



**Cheshire East Information, Advice and Support for SEND**

**Cheshire East Information, Advice and Support  
(CEIAS) Team**

**1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 - July 31st 2021**

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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## Contents

Introduction.....	
Background to the team.....	
Contacts to the team.....	
Collaborative Working.....	
Engagement with young people .....	
Early Years .....	
Quantitative Data .....	
Feedback on the work of the team .....	
Staff Development .....	
Engagement with North West Consortium and National IASSN .....	
Future Developments.....	
Workshops.....	

## 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 2021 annual report gives an overview of CEIAS: our key areas of work, our continuing response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and developments for the service going forward in 2021-2022.

## 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 provides support across the whole authority. There are currently 3,166 EHCP's in Cheshire East which is a significant increase on last year's figure of 2,598, a breakdown in age groups is below:

**Under 5 – 119**

**Age 5- 16 - 2,247**

**Age 16-19 -605**

**Age 19-25 – 195**

The figures for those children receiving SEN support in Cheshire East settings is 5072, as of January 2021.

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 case work officers and one PT manager as detailed below:

1 x Manager 22 hours

1 x 36 hours (Permanent)

1 x 33 hours (permanent)

1 x 10 hours (term time only)

A new manager (Part time) was appointed in October 2020 in compliance with the SENDIASS National minimum standards.

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

### Contacts to Team

As the team are continuing to work from home following the guidelines, nationally and from Cheshire East, a rota continues to be in place so that the office is covered each day of the week. The 24-hour answer machine and email states enquiries will be responded to within 5 working days; however, all calls over the reporting period have been responded to within 1-3 days. Working remotely and minimising time spent travelling has enabled the team to work more efficiently and utilize their time more effectively.

From February 2021 the team have started bookable virtual slots to their calendar which are available for parents to book on to with an advisor on a weekly basis. These are for parents that need a longer discussion, these have taken place by Microsoft Teams or by telephone. Parent feedback on these sessions have been very positive, some parents have been unable to access Teams due to limited technology so in this case meetings have taken place over the phone. From February we have had 27 parents utilizing these bookable slots which has enabled the team to discuss, support and empower parents who have been navigating lengthy, complex situations. The slots have provided an efficient use of time and capacity within the team.

Regular updates and information are shared daily on our Facebook page; a direct link to this is available from the tab on our website front page. Our Facebook page currently has 833 followers, this is an increase of 208 from last year. Parents report that it is useful for gaining up to date information relating to SEND. A recent post had the highest views which were 3,998, this was a good news story about the journey of a child who at age 5 was non-verbal who has, with the right support in place they have gone on to gain a first-class honours degree with teacher status.

Attendance at the Communication and Engagement Workstream enable us to develop links with the Cheshire East Communication and Engagement team which provides opportunities to share the most recent information in relation to SEND for parents and young people. The CEIAS website has continued to be developed with updated information links in response to identified need.

The team have adapted to the new technology and alternative ways of working, staff have successfully attended virtual meetings over the last reporting year including: SEN support meetings, Annual reviews, Mediation, Governors Exclusion panel meetings, school complaints and Early help assessment meetings. Team members have been able to be more flexible in terms of the geographical areas that they would normally support as meetings have been virtual. This has enabled team members to support in schools that they would not normally due to geographical elements and the team have been able to attend more meetings due to not having to spend time travelling throughout the borough.

We have compared the data from previous years regarding the number of meetings we have attended:

- August 2019 – July 2020 – 95 multi-agency meetings
- August 2020 -July 2021 – 147 multi-agency meetings

We are aware this number is much higher as our current data identifies just Multi-agency meetings. As we move forward into our next reporting year, we plan to amend this as identified in future developments for CEIAS.

We found this information not unsurprising due to the Covid-19 pandemic. CEIAS have ensured they have continued to provide the support required to families, carers, and young people to empower each individual and provide the relevant support when required.

