

Impartiality Policy

This policy has been created to inform interested parties of the methods used to ensure impartiality, how issues concerning impartiality may be resolved, and how the service measures and records its level of impartiality.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice (2015) states that:

- Local Authorities must arrange for children with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible, and their parents, and young people with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible, to be provided with information and advice about matters relating to their SEN or disabilities, including matters relating to health and social care. In addition, in carrying out their duties under part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, 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.
- Information, advice and support should be provided through a dedicated and easily identifiable service. Local authorities have established Information, Advice and Support Services (formerly known as Parent Partnership services) to provide information, advice and support to parents in relation to SEN. In addition, many local authorities provide or commission information, advice and support services for young people.
- Information Advice and Support Services should be impartial, confidential and accessible and should have the capacity to handle face-to-face, telephone and electronic enquiries.

SENDIASS supports parents taking part in negotiations and discussions with schools, early years settings or colleges, with Wokingham Borough Council or with health services. It does this by assisting children, parents or young people to express their views and wishes. SENDIASS aims to ensure that all parties to discussions understand their rights and responsibilities and the rights and responsibilities of the other parties. When it is not possible to resolve differences between children, parents or young people with schools, early years settings or colleges or the local authority or the health authority, the service will advise parents of the independent mediation service and explain their rights to complain or when appropriate appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) (SENDIST).

What do we mean by impartiality?

Wokingham SENDIASS views impartiality as one of the defining characteristics of its Service. By impartial, SENDIASS understands the meaning to be:

- SENDIASS does not stand to gain or lose whatever the outcomes of any discussions may be.
- Not taking sides with anyone.
- Providing factual information and advice based on what guidance and legislation says.
- Providing parents with enough information so they can make their own decisions; not telling them what to do.

How do we maintain our impartiality?

Children, Parents and Young People (service users) who seek support from SENDIASS must have confidence in the neutrality of its operation. Therefore, the service should be run at arm's length from the Local Authority (LA).

In Wokingham, SENDIASS is an in-house service. We maintain our arm's length distance from the remainder of the LA in the following ways:

- SENDIASS is located in Wokingham Youth Centre, 35 Reading Road, Wokingham RG41 1EG away from all other SEN, social care and health services
- It maintains a discrete database and a dedicated phone line
- The SENDIASS team emphasises to all the children, parents, young people and professionals they work with, that although engaged by the LA, the service does not participate in any of the decisions that are made by the LA, e.g. decisions regarding EHC Needs Assessments, issue of EHC Plans, school placements or level of support.
- Service staff and volunteers will also stress that they are unable to pass on any news regarding decisions as it is the responsibility of the allocated Case Worker in the SEN team to inform the family concerned. They will, however be able to offer support once the decision has been passed on.
- Parents will also be signposted to other organisations when appropriate, eg I.P.S.E.A., Contact a Family, SENDIST, and supportive local voluntary organisations.
- Service staff will be made aware of the implications of equal opportunities and endeavour to ensure that the Service is as accessible as possible to all parents.

We ensure that we act in an impartial way when dealing with parents, children and young people by

- informing all parents, children and young people of the impartial nature of SENDIASS, and advising them of this policy when they first approach the service.

- being clear with parents, children and young people that the role of SENDIASS is to help them participate in their/their child's education and advise them of their rights, not to advocate on their behalf or take sides with the Local Authority.
- empowering parents, children and young people to speak for themselves and make their own decisions, rather than pushing them towards a particular course of action.
- always respecting parents', children or young people's decisions without making a judgement, irrespective of our own views.
- providing factual information and advice based on what the guidance and legislation says, not offering our own opinions or reflecting local policy.

Ensuring the effectiveness of the policy

All SENDIASS Staff and volunteers receive a copy of the Impartiality policy and it is explained to them.

The policy is published on the Local Offer and our website and is shared with the Local Authority and other agencies.

To ensure the impartiality of the service is monitored objectively, a termly report of feedback from parents, children and young people will be summarised and presented to the Steering Group for review. The policy is reviewed annually.

If a situation arises where the service feels it cannot act impartially, it may be in the interest of the service user, with their consent, for their case to be passed on to an independent service from within the voluntary sector.

In exceptional circumstances the Assistant Director of Children's Services may be requested to find alternative arrangements for a case to be resolved.

November 2022

Review date June 2023

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2022