



Cheshire East
Information, Advice and Support
For SEND

Cheshire East Information, Advice and Support (CEIAS) Team

1st August 2019 - July 31st 2020

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

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Introduction

Cheshire East's Information Advice and Support (CEIAS) team provide a free impartial, confidential service giving advice and support about education, health and social care for young people and parents/carers of children who have special educational needs and disabilities. They aim to provide relevant information, advice and support to promote independence and empower those who contact the team. In addition, CEIAS provide support regarding the Local Authorities policies and procedures and practice in schools and other educational settings.

This 2020 annual report gives an overview of CEIAS; our key areas of work, our response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and developments going forward.

Background to the team

CEIAS is an in house funded IASS service, situated within the Children and Families (People) Directorate. Cheshire East is a large authority covering almost 450 square miles; the team aim to provide support across the whole authority.

The support CEIAS offers is based within the law and statutory guidance including the SEND Code of Practice 2015. Team members are impartial which means that they do not take sides; they aim to support all parties in achieving the best outcomes for children and young people.

The service is staffed by 3 CEIAS officers as detailed below:

1 x 36 hours (temporary increase in hours)

1 x 33 hours (temporary increase in hours)

1 x 10 hours (term time only)

In addition, there is support from a full-time business administrator support; this resource is shared with the Safeguarding Children in Education Settings (SCiES) team.

The current Manager of CEIAS also manages the SCiES team within the local authority.

Following the departure of a member of the team in September 2019, 2 members of the team have temporarily increased their hours to cover a proportion of those hours.

The timescale for the Recruitment of a stand-alone Manager was impacted by COVID; however, it is in progress, with an expected start date by the end of September 2020.

Contacts to the team

To ensure that calls are responded to efficiently, and to minimise the times that parents must leave a message, a rota is in place to ensure calls are answered directly. The only challenge to this is when staff are on leave or are unwell. To address this the business support team member will answer calls when required, between the hours of 9:30 and 4:30, inputting key information into the database so that officers have the relevant information they need to call back. It means that parents can speak to a person rather than the answer phone, this has proved to be working effectively.

During COVID-19 CEIAS have adjusted their working practice in line with Government and Health guidelines but have also worked hard to maintain the support they offer; for example, an office rota has been developed between the 3 caseworkers to ensure that the office is covered every day of the week. The person on duty, working remotely, calls in for messages left on our 24-hour answer machine, logs the calls and then decides on the response.

Regular updates and information are regularly shared on our Facebook page; a direct link to this is available from the tab on our website front page. Our Facebook page currently has 625 followers and parents report that it is useful for gaining up to date information.

The CEIAS website has continued to be developed with new fact sheets and information links in response to identified need. As a direct response to COVID-19 two new pages have been added; one for COVID-19 information and one for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Month	Number of users	Number of new users	Page views
August 2019	160	141	269
September 2019	274	256	586
October 2019	313	283	971
November 2019	272	256	799
December 2019	189	168	535
January 2020	330	304	1015
February 2020	391	362	1034
March 2020	323	294	928
April 2020	144	129	395
May 2020	431	418	821
June 2020	322	304	782
July 2020	275	253	769

Prior to COVID-19 CEIAS provided access to our service via 1:1 consultation sessions; this has increased our reach and, as a result, we have been able to meet the needs of some parents who previously struggled to get to us for support with complex paperwork and/or preparation for meetings such as mediation/EHCP and tribunal paperwork. The locality settings which we were using are in locations chosen to enhance our reach across the LA; their use has ensured that these 1:1 discussions take place in a conducive environment where the parents feel comfortable e.g. Children's Centre, Carer's Centre and local charities' premises.

Collaborative Working

In line with the IASSN minimum standards, the steering group has continued to meet, and information is routinely shared with them. The group includes representatives from health, communities, social care, early years, SEN and parent representatives. Records are kept and shared with all parties from these meetings.

The CEIAS team are working closely 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 like to see.

CEIAS officers are part of several SEN work streams in the Local Authority; contributing to policy and decision making; these include the Autism strategy group, EHC Timeliness and Quality Assurance work stream, Preparing for Adulthood and Communication and Engagement.

The team work closely with the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum. The CEIAS manager or a representative from the CEIAS service regularly attends and contributes to the PCF steering group.

CEIAS has regular attendance at SENCO network conferences on a termly basis and recently spoke about how schools could promote the service to parents/carers and young people through their websites and social media platforms.