There have been challenges in terms of getting used to new technology for the team and some parents have reported to us they have struggled as for some the only way of accessing these meetings has been on their mobile device which has proved challenging. The CEIAS team have offered possible solutions to families which has improved this issue for them. One example of this is the suggestion to use a Local charity service to access their facilities which made access to meetings much more efficient.

The table below shows the views to the CEIAS website which parents' feedback as being very helpful as well as the direct links on the landing page to the Local Offer, Facebook, IPSEA and Contact. Throughout the pandemic the team have ensured the CEIAS website has been updated with relevant and key information, so parents are informed of any changes and the latest information available.

Month	Number of users	Page views
August 2020	137	313
September 2020	168	505
October 2020	168	534
November 2020	125	303
December 2020	89	191
January 2021	137	354
February 2021	106	315
March 2021	179	431
April 2021	131	328
May 2021	176	423
June 2021	203	461
July 2021	120	308

The CEIAS service also has a significant number of professionals who contact the service to gain advice or information, current numbers of professionals for the reporting period are 55.

In this reporting year we have had 28 contacts that we have signposted to other services, all of these were not related to SEN and were appropriately re directed efficiently.

### Collaborative Working

In line with the IASSN minimum standards, the steering group has continued to meet, during this time these meetings have taken place virtually. 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.

CEIAS continue to engage 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 find useful to them. CEIAS have recently been invited to attend regular SEND youth forum sessions where direct work with young people and shared information will be made available including our short CEIAS presentation and young person questionnaire.

CEIAS are part of several SEN work streams in the Local Authority; contributing to policy and decision making; these include EHC Timeliness and Quality Assurance work stream, Preparing for Adulthood strategy implementation group and the Communication and Engagement work stream. During group discussions and development sessions we have:

- Highlighted areas of policies and processes that need reviewing or amending, for example the SEND communication promise
- Fed directly into each workstream what parents have felt has worked well and not so well so this can be shared with colleagues to inform future practice
- Impressed upon the importance of the Preparing for adulthood packs for parents and carers and the accessibility of these packs.

The team work directly with the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum (PCF). The CEIAS manager or a representative from the CEIAS service regularly attends and contributes to the PCF steering group and CEIAS and the PCF have monthly meetings to discuss any common themes, concerns, and future possibilities to provide information to families when required. CEIAS attended a virtual coffee morning presented by the PCF. This was recorded so it was accessible for all and questions had been gathered for all representatives to answer. 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 as well as attending monthly meetings with the co-chairs of the PCF to discuss opportunities for collaborative working, key themes and concerns parents have raised and ensuring every opportunity is shared to maximise the support available to parents and carers within Cheshire East. CEIAS have attended virtual coffee mornings presented by the PCF that were recorded so they could be shared with a wider audience.

CEIAS have hosted virtual coffee mornings for parents and attended other services coffee mornings with guests including the Cheshire East Autism Team and Cheshire and Warrington

Carers Trust and have further sessions planned with the Educational Psychology Team and Preparing for Adulthood Team. The feedback from this session was positive and CEIAS were thanked by parents for the information they could use to resolve issues they had raised.

CEIAS have met with the SEND lead of the Early years team to arrange further opportunities to work together through the coming year and the CEIAS short presentation was shared with the team so they can share this information with families they are supporting. A joint teams meeting has been arranged to discuss future opportunities as we have identified an increase in referrals regarding early years.

The CEIAS manager has regularly attended the SEND managers meetings to report any key themes and concerns from the data available. This is used to inform future decisions and highlight areas that may require amendments which ultimately can improve the service to families within Cheshire East. This provides a great opportunity to provide examples of working well collaboratively and finding a solution, sharing good working practice and finding practical solutions for challenging situations.

The SEND Ofsted re-visit took place in March where CEIAS took part in a session with the chief inspector to share parental perspective on SEND developments.

### [Engagement with Young People / Preparing for Adulthood](#)

All members of CEIAS have continued to liaise closely together as a Team to ensure that our Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) work has carried on successfully throughout the Pandemic.

