

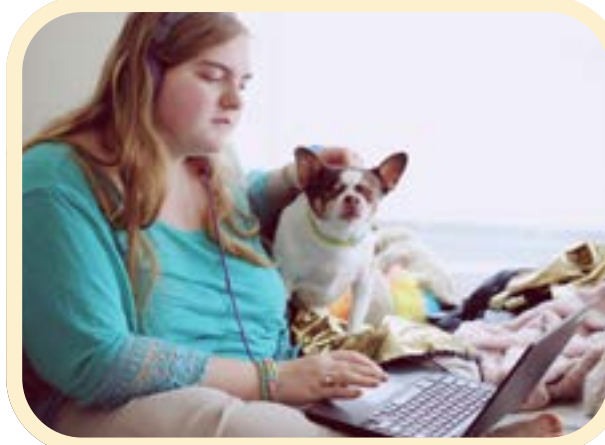


Somerset SENDIAS

Annual Report | 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025

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Information Advice and Support Services (IASS) provide free impartial, confidential and accurate information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people and their parents and carers on matters relating to special educational needs and disability (0-25). The provision of information, advice and support should help to promote independence and self-advocacy for children, young people, parents and carers. Chapter 2 of the SEND Code of Practice sets out the role and activities of an IASS service.

Somerset SENDIAS is jointly commissioned to provide the Information, Advice and Support Service which is a statutory requirement for Somerset Council (LA) and the NHS Foundation Trust and Integrated Care Board as outlined in Chapter Two of the **SEND Code of Practice 2015**.

Meet the Somerset SENDIAS Team



SENDIAS Officers

SENDIAS Officers provide information, advice and support on all matters relating to Special Educational Needs and Special Education law for children, young people and parents/carers. They undertake legally based training to IPSEA Level 3 this includes SENDIST Tribunal training. The team also undertake additional training through IPSEA, Council for Disabled Children and the Information, Advice, Support Service Network (IASSN).

SENDIAS Officers provide Information, Advice and Support through the Education, Health and Care plan, Annual Review, school exclusions and the SENDIST Tribunal process, and may include attendance at Tribunal hearings.

SENDIAS Officers provide induction and training support for new staff and volunteers.

SENDIAS Officers provide Information, Advice and Support at IASN Level 3 and Level 4.

SENDIAS Officer (Dynamic Support Register)

A SENDIAS Officer has responsibility to provide Information, Advice and Support to children, young people (and their parent's and carers) who are on or may be on the Dynamic Support Register. These children and young people must have a diagnosis of Autism and/or a learning disability and at risk of being placed in a 38 or 52 week residential setting to be on the Dynamic Support Register. This post is funded by the NHSfT and the Integrated Care Board.

SENDIAS SEN Support Worker

SENDIAS SEN Support workers enable and empower parents to have their voices heard and play an active part in the education for their children. SENDIAS SEN Support workers provide information, advice and support regarding SEN Support in school that relates to the Send Code of Practice and education law. SENDIAS SEN Support workers are trained to IPSEA Level 3 and update their training through IPSEA, Council for Disabled Children and Information, Advice, Support Service Network (IASSN)

SENDIAS SEN Support workers work with schools and families to ensure that schools understand their responsibilities and offer the right support for children receiving SEN Support and implementing the Graduated Response.



SENDIAS SEN support workers may identify if the child needs more intervention in school and may require an EHC plan. The SENDIAS SEN support worker will refer the family to IAS support from a SENDIAS Officer if an EHC request to assess is made to the Statutory SEND team.

The SENDIAS SEN Support Workers provide Information, Advice and Support at IASN Level 2.

Development Officer

The SENDIAS Development Officer works directly with children and young people to offer information, advice and support with the meetings at school, Education, Health and Care plan process, Mediation, SENDIST tribunal and exclusions. The SENDIAS Development Officer is trained to IPSEA Level 3. They also undertake additional training through IPSEA, Council for Disabled Children and the Information, Advice, Support Service Network (IASSN).

