



**WOKINGHAM
SENDIASS**

Annual Report

October 2025

Our vision

Empowering children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and their parents to play an active role in decisions about them/their children by providing high quality information, advice and support in a way that is flexible and responsive and promotes resilience.

Our mission

To encourage everyone to work together to get the best possible outcomes for every child or young person with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

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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. SENDIASS 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.

The information, advice and support offered is firmly based in the law and the SEND Code of Practice. SENDIASS 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. This year we have continued to conduct many one-to-one meetings virtually. This has enabled us to increase our capacity in line with rising demand. We offer in-person meetings where necessary, for example, if parents or young people find it difficult to use telephones or technology.

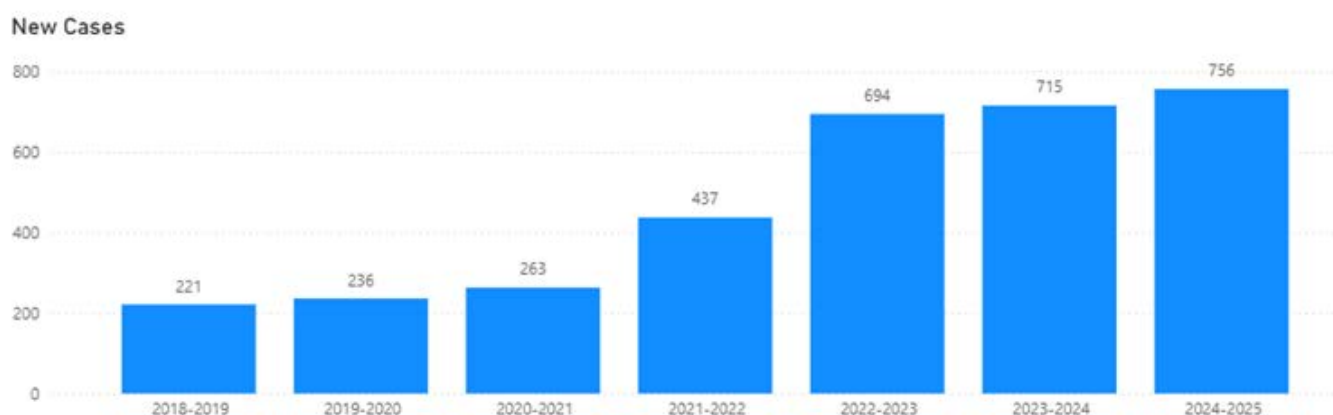
Currently the SENDIASS team is staffed by 2.9 FTE: a full-time manager, a Sendiass Officer 30 hours per week term time only (0.7 FTE) another officer working 25 hours per week term time only. (0.56 FTE). In addition, there is an assistant 25 hours per week term time only (0.56 FTE) as of 9th June 2025 on a fix term contract. there is currently 1 active volunteer who volunteers for one morning per week, helping with surveys and assisting with enquiries from parents.

We have permanently adopted a hybrid working arrangement, working partly from home and partly in the office according to the needs of the service/clients and personal preference. The office space can take a maximum of four workers at any one time but can also double as a meeting space for parents and young people.