Team members have completed Local Authority online training around PFA.

Two members of the Team are designated leads on this work. Although regular feedback and Team discussions take place. This means that we are all updated and can support each other when necessary.

We attend the PFA Workstream meetings and are now moving forward by also attending an Implementation Group for PFA subgroup. This group is going to be focusing closely on PFA Annual Reviews and EHCP's with consultation with our parents, carers, and young people.



This group has recently begun, and so further developments will be reported in our next annual report.

The Team have been involved with discussing and contributing towards the Cheshire East Preparing for Adulthood Strategy in 2021. We have provided constructive feedback and we are involved in plans to ensure the effective use of the Strategy so best outcomes can be reached for the young people.

CEIAS have been involved in discussions around PFA Packs that have been produced. Due to Covid these packs have not been able to be distributed physically. We have supported parents and professionals in disseminating the information electronically as well as offering other resources that will benefit and support the PFA Process.

We have sent out Questions to Young People asking them for their views on our service. We have shared the questions with short break providers, youth forums, schools, charities, and colleagues. We have produced a small power point introducing and explaining the role of the Team which has also been shared to encourage engagement with young people and ensure they are aware of our service. We hope to pull all this information together and ensure that it is acted upon and discussed at the PFA workstreams to inform good practice.

As a Team, we are very aware of the need for collaborative working to continue in this area.

### Early Years

CEIAS have attended information sessions with local charities such as Ruby's Fund as the Covid restrictions have eased, unfortunately, the constraints of working within the Covid guidelines have meant that our face-to-face outreach to Early Years Parents has had to be put on hold and we have focussed on virtual alternatives.

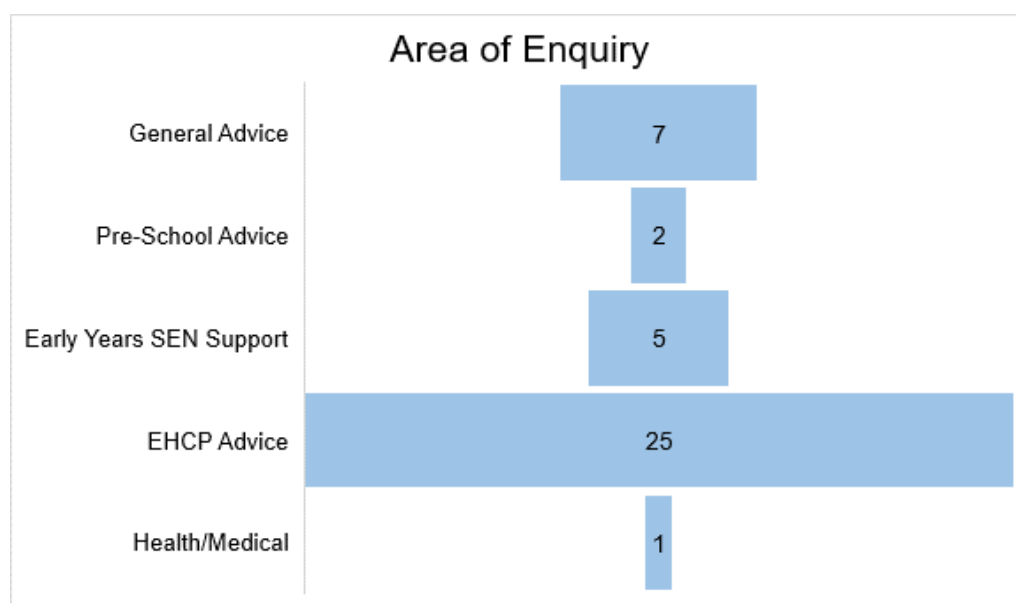
From an analysis of our data, we can see that parents of pre-school children are continuing to contact us at an earlier point, accessing information in a timely manner and gaining the knowledge and tools they require to engage in the assessment processes, work effectively with the professionals involved,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

We have been contacted by several parents whose children in Early Years had not had their EHCPs reviewed in readiness for the phase transfers to primary school and we were able to

offer information, advice, and support swiftly and effectively to enable the parents to remedy the situation.