The SENDIAS Development Officer is responsible for supporting the SENDIAS Manager with matters relating to service development, inductions, policies and procedures, website improvements, attendance at Regional IASS meetings etc.

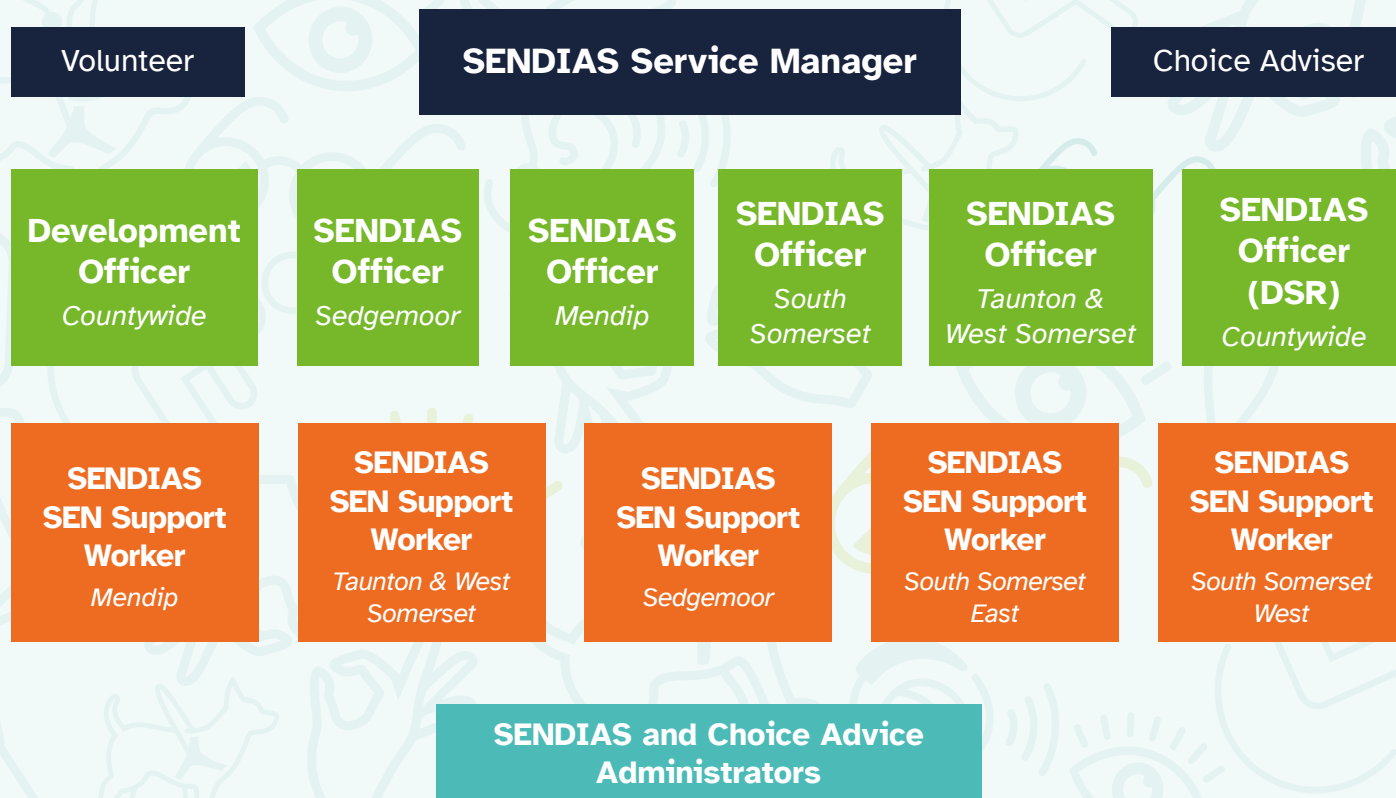
The SENDIAS Development Officer provides Information, Advice and Support at IASN Level 3 and Level 4.