Summary of Activity

August 31st, 2024 – 1st September 2025

Case Work



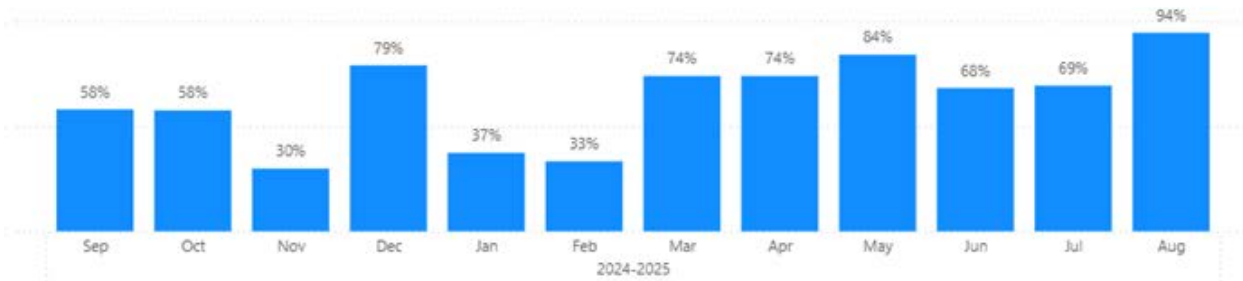
Demand for service

Demand for the service has seen an increase this year, with 756 new cases this academic year compared to 715 cases in the last academic year, an increase of 73% in the last four years. This comes on top of an increase in the previous academic year, demand for our service continues to grow each year this is reflective of the national picture.

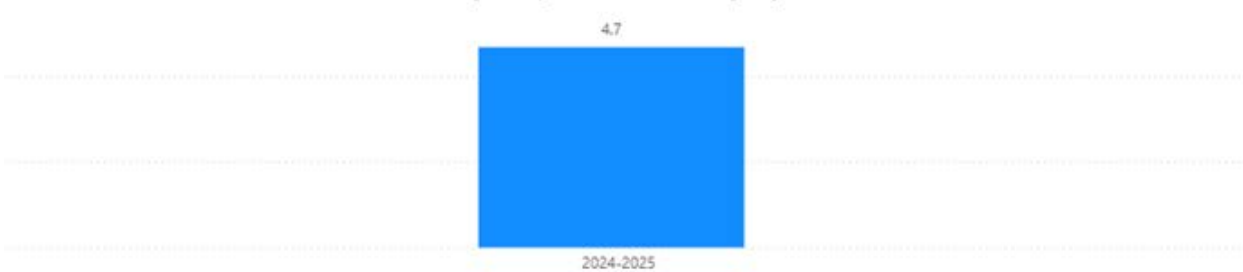
Responding to demand

Despite a rise in new referrals, the service has maintained a strong focus on providing clear, high-quality advice to families. The team has strengthened its offer by developing accessible guidance materials to support parents in completing key tasks—such as preparing EHC needs assessment requests, reviewing plans, and understanding mediation and tribunal processes. This approach has increased both the efficiency of the service and the confidence and independence of families, ensuring they are well-supported throughout the process.

% Referrals Contacted Within 5 Working Days



Average Response Time (Working Days)

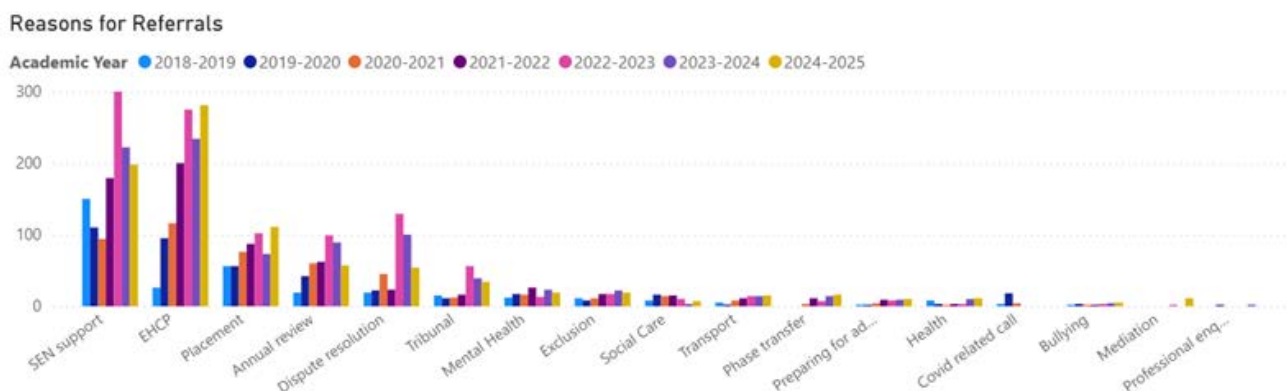


SENDIASS continue to ensure that cases are closed as soon as a piece of work is complete, rather than having some families who remain open to the service for extended periods of time. This enables us to record each piece of work that is done and will also enable us to gain feedback from users more effectively and hence to measure the impact of our involvement (see **Appendix 2** for service user satisfaction survey results). It also ensures that the team can focus on the current, pressing issues impacting families. Our outstanding actions have dramatically decreased.

