Cheshire East Information, Advice and Support Service (CEIAS)

Annual Report

1st August 2025-31st July 2026

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 service which operates at arms-length from the local authority. CEIAS is a statutory service which provides free impartial, confidential, and accurate information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people 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 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.

Minimum Standards for SENDIAS services

The service operates during normal office hours and throughout the year, including school holidays. The helpline has a voicemail facility, and the service regularly sign posts and provides information about a range of local and national SEND organisations. Support is provided to families in various ways: by telephone, email, virtual bookable individual sessions and attendance at virtual multi agency meetings with schools and other professionals. The service has a stand-alone website and provides a range of information leaflets, animations and links to other relevant SEND services. CEIAS also have an active Facebook page for sharing information around SEND, the Facebook page can be accessed directly via a link on our website.

Facebook – average views per **28** days – **8,123**. Followers – **1,979**

EHCP Data in Cheshire East

Presently, there are **5,683** EHCPs supported by Cheshire East Local Authority. **4,326** of those are educated (school, college, nursery, training etc) within Cheshire East and **987** children educated outside of Cheshire East. Approximately **370** children have no setting, are electively home educated or receive online/ alternative provision.

CEIAS Staffing

The service is currently staffed by:

Case workers:

1 x 36 hours

1x 35 hours

1 x 8 hours term time only.

The service has been without a direct manager since December 2023 and does not have access to business support.

What we have done this reporting period

- A member of the team has held monthly face to face bookable slots at the SEND hub helping parents with more complex enquiries/ helping with paperwork and general advice and support, these are one-hour slots. There has been positive feedback from both families and professionals at the SEND hub and bookings have been consistent throughout the year, averaging at three or four families per session. We have been able to offer support to over 30 families.

- Partner working with the family service workers at the SEND family hub.
- Regular meetings with SEND front door team to help with any enquiries that need information from the team.
- Meeting with the SEN heads of service to discuss regular themes that we are seeing in the enquiries that come into the team also to strengthen positive working together.
- Regular attendance at the Cheshire East Parent Carer forum meetings and face to face attendance at parent carer forum engagement groups.
- Regular engagement with the Northwest SENDIASS consortium group, attending meetings and accessing training opportunities.
- CEIAS held a joint evening Q and A event with a local charitable organisation for parents / carers of children with SEND, this was to offer advice to parents who are unable to attend daytime events.
- Attendance at school SEND coffee mornings and school SEND engagement sessions.
- The website has been updated and there has been the addition of animations to provide visual information on a range of topics relating to SEND.

Personal development

- All team members complete ongoing mandatory training that is delivered through the local authority.
- Team members have attended Tribunal training delivered remotely from SENETA.
- Team members have attended refresher training delivered by IPSEA.
- IASSN Legal Training- Implementation and the Law.
- CYP Voices on Racism training seminar.
- EOTAS Policy briefing Webinar.
- SEND reforms (white paper) briefing delivered face to face by the Council for Disabled Children in Manchester.
- Vicarious trauma training delivered Council for Disabled Children.

Feedback

Feedback is collected regularly and is submitted to our National IAS service to gain a picture of national feedback across the country from all IAS services. This is done by asking a set of 6 questions developed from the national SENDIAS service. Feedback is also gathered from email sent to us by families that we support, some of these comments have been captured below.

- "You have been really helpful in the advice you gave; it is always the same whichever member of the team I speak to"

- "Thank you again for your help so far. You have been very supportive with following things up for us with the local Authority"
- "Thank you for getting back to me so quickly I was not expecting such a fast response"

- "I appreciate the support you gave to the family during the mediation meeting; it really did make a difference; you remained professional and impartial throughout" (School SENDco)

- "I felt so lost and frustrated with the system and didn't know where to turn. You helped me to navigate my way through many problems and overcome issues, communication with the LA was easier when you attended meetings"

- "The advice you gave was excellent and fair to both sides, your patience and compassion was amazing"