SENDIAS Administrator

The SENDIAS Administrator is responsible for the Helpline, email support to families and professionals, general administrative duties, collating data, signposting parents/carers and professionals.

The SENDIAS Administrator is trained to IPSEA Level 3 and provides information, advice and support at IASN Level 1.

SENDIAS Team Structure



Information, Advice, Support Service Network (IASSNN) Intervention Levels



- Somerset SENDIAS
- Information, Advice and Support Service
- National IASSNN Intervention Levels

SENDIAS Help-line Co-ordinator

Level	Service user need	Support
Level One	<p>Information and advice about SEND matters, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The legal framework • Local SEN processes and procedures • Support groups • Particular special educational needs or disabilities • Funding arrangements • Local services • Web based resources • National organisations 	<p>Phone or email support - tailored to the particular circumstance of the service user.</p> <p>Note that the provision of general information about the service - e.g. as part of training, distribution of service leaflets, visits to IASS website - are <u>not</u> included.</p>

SENDIAS SEN Support Worker

Level	Service user need	Support
Level Two	<p>Any or all of Level one plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to understand or complete documentation • Support in communicating with school, the LA, other services, etc. • Detailed and personalised guidance on following SEND or exclusion procedures • Assistance in accessing services 	<p>Any or all of Level one plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone or email support over a period of time • Research and provision of specialised advice and information • Home visit by IASS or office visit by service user • Provision of support at/for meeting • Liaison with other agencies



SENDIAS Officer

Level	Service user need	Support
Level Three	<p><i>Any or all of Level one and two plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed and continuing assistance and guidance with statutory processes Complex, multi-agency needs Assistance in overcoming serious breakdown in communications with school/LA/other services Requires intensive support due to personal circumstance (e.g. low literacy levels, learning or sensory difficulties, English as a second language). 	<p><i>Any or all of Level one and two plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of support at/for a series of meetings over a period of months Ongoing support and guidance through statutory processes (EHC needs assessment, disagreement resolution, mediation etc.) Assistance with preparation for an exclusion appeal and support at the appeal meeting IASS undertakes key working role with other agencies

And

Level	Service user need	Support
Level Four	<p><i>Any or all of Level one, two and three plus:</i></p> <p>Detailed and continuing assistance and guidance with preparation and support during:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Tier Tribunal (SEND), including DDA complaints to Tribunal Complaints to Ombudsman Judicial Review Disputes about Child Protection 	<p><i>Any or all of Level one, two and three plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of intensive support for the service user(s) during the legal processes. This may include assistance with preparation for the legal process and support at, for example, a Tribunal hearing



The National Minimum Standards for IAS Services



The **Minimum Standards for SEND Information, Advice and Support Services** are based on the requirements relating to support that Information, Advice and Support Services must provide, as set out in the Children and Families Act (C&FA) 2014, the SEND Code of Practice and on additional legal advice commissioned by the Information, Advice and Support Service Network.

The IASS Minimum Standards have the following four areas:

1. Commissioning, governance and management arrangements
2. Strategic functions
3. Operational Functions
4. Professional development and training for staff

This report reflects how the SENDIAS service in Somerset aims to meet these standards with the information, advice and support the service provided to children, young people and parent/carers in this period.

Commissioning, Governance and Management Arrangement



- 1.1** The IASS is jointly commissioned by education, health and social care in accordance with the CFA 2014. A formal agreement is set out in writing which refers directly to these Minimum Standards, whilst also considering the need for continuity and stability of the service.

SENDIAS is jointly commissioned by Somerset Council, Integrated Care Board and National Health Service Foundation Trust to provide SEND Information, Advice and Support as outlined in the National Minimum Standards, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice. This commissioning arrangement maintains the current staffing levels which is managed by the SENDIAS manager.