The numbers of Early Years parents and professionals working with Early Years parents who have contacted CEIAS have increased again this year, last year's figures were 23 new enquiries, and the previous year was 13 enquiries.

CEIAS have shared our short presentation with new SENCOs at the Early years training session.

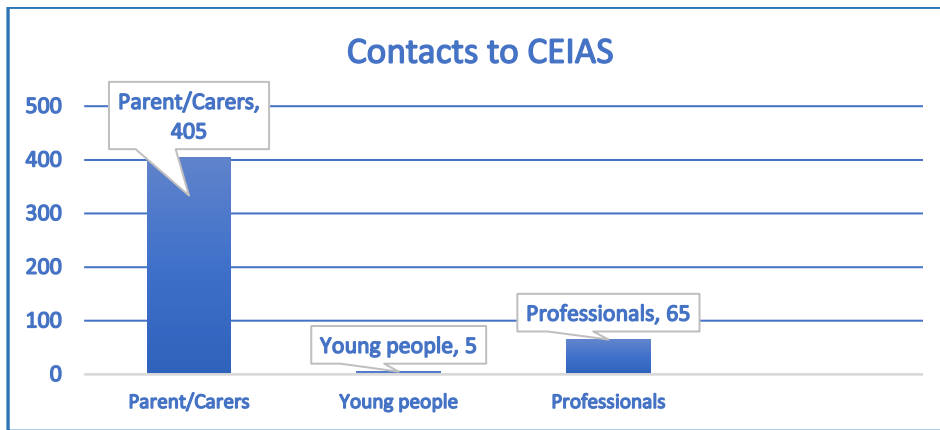


CEIAS have received 23 new contacts during this reporting period whereas the overall total of Early years enquiries is 40.

### Quantitative Data

During the reporting period 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021 there have been 459 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 405 parent/carers, 51 professionals and 3 young people.

This is not significantly different to last year where we recorded 491 enquiries however we believe the drop in new enquiries is the result of schools being closed through lockdown.



The figures may appear different to the contacts recorded, this is due to a classification code being added to each enquiry so that we can capture the reasons for the enquiry, each enquiry can have more than one classification code, further enquiries from the same parent may mean further classification codes are added if the call is for a different reason.

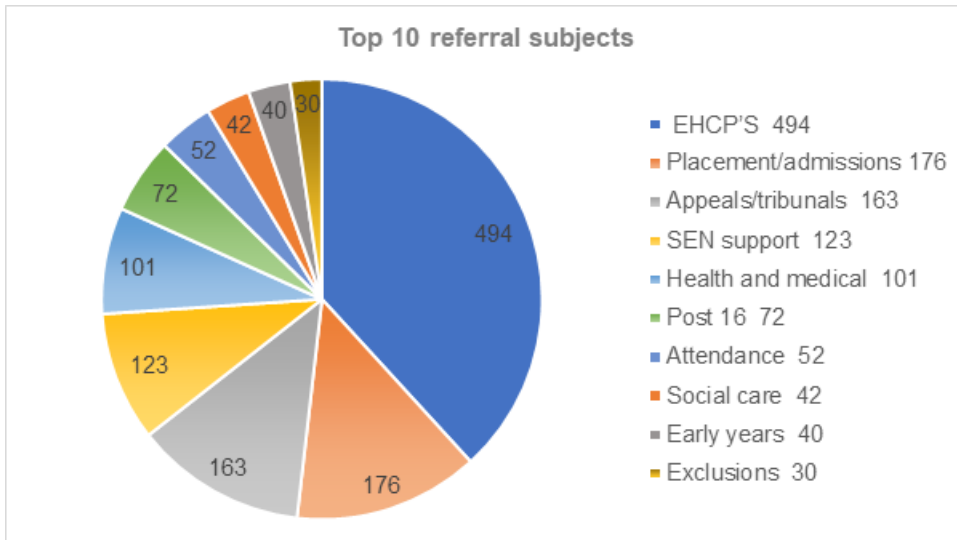
### Contacts by area of enquiry

Our data shows that the main areas of enquiry for the reporting period are Education, health, and care plans (EHCP's), Placement and admissions, Tribunals and Special Educational Need (SEN) support. There has been an increase in Tribunal enquiries from last year.