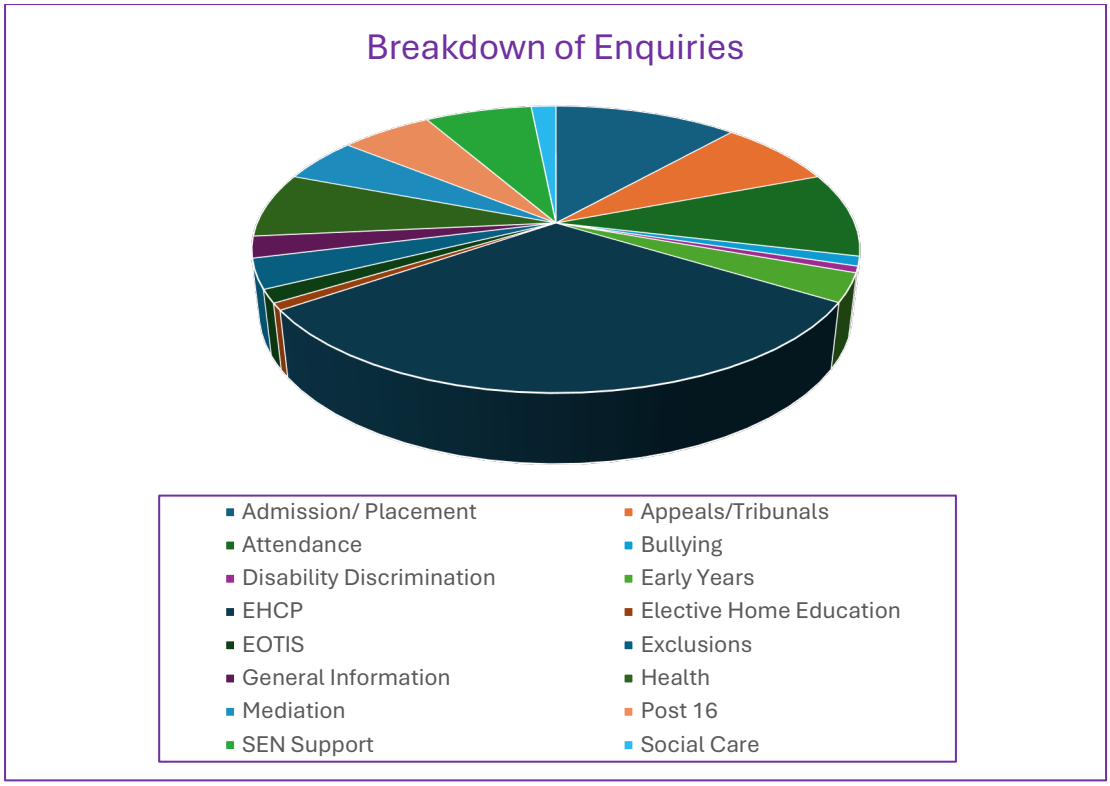
- It made a difference having you there to support the parent today, they now know where to go for advice and support going forward" (Early Help Family service worker)

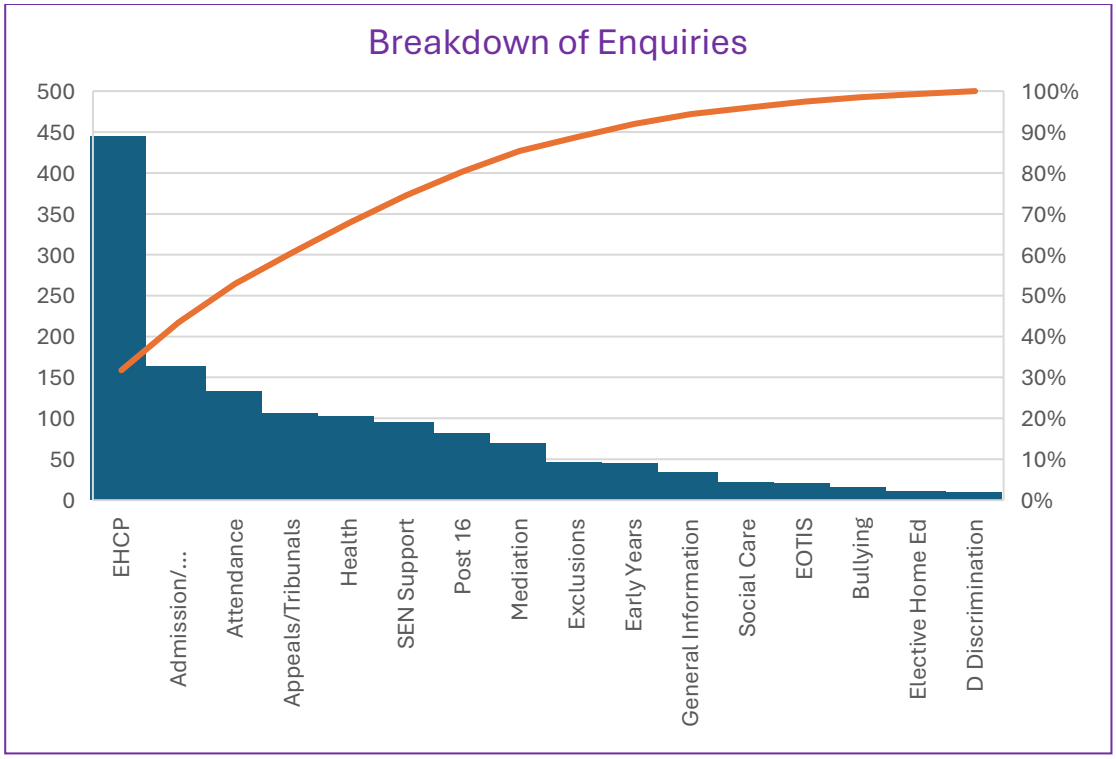
Meeting Support

CEIAS have supported families at **237** virtual Multi Agency meetings in this period, this is similar to last years recorded figures. We have continued to be able to offer more support at meetings and meeting preparation due to primarily working remotely via Teams, the feedback from parents has been very positive. We have also held **129** 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 **51** parents regarding mediation this has increased significantly from last year's figure of **20**. CEIAS spend time helping to prepare parents for mediation and attend preparation calls with the mediation service prior to the mediation taking place. CEIAS have supported **106** parents regarding appeals to the Tribunal, this has involved various levels of support. CEIAS have supported **30** families at 1:1 face to face sessions at the SEND Family Hub. During the reporting period 1st August 2023– 31st July 2024 there have been **3,581** 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. There have also been an additional **75** enquiries from professionals requiring information or advice.