- 1.2** The IASS is designed and commissioned with children, young people and parents, and has the capacity and resources to meet these Minimum Standards and local need. For smaller local authorities (LAs) this may involve commissioning across local areas.

The Service Level Agreements between Somerset Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group includes the funding of the SENDIAS Officer with responsibility for supporting children, young people who may be on/are on the Dynamic Support Register. This role is now well established and embedded alongside health, social care and statutory SEND colleagues to benefit these children, young people and their families. Referrals continue to rise as the awareness of the support SENDIAS is able to offer these families is now widely known within Health and Social Care.

Normally, the service has the capacity to meet the needs of the children, young people and families however in 2024/2025, there were four members of staff on maternity leave and one on long term absence which affected the delivery of the SENDIAS service. The service delivery had to adapt to provide the most effective delivery due to the reduced capacity within the team.



- 1.3** The IASS provides an all year-round flexible service which is open during normal office hours and includes a direct helpline with 24-hour answer machine, call back and signposting service, including linking to the national SEND helpline.

The SENDIAS service meets this standard, however, in 2024.2025 due to lack of capacity and maternity cover, the open helpline had to be an answering machine and call back service. This service will resume once capacity has returned to normal levels.

- 1.4** There is a dedicated and ring-fenced budget held and managed by an IAS service manager located within an IASS.

The budget is not ringfenced but managed by the SENDIAS Manager.

- 1.5** The IASS is, and is seen by service users to be, an arm's length, confidential, dedicated and easily identifiable service, separate from the LA, Clinical Commissioning Group and/or host organisation.

Since publishing the statutory duty for LA's and Health to jointly commission Information, Advice and Support (IASS) services and provide such services outlined in Chapter 2 of the SEND Code of Practice on the Somerset SENDIAS website, this has clarified any confusion regarding the impartiality of the service for parent, carers, and other interested parties.

- 1.6** LA and IASS ensure that potential service users, Head teachers, FE principals, SENCo's, SEND Teams, children's and adult social care, health commissioners and providers are made aware of the IASS, its remit and who the service is for.

SENDIAS works in a multi-agency way, all staff work towards promoting the service to all potential users by attending events such as the Somerset Parent Carer Listening Events for parents and carers, attending coffee mornings in mainstream and special schools and local conferences.

The SENDIAS manager attends strategic level meetings with other services such as the SEND team, Head teachers, Service managers and the Director of Children's services.

- 1.7** The Governance arrangements outline a clear management structure, encompassing a strategic manager within the IASS and a steering group or advisory body which includes representatives from service user groups and key stakeholders from education, social care and health.

The SENDIAS Advisory Body includes parent/carers, representatives from Somerset Parent Carer Forum, Special schools, Adult Mental Health provider, School Governor, Early Years Opportunity Group, Participation and Engagement Officer, Young People's Champion. Unfortunately due to a lack of capacity, the advisory body was only able to meet once in 2024/2025 however, meetings will be able to return to the usual frequency in 2025.

- 1.8** The IASS has a development plan reviewed annually with the steering group/advisory body, which includes specific actions and improvement targets.

The service development plan is reviewed annually.





- 2.1** Each IASS has a manager based solely within the service, without additional LA/CCG or host body roles. They have responsibility for strategic planning, service management and delivery, and quality assurance.

The service is compliant with this standard.

- 2.2** The IASS engages with regional and national strategic planning and training and demonstrates effective working with other IASSs to inform service development.

The SENDIAS Manager submitted evidence regarding the effectiveness of Somerset SENDIAS SEN Support worker role as part of the National Information, Advice and Support Network submission for the call for evidence from the Education Select Committee.

The SENDIAS manager is the current Chair of the regional Information, Advice and Support network, with the Vice Chair from SEND & You (North Somerset, Information, Advice and Support Service) co-produced and organised a South West Regional managers residential held at Exeter. Representatives from the national IASS network attended the conference.