There is a key performance indicator to respond to 80% of new enquiries within 5 working days. Response times this year have been 60%. This reflects a period of transition within the team, including temporary staffing changes due to secondments and acting-up arrangements over key holiday periods

This was changed from two working days early this year to come in line with other departments within the council, since the appointment of our Sendiass Assistant our response times have greatly improved.

Satisfaction with the response times is reflected in the surveys (see **Appendix 2**). The service user survey indicates that 44% of service users thought that SENDIASS were easy to get hold of (a decrease from 60% last year).



New referrals: reasons for requesting support

The chart below shows the reason for referral for all new referrals in the current year.

During our involvement the category of need may change, hence there are often several reasons for a referral.

A high level of work at SEN support level continues to relate to mental health, anxiety and Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Placement work remains a key area of focus, reflecting both local and national pressures on school places and the need to identify provision that best meets children's needs.

The numbers of cases for each of these types of work has increased in line with the number of case referrals.

Requests for support for dispute resolution and tribunal have remained like last year's figures.

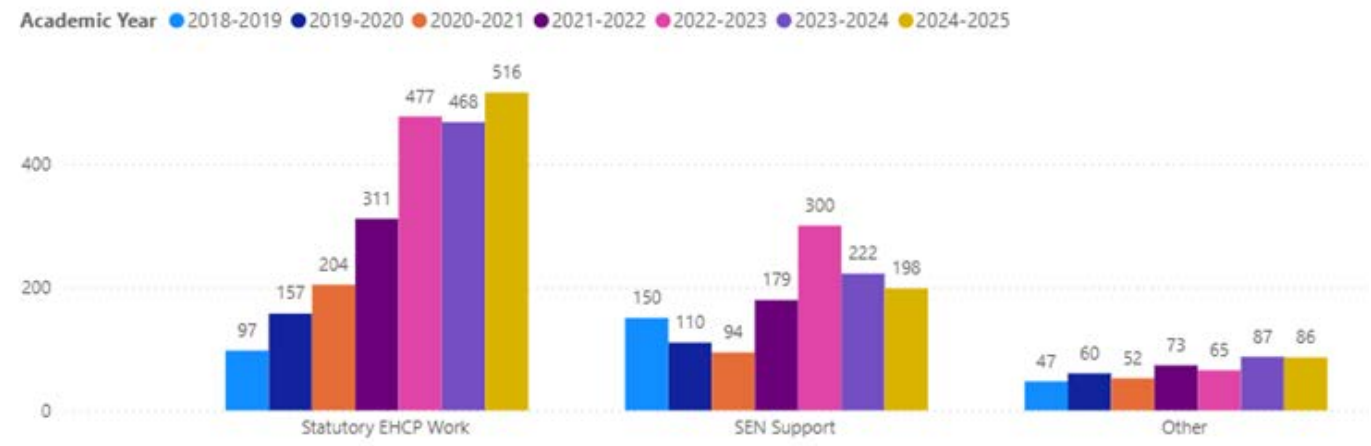
SENDIASS continue to offer effective support to families who wish to appeal decisions. The service has assisted in the preparation 34 tribunal cases. This resembles last year there have been 65 dispute resolution cases compared to 100 the previous year. The service always strives to bring about quick resolution without the need for costly tribunals. This is achieved by support at mediation meetings and assisting parents to provide clear evidence to support their requests, encouraging all parties to continue to work together to achieve resolution as quickly as possible. The high level of dispute resolution cases compared to tribunal indicates a significant level of success. This last academic year, SENDIASS have attended 2 hearings, and there are many more scheduled for the coming months.

The proportion of work around statutory issues (EHCPs, annual reviews, tribunals) and SEN support and other is shown in the chart below. Many new referrals are connected to statutory processes.