Over the reporting period CEIAS have supported at 8 mediations. We have worked to maintain and keep communication open and transparent, attended Mediation sessions and preparation meetings with the Mediation service.

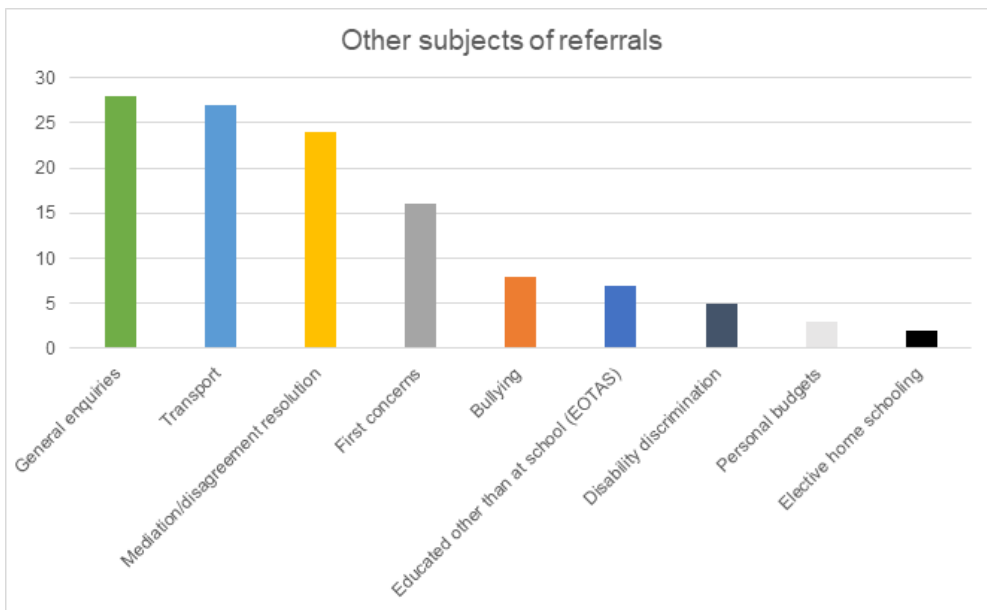
CEIAS have supported 8 parents regarding tribunal and the appeal process. CEIAS, with parental consent have liaised closely with the Cheshire East Tribunal officer with the aim of avoiding Tribunal and working together to resolve issues in the best interests of the child and help to reach an agreement between all involved. A key area of support has been through information sharing and preparation work throughout the appeal process.

This year we have captured data on mental health which has been added under the health and medical information, the current figures recorded specifically related to mental health are 63 new enquiries. The team identified the need to capture data on mental health due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. CEIAS has ensured our website is updated with relevant information regarding Covid-19 including services available, local charities and national organisations. The CEIAS team have signposted parents and carers to this information and provided contact information for relevant services for parents to access.