The Southwest Regional Information, Advice and Support network commissioned an independent report to endeavour to evidence the impact of SENDIAS services for children, young people, parents and carers with the financial benefits to providing an adequately resource Information, Advice and Support service. The regional managers are working towards addressing the recommendations and improving regional service provision.

As regional Chair representing the South West Information, Advice, Support Regional Network, the SENDIAS Manager attended meetings with the regional Global Mediation & Disagreement Service, South West Tribunal User Group, and the South West SEND Network.

- 2.3** The IASS works with local partners, including local parent and young people forums to inform and influence policy and practice in the local area.

SENDIAS Manager attended multi-agency strategic meetings with Somerset Council SEND Inclusion and Social Care services, Somerset Parent Carer Forum, Designated Medical Officer, School representatives and Voluntary Sector colleagues throughout the year.

The SENDIAS manager is a member of the Dynamic Support Register (DSR) steering group and attends DSR Link meetings.

The SENDIAS Manager attends regular service update meetings with Somerset Parent Carer Forum, Statutory SEND, Integrated Care Board and Social Care colleagues.

The SENDIAS Manager attended National, Information, Advice and Support Service Network (IASSN) meetings regarding developing Information, Advice and Support services across the country.

The SENDIAS Manager and the SENDIAS Development Officer attend the Collaborative Supportive Employment Forum meetings throughout the year.





3.1 The IASS provides:

Impartial information, advice and support (IAS) on the full range of education, health and social care as defined in the SEND Code of Practice to the following service users –

- a. children
- b. young people
- c. parents

This support is offered in a range of ways which includes face to face, a telephone helpline, email, website and social media.

Somerset SENDIAS is fully compliant with this standard.

3.2 The IASS provides branded information and promotional materials in a range of accessible formats.

Somerset SENDIAS has an independent logo designed by a young person with SEND, information is available in a range of accessible formats however budget constraints mean the service is unable to provide branded promotional materials at this point.

3.3 The IASS has a stand-alone service website that is accessible to all service users. The website includes:

- Contact details of the service
- Opening hours
- Response times
- Information on a range of SEND topics
- Signposting to other useful groups including parent groups and youth forums and national helplines
- Signposting to the Local Offer
- Key policies including a complaints procedure

Somerset SENDIAS is compliant with this standard.

3.4 The IASS provides advocacy support for individual children, young people, and parents that empowers them to express their views and wishes and helps them to understand and exercise their rights in matters including exclusion, complaints, SEND processes, and SEND appeals.

Somerset SENDIAS is compliant with this standard.

3.5 The IASS provides information, advice and support before, during and following a SEND Tribunal appeal in a range of different ways, dependent on the needs of the parent or young person. This will include representation during the hearing if the parent or young person is unable to do so.

Somerset SENDIAS is compliant with this standard.

3.6 The IASS offers training to local education, health and social care professionals, children, young people and parents to increase knowledge of SEND law, guidance, local policy, issues and participation.

Somerset SENDIAS is compliant with this standard. Somerset SENDIAS provided Information sessions which were presented to the following teams: Young Somerset, Somerset Parent Carer Forum Listening events, CAOT coffee mornings, Oakfield School parent group Q&A session.





- 4.1** All advice and support providing staff successfully complete all online IPSEA legal training levels within 12 months of joining the service. Volunteers who provide advice and support should complete IPSEAs Level 1 online training within 12 months.

All staff must complete the three levels of IPSEA legally based training including face to face, currently two members of the team are nearing completion of their training. Currently, there is one volunteer who supports the service when possible and is a member of the Advisory Body.

- 4.2** The service routinely requests feedback from service users and others, and uses this to further develop the work and practices of the service.

The service sends out feedback from service users on a regular basis which helps to improve the service and enables the feedback to be submitted as part of the national IASS network benchmarking process.