Reason for support: all cases during the year

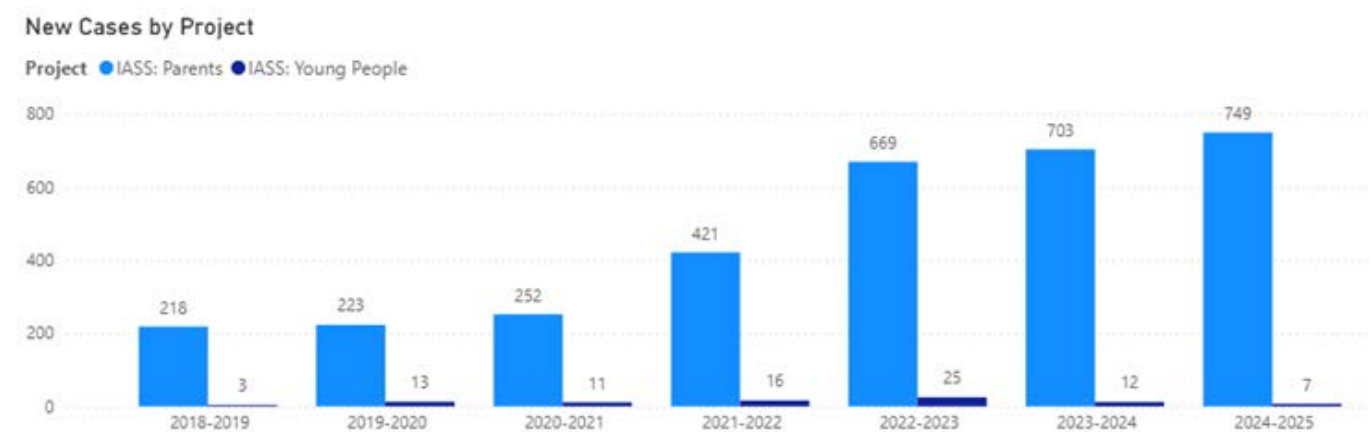
We have collected data on the types of work throughout the year, whether they are existing cases or new referrals, by measuring the number of contacts for each piece of work. The graph below demonstrates the significant time spent now on supporting parents and carers to navigate the tribunal and dispute resolution processes.

The proportion of work around statutory issues (EHCPs, annual reviews, tribunals) and SEN support and other for all cases is shown in the chart below. The statutory work is a larger proportion for all referrals (compared to new referrals) primarily because they tend to be cases that stay open for a longer period.



Providing Information, Advice and Support to Young People

SENDIASS continue to promote the service specifically for young people. It continues to be a challenge to increase the take-up of this service. All SENDIASS Officers consider how the voice of the child or young person can contribute to any cases where we are offering advice to the parents, particularly for those age 14 or over, and will discuss with the parents, and where possible, the young person, whether it is appropriate or desired that the 0-25 Coordinator supports the child separately. Children may struggle to engage due to their mental health or anxiety, or because they have already spoken to many professionals and are overwhelmed by the thought of speaking to another. For those who do engage with the service, the experience is positive. Seven young people have been supported this year. During a period of staffing transition, including secondments and temporary cover arrangements, the team has continued to offer support while refining the model to strengthen future capacity.



Further information about casework can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Training and Workshops

SENDIASS are required by the Service Level Agreement to offer at least 3 training sessions to parents and one training session to professionals each term.

For parents

SENDIASS continue to deliver training online for parents throughout the year, with SEND Voices Wokingham hosting on Zoom. The following courses are available: EHCPS; Annual reviews; Preparing for Adulthood; SEN Support and Effective Communication. At least 3-4 training sessions have been offered each term, but delivery depends on demand. This year 78 parents have attended our training. The aim of the training is to give parents the information they need to enable them to continue with minimal support from us, rather than addressing each individual need separately.

Those who have responded have been very happy with the courses. Parents indicated an improvement in their knowledge and confidence after attending training for each of the courses. Most were happy with accessing training via Zoom and we believe we do get better attendance via Zoom that we did with face-to-face training prior to the pandemic. Many attendees would recommend the training to other parents. We are currently gathering feedback from our parents training sessions via our hosts SEND Voices Wokingham.