CEIAS officers have attended various team meetings to share information about the support available from the CEIAS team; these have included the Cheshire East Family Service's team meeting, with Visyon (charity for children offering support and therapeutic interventions) also with the Early Years Team.

Specific links have been forged with Cheshire East's Connected Communities Team to discuss how to reach out to our migrant communities; leading to a joint action plan. We have taken advice from that team on how we can work together to support children and young people with SEND from these communities. As a result of this work

our knowledge and understanding has increased and it has helped us to identify some of the potential barriers to parents reaching out for support. We have created a factsheet on what some of those barriers might be and how we can work towards overcoming them; this is informing our own approach and will be shared with schools and the SEND team.

Engagement with young people

During this year CEIAS have continued to actively reach out to young people we have:

- Contacted Commissioned Short Break Providers and colleges and sent our information for them to share on social media platforms.
- Updated the information available for young people, on our website; consulting with them to inform these developments; asking what they think of the information available, and suggestions for improvement.
- Used our Face Book page to share updates and information; engaging with young people to gather feedback on how we can improve our Face Book page.
- Worked closely with charitable organisations that support our young people, Cheshire and Warrington Carers, Autism Inclusive in Crewe, Space 4 Autism in Macclesfield, Ruby's Fund in Congleton and the Welcome Café in Knutsford. Ensuring that we are available to listen to our young people and show them that we value their views. We also can demonstrate that we are on hand to provide easy to understand information as well as any explanations they need or to answer any questions posed by a young person.
- Created a factsheet for parents and a document created by young people for young people regarding their messages for people returning to school following COVID-19.
- Actively participated in and contributed to Preparing for Adulthood workstream meetings and working groups to plan events for our young people. Sadly, the large events that had been planned for spring of 2020 had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. These were going to take place in two localities across CE and were to be open to young people, parents, carers, schools and colleges. We have supported work on a "Preparing for Adulthood Transition Pack" and have increased people's awareness of it.
- Continued to work closely with different teams to explore ways of sharing information regarding 'Planning your Future'.

Early Years

In previous years the team have seen a trend of parents contacting us in the final months of the summer term, just before their child with SEND was due to transition from a pre-school setting to Primary school. There ensued a race against time for the parents, LA and settings to assess needs and secure appropriate special educational provision for when the child entered Reception class. This year we have actively raised the profile of CEIAS with teams involved with EYs within the LA; for instance, meeting with the Head of the Early Years Team and staff based in Children's Centres. In addition, we have targeted our 1:1 sessions in a local Children's Centre; this has extended our reach to more Early Years parents.

From an analysis of our data we can see that parents of pre-school children are contacting us at an earlier point, accessing information in a timely manner and gaining the knowledge and tools they require to engage in the assessment processes, work effectively with the professionals involved, and make informed choices about their child's education.

As a team we decided that we needed to ensure that all Early Years referrals are accurately captured in our data i.e. not just Pre-School children but the whole Early Years Foundation Stage age group. When re-visiting our data, we discovered that our Early Years figures have increased five-fold this year.

CEIAS work during Covid-19

During the Coronavirus pandemic the team have worked from home; this has been a challenging time for team members both personally and in relation to their working practices. Things which we had previously done could not happen in the way that they had happened; everything had to be re-looked at to ensure continuity of our support, advice and information.

The priority focus has, at all times, been to ensure that there is as little disruption as possible to the service that CEIAS provide to parents and young people. It is to the team's credit that they have made those adaptations and have continued to support parents and young people using a range of communication methods. Initially this was extremely difficult as all team members had IT equipment which did not allow for this to happen easily. Team members benefitted from having access to new technology including laptops and phones; it means that they are now in a much better position to take part in virtual meetings and communicate more effectively without the need to travel large distances.

In addition to responding to contacts during COVID-19 CEIAS have:

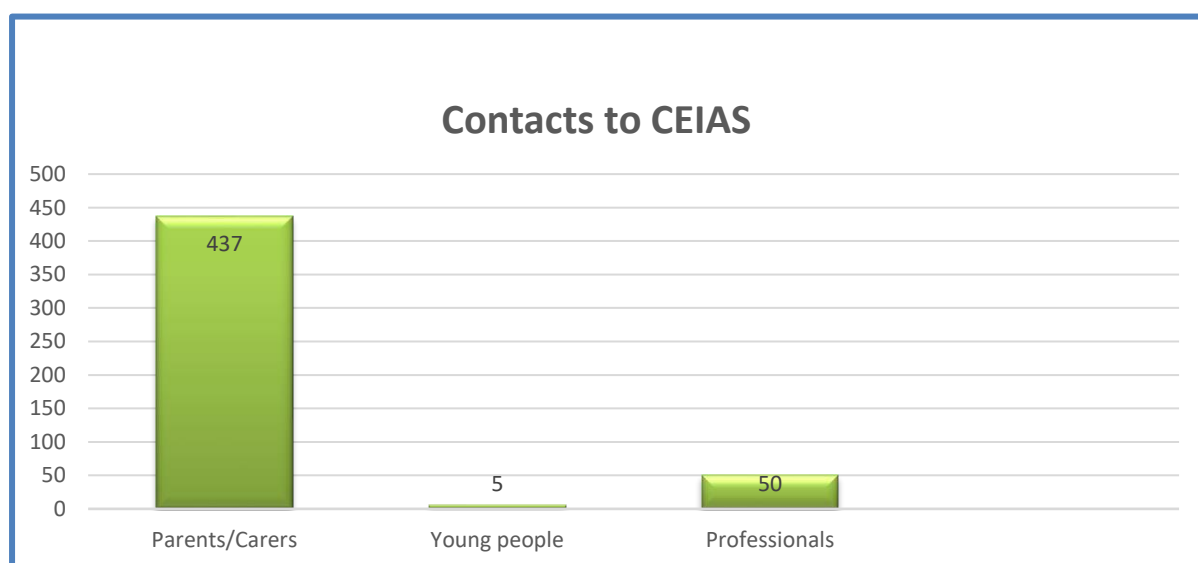
- Planned a range of workshops on SEN topics for the future.
- Kept the website updated and written new information leaflets specifically to support parents and carers through COVID.
- Carried out weekly online team meetings to provide support and plan work.
- Contributed to SEN virtual Work stream meetings with the LA.
- Supported parents in virtual Annual Review meetings and mediation meetings.
- Collated feedback from parents and young people who have had support.
- Ensured that we have kept up to date with all developments so that we can advise parents accordingly; both developments locally and nationally.
- Written induction guides to inform new team members of internal processes and procedures.

Quantitative Data

During the reporting period 1st August 2019 –31st July 2020 there have been 491 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. The data shows we have had 437 parent/carers, 50 professionals and 5 young people.

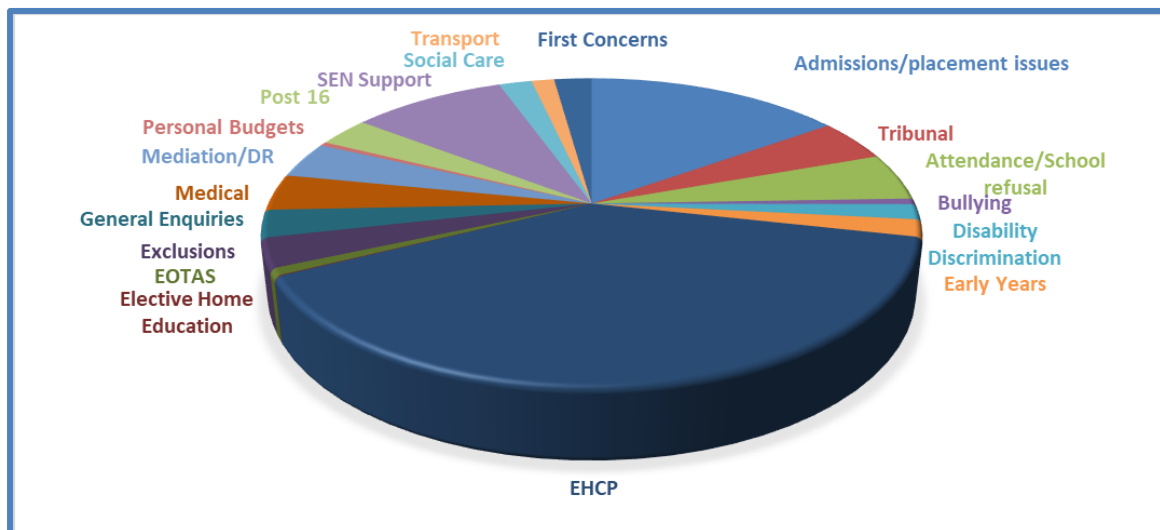
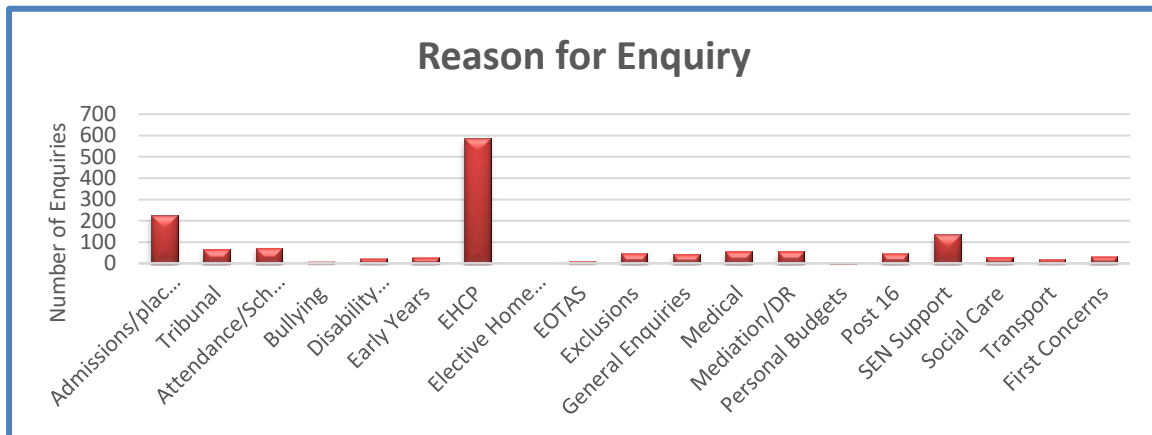
This figures for this year show a significant decrease on the 2018/19 figures which recorded 666 callers; this is most likely due to the impact of the Coronavirus lockdown.