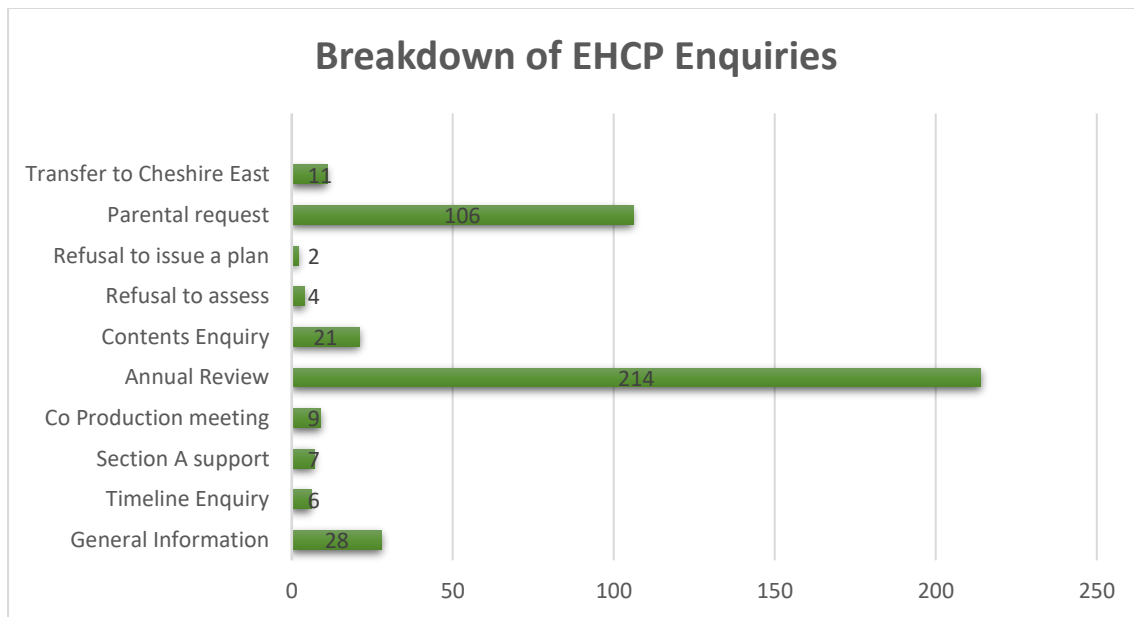


The following chart demonstrates the top ten enquiries we have received during this reporting period. Unsurprisingly EHCP's are our largest source of enquiry and as you will see below this is because the category of EHCP's can be broken down into several sub-categories.

This chart reflects the other enquiries we have received throughout this reporting period.



A further breakdown of the category EHCP shows that the main enquiries to the CEIAS service were around annual reviews and parental requests for EHCP's this remains the same as data gathered in the last reporting year. There have been 214 classification codes entered for enquires around annual reviews.



The number of enquiries that we have had around parental requests has led us to link up with the Inclusion Quality Team, who with parental consent have been able to discuss individual cases and provide support to parents and schools around parental requests, this has been very helpful to both parents and the CEIAS team and a positive example of working successfully together. Currently 5 families have been supported directly through this link and we would like to continue this as we move forward into the next reporting year.

### [Feedback Gathered by the Team](#)

The CEIAS team continually gather feedback in a range of ways, feedback is gathered following contact with service users with a set of questions for example: How easy was it to contact CEIAS? and How useful was the information provided?

Each contact is asked how they heard about our service which is then recorded on a spreadsheet. This can help us to identify any gaps in where our enquires come from and we

have created a distribution list of services and organisations throughout Cheshire East to share our CEIAS short presentation with.

The presentation has also been shared with the Locality managers within the SEN team to share with their teams in each locality and ensure new members of the team are aware of our service and have the correct contact information for our service. CEIAS gather feedback from the parents we support, from this data we can see the impact we have made to families:

Thank you so much for this information you're a star and have been so helpful (Parent)

I Can't thank you enough for the support you have given us. I don't think I could have tackled any of all this without you!! (Parent)

Brilliant, thank you so much, honestly really appreciate everything you've done for our family over the last 18 months (Parent)

Thank you so much for your support and advice. I wouldn't wish to be without it (Parent)

Thanks, we really appreciate the help and advice you gave today. We'll have a go at completing the forms and come back to you if we get stuck (Parent)

Thank you for the support you gave to me and my parents in helping me get back to College after lockdown (YP)