For professionals

This year we have extended the training offer to include colleagues from schools. In total we have delivered training to 117 colleagues. Two courses are offered:

- **EHCP and Annual Reviews:** The purpose of this workshop is to give colleagues information about EHC Plans, when one is needed, how the application process works and how it is reviewed. By attending the session, they should have a greater understanding of the process and how they may be expected to participate. In addition, this greater understanding enables them to challenge other professionals who may be giving inaccurate information and hopefully prevents some queries to SENDIASS.



- **Understanding the Parent’s Perspective and Effective Communication:** This training aims to give attendees a better understanding of the emotions and stresses that a parent experiences to encourage deeper understanding and empathy. The training was devised in response to the many parents who tell us that they feel some professionals do not understand the difficulties they face. The course also includes some tips for effective communication (the same guidance given to parents).

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. SENDIASS have contributed regularly to the following groups:

- Local Offer
- Preparing for Adulthood
- Inclusion & Innovation Fund
- Helping Early Strategy
- SEND strategic Partnership board
- SEND Assurance Board

Reputation and awareness of the service

SENDIASS continue to collect data on user satisfaction in line with colleagues nationally (see **Appendix 2** for full results). The overall satisfaction rate for Wokingham SENDIASS is 33% down slightly from last year. This is an average of the positive responses across all 6 questions. 54% of people said that their child had benefited from Sendiass involvement. We have survey a lot fewer families this year due to capacity.

Service Development: Progress against 2025/26 Action Plan

Service development has been much more modest this year. Activity has focussed on increasing the efficiency of the service to manage rising demand. There were 5 main areas of focus:

Modify the method of service delivery

Demand continues to grow; resources have remained the same and will continue to be reviewed in the context of the wider developments to the SEND system.

Delivery of the service will continue to develop in response to ensure advice is given to as many parents as possible whilst ensuring those with the most complex problems and the highest need for assistance still get an appropriate level of support. The team have worked hard to encourage self-sufficiency to those parents who can advocate for themselves.

This can involve coaching parents prior to meetings, rather than attending, giving instructions on how to prepare paperwork, check plans, submit appeals, rather than assisting parents directly. This has been a challenge. Parental confidence, of those contacting the service is low currently and parents feel the pressure to get things right for their child. The current approach is for parents to try to complete tasks first and the Sendiass service offers to check what they have done and offer advice.

Revive the volunteer programme.

The volunteer programme has been a challenge to sustain. Our main source of volunteers is parents who have used the service. Many will show an interest but may be unable to proceed or must withdraw due to family commitments. There is a training commitment to ensure our volunteers can work appropriately with parents, we now have one volunteer who has been able to offer us one morning per week. They have been trained to assist with completing paperwork, EHCP applications, annual review paperwork) which can be time consuming but does not use much of the detailed knowledge that SENDIASS officers have. They have also answered phone calls, taking initial information from parents, and assisted with the satisfaction surveys. SENDIASS are very appreciative of the time our volunteers give.

Website and leaflet development:

The website has been moved to a new platform as part of the council wide website upgrade. To meet new accessibility standards, we were required to audit the readability of the pages. Most pages passed the readability criteria, but a few did not. It is likely this is due to the complexity of the content and increasing the readability would reduce the usefulness of the site.

The range of leaflets has been expanded to cover common areas of enquiry: how to complete an EHC Needs Assessment form, how to check an EHCP, guidance on mediation and tribunals. This will aid parents with tasks that we may want to coach them to do for themselves.

Service for young people:

SENDIASS have continued to encourage the inclusion of young people in decisions about their education, whether that is in our work with parents, schools or through our training. The 0-25 coordinator has visited Say Yes, the new SEND youth forum, twice once this year. The target has been a 20% increase in numbers. Unfortunately, due to this post being vacant for most of the academic year we haven't reached our target this year.