The actual number of contacts to CEIAS in this date range is 1,496; this includes the first referral contact and any subsequent contacts during that period.

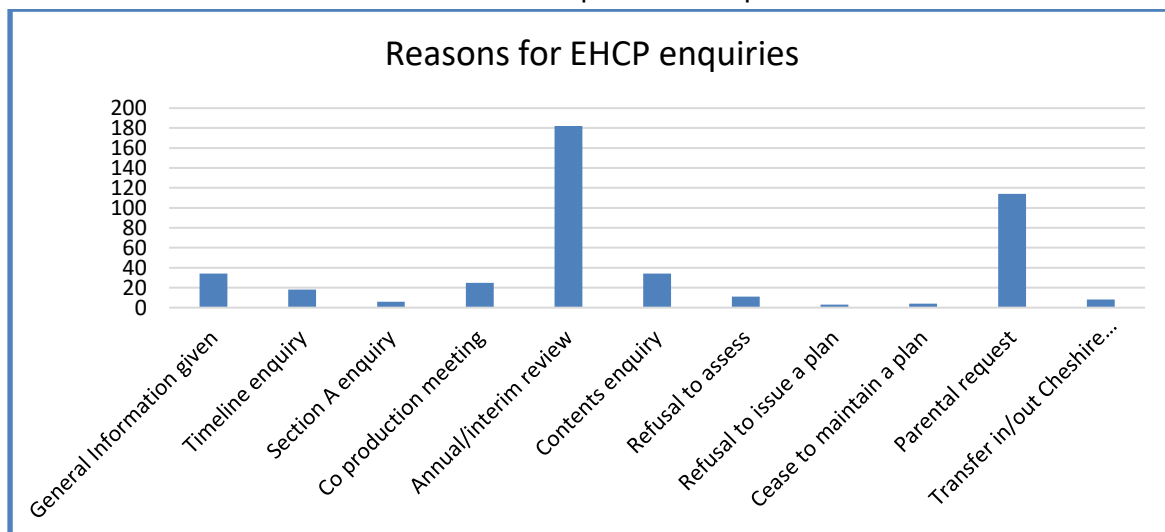


Contacts by area of Enquiry

Our data shows that the main areas of enquiry remain EHCP and SEN support; there has been an increase in the enquiries regarding placement/ admissions. The lowest categories remain Elective Home Education (EHE), bullying and personal budgets.



A further breakdown of the EHCP category shows that the main enquiries to the CEIAS service were around annual reviews and parental requests for EHCP.



The data collected and collated by the team does not include all the information around their work e.g. the number of returned and subsequent calls/contacts, one off calls/contacts which have led to signposting or the answer to a specific question but no further involvement. These calls are not recorded on the database as we do not wish to keep personal data where we do not need to.