Thank you, you made me feel comfortable and the meeting was much better for me on Teams rather than in school (YP)

"It was lovely to meet you too and thank you very much for attending the meeting, that was a big help, especially with the meeting being on Teams. Also, thank you for the phone conversation we had - that was the first time I'd talked to anyone about some of these issues for a long time (Parent)

I felt so much more confident with you attending the Annual Review and helping me to prepare (Parent)

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81.82% detailed we had made a great deal of difference to them and their situation

18.18% detailed we had made a lot of difference to them and their situation

All the parents who provided us with feedback clarified they would be extremely likely to recommend the CEIAS service to others.

Quotes received from our feedback survey include –

*“This team is professional and skilled and worthy of all praise afforded it. It’s a valuable resource and support to parent carers and in turn children and young people with additional needs”*

*“Always receive an excellent service in a timely and professional manner”*

CEIAS are keen to ensure we gather feedback in a variety of ways and submit monthly case studies for evaluation. The Case studies are used as learning tools, discussed at the SEND managers meeting and as part of our data gathered for reporting purposes.

Selected are three case studies completed by the CEIAS team to identify the impact made on the family/child or young person supported.

### **Case study one impact**

There is now a new Final EHCP in place for the YP which she, her parent and tutors are happy is fit for purpose. The Art lessons have been agreed to go in Section F much to the parent’s relief.

The Health section is at last accurate and up to date and therefore the parent agrees with all the needs in Section B and required provision in F for the first time and said that her stress levels have lowered therefore. The parent reported that the YP is also less anxious as she no longer has the uncertainty hanging over her and this has led to improvements in her mental health and fewer incidents of self- harm.

The Post 16 provision and Preparation for Adulthood are clearly identified in the amended EHCP.

Once the SEND Team keyworker became aware of the YP’s interest in Art and craft she gained her permission to share some of the YP’s wonderful art pieces at each of the

meetings. This had a very positive impact on the YP and all the other attendees and cemented the effective relationship which was building between the family and the SEND Team keyworker. Also “The Golden Thread” is now apparent when looking through the EHCP from YP views in Section A to Outcomes in Section E.

### **Case study two impact**

The parent was extremely grateful of CEIAS for communication with the Key Worker on her behalf as she had struggled to contact the team. Parent felt relieved that it would be imminent that the transport issue would be resolved and felt reassured that she could come back to CEIAS if she needed further support.

### **Case study three impact**

Parent felt reassured that going forward there would be a plan in place with a risk assessment with as to what would happen if there was to be any future incidents. Parent was grateful that the same advisor who had previously supported with her son in the past was now offering support as a trust on such a sensitive, personal nature was already in place.

### **Staff Development**

All members of the team have regular supervisions with the new manager. The team have annual personal development plans where personal goals and achievements are planned, reviewed, and celebrated. Monthly team meetings are scheduled to discuss service planning, provide the opportunity to discuss concerns and issues and work through the CEIAS action plan that is updated following each meeting so there is a clear objective for the team to follow. The manager completes a “What is Working” and not working team document to ensure the meetings are completed in a person-centred manner.

The CEIAS team have all 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.

The team have attended the following: some as a team and others as individuals:

- Safeguarding training refresher



- Mental health first aid
- Preparing for adulthood on learning lounge
- Motivational Interviewing training (two-day training)
- EHCP masterclass
- Mandatory sessions through the learning lounge within Cheshire East
- Staff development day
- The Thomas Pocklington Trust “Introduction to Visual Impairment” training
- IASP Exclusions Training
- IASP Home Learning and Remote Education during Covid
- IASP Strategic Regional Workshop
- Early Years Masterclass (NASEN)

### Engagement with the North West Consortium and National IASSN

CEIAS have continued to attend the North West Consortium meetings, these have taken place virtually. A member of the team attended in person the Annual conference in Lancaster which had been re arranged from March to July due to COVID. This was a successful conference and gave opportunities to share information about each other’s services as well as a useful session to support mental health and wellbeing whilst continuing to work through the ongoing pandemic.