Future Demand and Challenges

Demand for the service continues to rise and is likely to continue we predict that the incidence of SEND will continue to rise, both in terms of those requiring SEN support and those requiring EHCPs. There are still a high number of children and young people presenting with anxiety and mental health difficulties, particularly with Emotional Based School Avoidance. Many families continue to face increased pressure, including from wider cost-of-living challenges, which can particularly affect families of children with SEND. We are working closely with partners to strengthen support for families' wellbeing, resilience and financial stability so they feel confident and well-supported

This rise in demand must also be put into the context of continued SEND financial pressures nationally, as well as a particular local pressure on school placements. These factors make it much more difficult to achieve an agreeable outcome for families of children with SEND as there are less choice and flexibility in the system. In turn, these pressures are likely to lead to more parents seeking support from SENDIASS to understand the issues and to challenge decisions.

Parents have continued to use SENDIASS as an independent source of advice and reassurance when navigating SEND processes.

SENDIASS continues to work collaboratively with the SEND team, sharing themes from parental feedback to support ongoing improvement.

Action Plan 2026/27

An action plan will be developed in response to the findings of this annual report and will be shared with relevant teams across Children’s Services and Partners, ensuring that key learning is embedded into future service design and commissioning decisions.

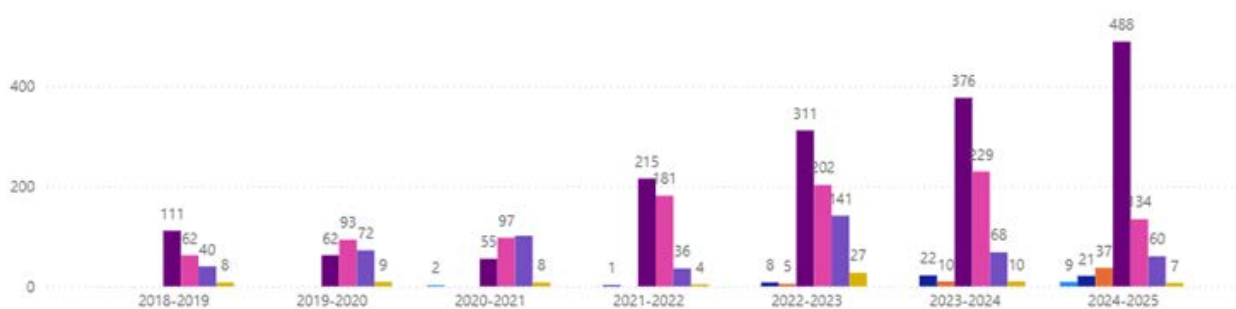
The SENDIASS Annual Report and accompanying action plan will be presented to both the SEND Assurance Board and the SEND Partnership Board, ensuring that key themes, trends and learning from the year are shared across the partnership. This creates a clear learning loop, enabling leaders to use insight from families’ experiences to inform service planning, system improvement and future commissioning intentions. In addition, the report will be discussed with the Commissioning Team as part of their regular meeting schedule to ensure that emerging themes directly inform commissioning priorities and strengthen the design and delivery of support across the local area.

Appendix 1: Further Analysis of Casework

The following analysis is based on new referrals received between 31st August 2024 and 1st September 2025, and comparison with previous years.

New Cases by Intervention Level

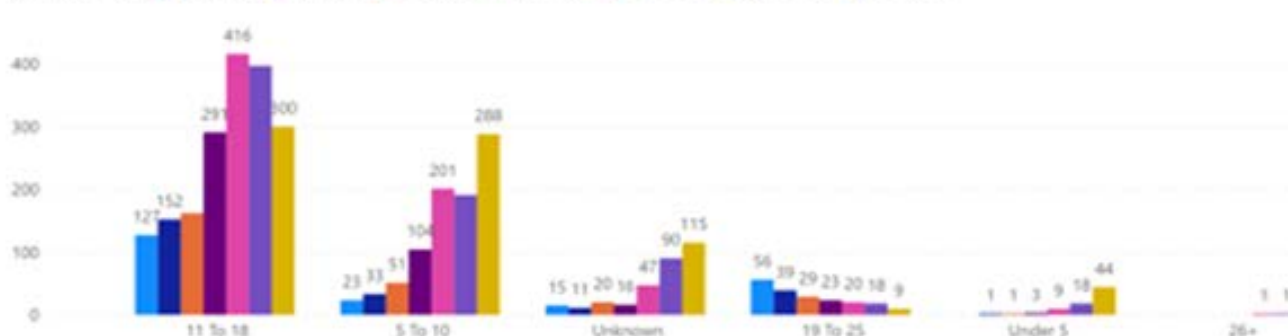
Template Stage ● Case note ● First Contact With Client ● Initial Referral ● Level 1 ● Level 2 ● Level 3 ● Level 4