Feedback on the work of the CEIAS Team

The CEIAS team, over the past year and a half have held weekly bookable sessions across the Local Authority at a range of venues; below is some of the feedback gathered from parents/carers who have attended one of those individual sessions with a member of the CEIAS team:

- It is useful to have 4 different venues across the LA and one taking place each week.
- It was a helpful session in a friendly environment; good to meet a CEIAS advisor face to face.
- I was nervous but the CEIAS advisor put me at ease; then, afterwards, I was introduced to a parent support group where I found it helpful to speak with other parents. I would never have attended this before as I would be nervous.
- The range of resources the advisor brought along was useful to take away and read.
- As the meeting in school was short notice and CEIAS were unable to attend, I went to the bookable session and the advisor helped me to prepare; I felt much more confident.
- The sessions are great as they are in venues where we can access other sources of support.
- It was helpful to have a booked time so that I didn't feel rushed, the CEIAS advisor was extremely helpful and helped me to understand the EHCP paperwork.

Feedback from one of the venues was as follows: SPACE for Autism said that the sessions we held there were helpful to parents as it also gets parents to access their services as well where they would not normally access on their own, hence being able to offer additional information.

Below are some of the comments that have been gathered from parents and young people who the service has supported:

I like the CEIAS website, but I think it should contain more videos and pictures.

I have put up a poster in my college about CEIAS

It was good to prepare for my College annual review in a virtual meeting with a CEIAS advisor, she explained things well.

Feedback from Young People

It was good to discuss my options with CEIAS as I dropped out of College and I live on my own, so I found it helpful. she understood



I know what the service offers to young people, but my Mum usually fills in the forms.

Quick to respond to requests, very knowledgeable and professional

I am partially sighted, so it was so helpful when CEIAS helped with form filling.

Very Friendly and helpful service, I have already recommended to a friend.

I would not have progressed as far as I have if it wasn't for their support



Feedback from Parents

I felt alone and bullied, CEIAS changed this for me, Thank you

The service is vital for parents who feel they are desperate, I can't praise them enough

Staff Development

All members of the team have regular supervisions with the manager, and they have annual personal development plans where personal goals and achievements are planned, reviewed and celebrated. Regular team meetings take place to discuss service planning and provide the opportunity to discuss concerns and issues.

CEIAS officers have successfully completed levels 1-3 of IPSEA SEN Advisors legal training and have also engaged in training that has become available through the North West regional group as well as wider national SEN training providers.

In addition, members of the team have attended the following; some as a team and others as individuals:

- Safeguarding training
- Signs of Safety training
- Education and Skills development days
- Conflict Management training
- Motivational Interviewing training (2 day training)
- Factual recording of information (attended by 1 team member)
- Children and Families conference (Local Authority)
- Online Mental Health and Psychology training from the University of Liverpool
- Protecting and managing information online training (PAMI)
- Online tribunal training from SEN Expert Claire Jackson.

Engagement with North West Consortium and National IASSN

Cheshire East has ensured continued engagement with the North West regional group and maintains its membership.

Engagement with this group provides the officers with an opportunity to discuss issues affecting services and to share ideas and information; they have found this group to be a vital source of support. There is also the opportunity to develop training that can be extended to each other's services. A member of the CEIAS team attended the North West group residential meeting in Lancaster held in March 2020, again, an excellent opportunity to liaise with others and to share information and developments.

CEIAS engage with the national IAS service including regular updates information on the work of the team, service user feedback and case studies as well as contributing to National SENDIASS surveys.

Future Developments

Due to the current Covid -19 situation, the team will continue to work from home for the majority of activities. With the updated technology we will continue to support parents and young people effectively through virtual meetings as well as continued daily email and telephone support.

We are creating a diary of workshops for delivery over the course of the year; these will either be face to face or we will deliver these virtually. The importance of early assessment and identification of SEN is clear in the Code of practice and will remain a focus for our team, with an Early Years Workshop during 2020-2021.

Our bookable face to face consultations have been a great success; until teams return to working face to face these will be arranged to take place virtually.

We plan to continue having regular consultations with our young people, to discuss the leaflets we produce for them; taking on board their views and suggestions, we will be guided by them in any redesign; this will allow us to continue identifying what appeals best to them and also any additional leaflets which they have said are needed.

When the new Manager takes up their post they will get out and about meeting with teams, groups and individuals listening to your views and incorporating ideas into CEIAS forward plans.

We hope that you find this Annual Report helpful, thank you for all your support during a particularly challenging year.