- 4.3** All IASS staff and volunteers have ongoing supervision and continuous professional development.

Somerset SENDIAS staff have ongoing supervision and training. All staff undertake Mental Health First Aid Adults and Youth training and all mandatory training requirements including updating Safeguarding training. All staff have access to training opportunities via the national Information, Advice and Support network.

During the summer of 2024/2025, four members of staff went on maternity leave. A one year secondment was agreed to cover maternity leave for one member of staff which ceased in September 2024 with the return of a member of staff.

One member of the team was on long term sickness. The maternity leave and long term sickness meant that service capacity was significantly reduced, the SENDIAS team worked very hard and adapted the service delivery to support children, young people, parents and carers during this period.



The three main reasons someone comes to SENDIAS for information, advice and support are:

- SEN Support in School
- EHC process
- Mediation/Tribunal

Between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2025 the SENDIAS Service received:

Helpline Calls	911	Mediation: Parents/carers received support	180
New Cases - Level Two	440	Tribunals: Parents/carers received support	178
New Cases - Level Three	293		
New Cases - Level Four	219		
Total Referrals	964		



78 cases
were stepped up to officer level

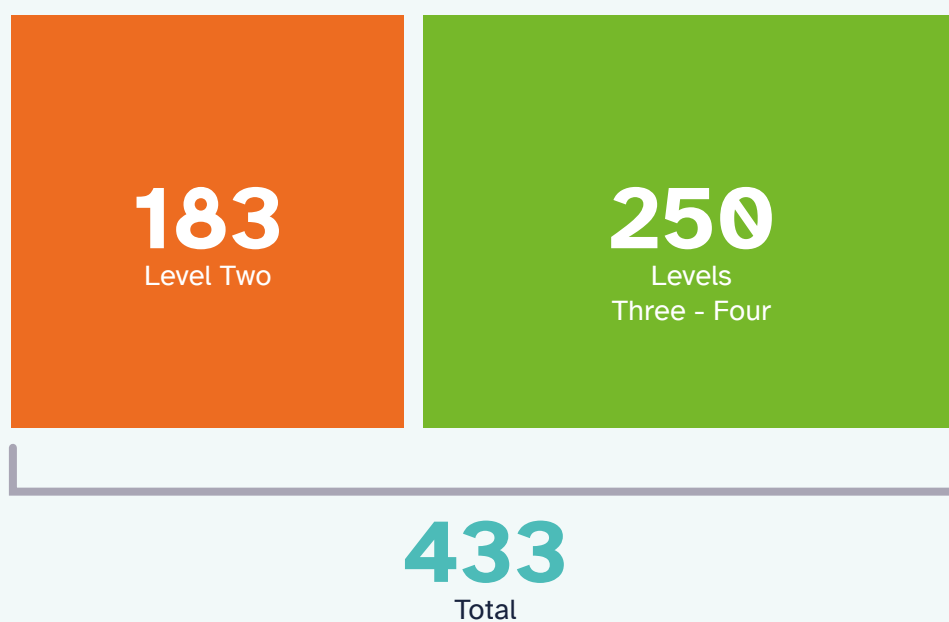
SENDIAS received
911 calls
between 1st April 2024 - 31st March 2025