Number of referrals by age of child

New Cases by Age

Academic Year ● 2018-2019 ● 2019-2020 ● 2020-2021 ● 2021-2022 ● 2022-2023 ● 2023-2024 ● 2024-2025

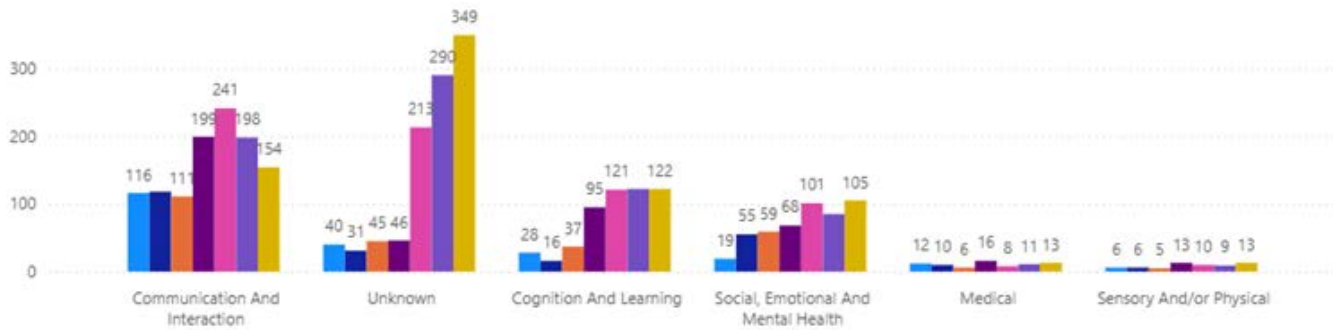


Most age ranges have seen a large increase in numbers of referrals. The majority of referrals are for children in the 5-10 and 11-18 brackets. The proportions of referrals in each age range remains broadly similar. This is comparable to Local Authority data: SEN support is highest in KS1 & 2 and there are high numbers of EHCPs in KS2 and 3, although there are also a large number of EHCPs in the post-16 age range. It is likely that the number of post-16 referrals to SENDIASS are not consistent with Local Authority data as many parents will have a much greater understanding of the processes by that stage and will not need support. The Local Authority has observed a rise in the incidence of children with SEND amongst under 5s, consistent with our referrals.

Number of referrals by disability

New Cases by Main Disability

Academic Year ● 2018-2019 ● 2019-2020 ● 2020-2021 ● 2021-2022 ● 2022-2023 ● 2023-2024 ● 2024-2025

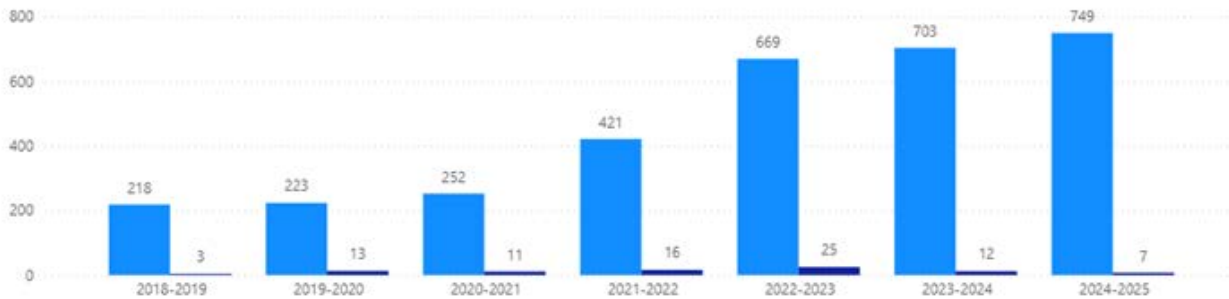


Children and young people with communication and interaction as their primary need continues to be the predominant group, followed by SEMH (social emotional and mental health) and cognition and learning. There are a higher number of unknowns this year, perhaps because of incomplete data, or because children do not fit into a clear category.