Breakdown of enquiries

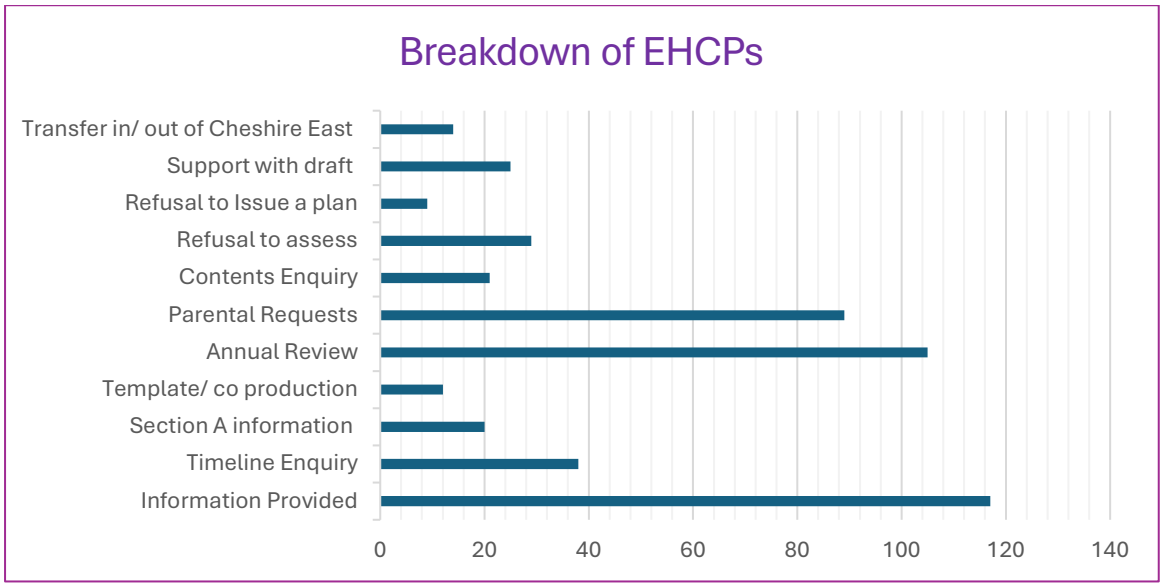
Breakdown of service users contacting the CEIAS Service: most enquiries are from parent/ carers, professionals contacting the service include social workers, family support, NHS professionals, SEND keyworkers, charitable organisations and other local authority teams. The main area of enquiries this reporting period is EHCP along with school placement enquiries/ children out of school. There has been a significant increase from the last reporting period in requests for mediation support and appeals/ tribunal support, although due to capacity we have been unable to support at tribunal but have helped parents to prepare including supporting with paperwork and reading through relevant paperwork and supporting with timeliness of cases. CEIAS have attended **51** mediations this period (last year we attended **20**), due to capacity within the team we cannot support at all the mediations that we are requested to.


Breakdown of Enquiries
Admission/ Placement
Appeals/Tribunals
Attendance
Bullying
Disability Discrimination
Early Years
EHCP
Elective Home Education
EOTIS
Exclusions
General Information
Health
Mediation
Post 16
SEN Support
Social Care


Breakdown of Enquiries
500
450
400
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
EHCP
Admission/...
Attendance
Appeals/Tribunals
Health
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Bullying
Elective Home Ed
D Discrimination

Breakdown of EHCPs

EHCP advice has been the main area for enquiries this period; this has been broken down into the type of advice that has been requested. The main area of enquiry for EHCPs were general information followed by parental requests for EHC needs assessments and advice and support around annual reviews.



Future planning

The team aim to provide 1:1 face to face sessions at an agreed venue as this has found to be very positive for families.

The team will attend SEND coffee mornings at settings to speak with parents and explain the team's role.

The team will plan some joint sessions with the Cheshire East parent Carer Forum including Q and A sessions for parents.

Ensure the website information is up to date and to add any further relevant information.

Capacity within the team continues to be a barrier to plan/ arrange and deliver events so joint events with other services are helpful during this time.

The team will continue to attend local and national training events to ensure the team are kept up to date with current legislation.

CEIAS will continue to work together with other LA Teams and charitable organisations and parent/carer support groups to ensure that we can offer positive support for our parents, carers and young people.

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