impact on the development of our young people’s service. Any direct promotion of our service has been impossible. Initially we had planned to roll out our presentations, workshop and publicity during the summer term. This has been postponed but we have continued to develop the resources so that we are ready to make a start as soon as we are able to.

## **Evaluation and data**

### **Number of young people supported**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of young people supported (new cases)</b>
September 2019	0
October 2019	0
November 2019	0
December 2019	5
January 2020	1
February 2020	0
March 2020	0
April 2020	0
May 2020	3
June 2020	3
July	0
August	0

The numbers supported are still small, and quite variable from month to month. However in September –June in the previous year we supported 3 young people in total so this is a definite improvement.

## Responses to satisfaction surveys

So far we have had only 2 surveys completed, so it is difficult to draw conclusions, but early results are encouraging.

How did you feel before you started receiving support from SENDIASS?				
1 Not happy	2	3	4	5 Happy
		2		
How easy was it to get in contact with SENDIASS?				
1 not easy	2	3	4	5 very easy
			1	1
Did you feel SENDIASS supported you to get your views across to school and other professionals?				
1 not really	2	3	4	5 they were very helpful
				2
Did you feel you were listened to?				
1 not at all	2	3	4	5 they listened really well
			1	1
How would you rate the overall support you got from SENDIASS?				
1 not helpful	2	3	4	5 very helpful
			1	1
If your friends needed advice and support would you recommend SENDIASS?				
1 not at all likely	2	3	4	5 very likely
			1	1
How do you feel now you have received support from SENDIASS?				
1 no different	2	3	4	5 much happier
		1		1
Did you think SENDIASS gave you information about all the things available to you so you could make up your own mind (this is being impartial)?				
1 not at all	2	3	4	5 yes
				2

## Other feedback received

The following was received from a parent of a family that Katharine has worked with:

Katherine has been supporting me at home as well as in school for a number of months now. My son Peter has diagnosed Autism and I have found this extremely difficult at times to manage as I am a single mum and his elder brother has diagnosed Autism and younger brother also has autism but yet to be diagnosed by CAMHS. Katherine has been very understanding and helpful. She has also been very effective and efficient in school reviews with the SENDCO and sees the wider picture that I can't always see as well as she chases up school for things to be done that they have promised to do.

Peter is ok to speak with her and considering he's not keen to engage in social contact I'm eager for this to continue. He now speaks to her on the phone and can confide in her as she is very approachable and will try to ask him about what's going on in his life.