CEIAS engage with the National IAS service taking part in regular training opportunities, questionnaire feedback and submitting case studies and service updates.

CEIAS recently submitted a short survey to demonstrate the recent support we have provided to families through the tribunal process. This information was requested from the department for education and all IAS services were asked to contribute nationally.

### Future Developments

The CEIAS team will continue to work from home for most activities which is in line with the guidelines issued by Cheshire East council. This decision is under review and upon completion of risk assessments by individuals the CEIAS team will look to attend events and meetings in person were appropriate. CEIAS will continue to support parents and young people effectively through virtual meetings as well as continued daily email and telephone support.

CEIAS have developed a catalogue of workshops for delivery over the course of the coming year; these will either be face to face or we will deliver these virtually. We have identified key times of year to deliver relevant workshops to families to ensure they have the information required. We will advertise the workshops throughout Cheshire East and on our social media platforms. The first workshop will be about Annual reviews as we have identified this continues to be our greatest area of contact. The workshop is planned for early November 2021.

Following this we will deliver a workshop regarding Mediation as we have identified an increasing trend on requests for support in this area. We have been instrumental in helping to resolve issues brought to mediation which has frequently prevented the need to appeal.

We will continue to provide bookable consultations weekly so families can explore any concerns or issues they may have in detail with a member of the team. These sessions continue to be beneficial to families and will continue to be available virtually.

CEIAS continue to seek opportunities to consult with our young people in Cheshire East. We welcome their input to amend our resources and improve processes they are involved in. As the restrictions for Covid-19 lift we will be able to provide more opportunities to directly engage with a variety of young people and ensure their views are captured. Through the connections made with the participation team we are due to attend youth council sessions in September 2021 to talk about our service and ensure the young people have the information necessary to contact CEIAS when required.

CEIAS Quick guides are under development with the first covering the challenging subject of transition. The team are currently working on three quick guides that will be distributed at the beginning of September 2021 covering transition at key stages to include Early years/Primary, Secondary and Post 16. We plan to distribute CEIAS Quick guides each month as an additional source of information.

We have identified the opportunity for additional data collection and analysis following the recent Ofsted reinspection as this was an area of concern that was identified. The use of additional classification codes on our system will be used to gather data in relation to communication. CEIAS will also be gathering additional data to break down the type of

meetings we are supporting with and attending to inform our service development throughout the coming year and tailor our workshops according.

The feedback we gather from parents, carers and young people has been incredibly helpful and we plan to include feedback from services that we work with as we move into the coming year.

CEIAS continues to seek opportunities to engage with migrant communities through liaison with the Communities team within Cheshire East and work has begun on engagement with the Travelling community with contacts within the SEN team and national charities. This year we have captured data regarding Ethnicity, and this has highlighted the lack of diversity in our contacts which we would like to amend.

Black or Black British Not Known - 3

White British - 855

White - any other White Background- 4 which include Eastern European and Russian

The CEIAS team all continue to develop, refresh, and update their knowledge by attending relevant training sessions. As we begin the next year the team are already committed to attend IPSEA refresher training, Exclusions and IPSEA new manager training.

We have identified that we would like to collaborate data regarding referral origin by adding additional classification codes to our database which will provide us with key data that shows us any gaps identified and will allow us to share our service information in a targeted way.

### [Workshop delivery](#)

CEIAS is involved in the improvement journey through the training programme that has been developed by the Inclusion quality team. We have developed workshops following requests for relevant topics and once the schedule is finalised, we will be delivering workshops to the SEN team and SENCOs within Cheshire East.

As mentioned above CEIAS will be delivering workshops on Annual reviews in November and Mediation in December 2021 and will continue to deliver workshops throughout the coming year.

Thank you for taking the opportunity to read our annual report.

We hope that you find this annual report helpful, thank you for all your support during another particularly challenging year.

The CEIAS team