Referrals by person supported (parent/young person)

New Cases by Project

Project ● IASS: Parents ● IASS: Young People



The large majority of our work continues to be with parents. Increasing the number of young people supported continues to be a challenge.

Intervention levels

The table below shows the criteria for levels of interventions.

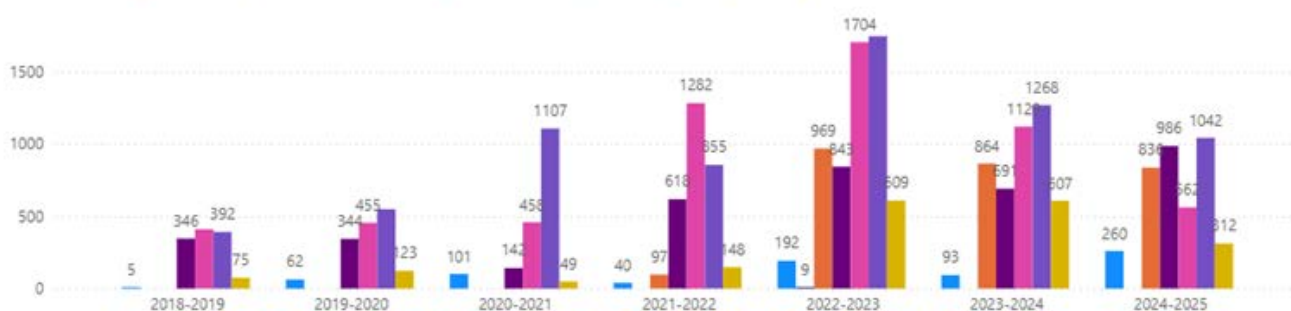
	Old definition	New definition
Level 1	Phone or email support – single intervention.	Information: single contact with the service for general advice on SEND issues via phone, email or drop-in.
Level 2	Phone or email support over a period of time. This may include support at a meeting, a home visit, or liaison with other agencies.	Advice: more detailed advice about the young person’s specific situation over a short period of time (4-8 weeks)
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.	Support: detailed advice and support over a period of time. Low Need / High Complexity or High Need / Low Complexity
Level 4	Intensive support during legal processes, eg. Tribunal.	Support: detailed advice and support over a period of time. High Need / High Complexity

The current proportions at each level for cases open at the end of the academic year, compared to last year is as follows:

The majority of cases are now at Level 3. Recent service developments and the new level descriptors aim to reduce the amount of support required for Levels 1 and 2 aiming to give advice to enable parents to resolve issues by themselves without the need for direct work from a SENDIASS Officer.

Number of Contacts by Intervention Level at Point of Contact

Project Status ● Case note ● First Contact With Client ● Initial Referral ● Level 1 ● Level 2 ● Level 3 ● Level 4



This allows more attention to be focussed on the more complex cases at Levels 3 and 4. There is currently a high number of parents requiring more long-term support. This is partly due to the rise in tribunal and dispute resolution work, but also due to what SENDIASS officers see as the lower resilience and confidence amongst parents currently.

Appendix 2: Parent Carer Survey 2024/25

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

- Target 75% satisfaction rates of those who responded we have achieved less than our target this is due in part to staff shortages this has then impacted on the service we could deliver.

Results

Average Score



I was so impressed with the advice and guidance given by SENDIASS

Answer 5 4 3 2 1



It was a great relief to have someone to talk to who was objective and gave clear advice

Yes/No Answer Yes No





WOKINGHAM SENDIASS