SENDIAS Caseloads

At time of writing



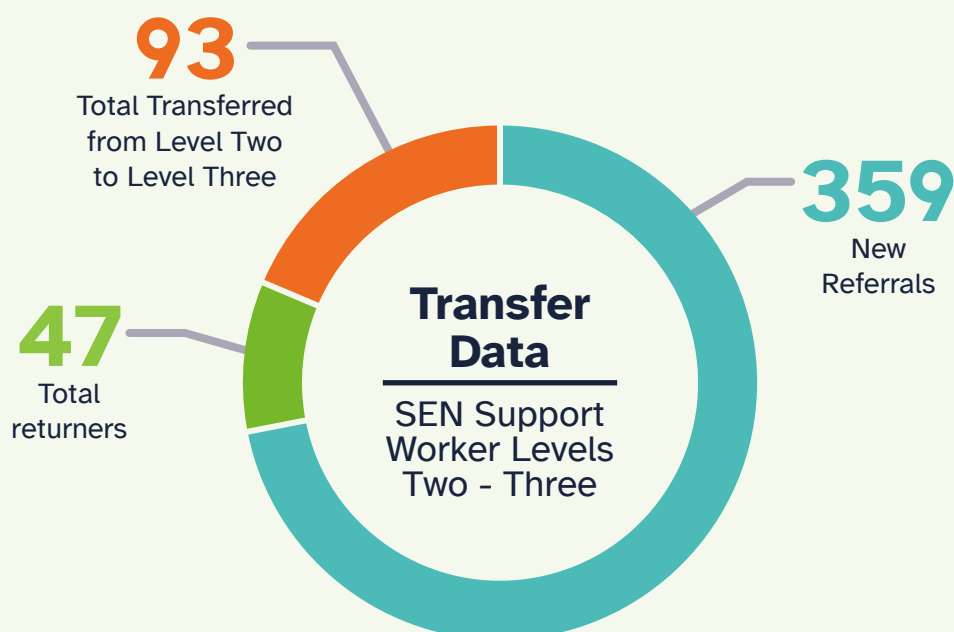
SEN Support – Level 2



The Sen Support worker role is now embedded in the SENDIAS Service. Over the past five years data has consistently evidenced that where SENDIAS SEN Support workers support a family and school for a child at SEN Support, the child remains in school at SEN Support and usually an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment is not requested.

SEN Support Worker Totals Transfer Stats

Total New Referrals	359
Total Returners	47
Total Transferred from Level Two to Level Three	93
Total Cases	499



In 2024/2025 at the point of referral, 81.37% of Level 2 cases remained at Level 2 and not stepped up to Level 3 to request an Education, Health, Care Needs Assessment.



SENDIAS Feedback Comment From Parents



Very useful service which offers very targeted advice when navigating through the SEND system in order for children to access the help required.



XXX was very understanding and professional in their approach to our tribunal case. We could not have done it without them. They talked us through proceedings and helped us with filling out forms and also helped us with our technical issues. Communication was excellent and responded swiftly. XXX is always impartial, supportive and has such a sense of calm about them! XXX is very knowledgeable about things like mediation, tribunals which I do not know so much about.

XXX was very helpful and supportive. Every question was answered, and the process was made so much easier to understand because of her. She has made a real difference to us and we could not have done this without her.



You're all fantastic in the areas of the process, without the support from SENDIAS I wouldn't have got this far.



Choice Advice



Choice Advice is a free, impartial, arm's length, information, advice and support service for all parents carers regarding school admissions and school admission appeals.

This service can help parents carers apply for a school place, prepare for a school admission appeal, understand the Infant Class Size regulations and the Fair Access Protocol and offer advice with transport.

In 2024/2025 Choice Advice has supported 491 families through the school admission and school admission appeals processes. The three common themes for the year are:

- Families moving into Somerset
- Lack of secondary school places in Taunton
- Fair Access Protocol - supporting children not in school to secure a school place

Choice Advisor

The Choice Adviser provides information, advice and support on all matters relating to school admissions and appeals. They support families to navigate the school admissions and appeals processes helping them to secure school places. The Choice Advisor also supports families with school transport appeals and provides tailored assistance to attend School Admission Appeal hearings with the most vulnerable families.

The Choice Advisor undertakes legally based training to IPSEA Level 3, Independent School Admissions and Appeals training, attends the annual Local Authority Appeal Panel Training and any other training relevant to the Choice Advice service.

Parents feedback

XXXX was really helpful towards me regarding my appeal for a school placement and gave me lots of information and advice. This was really important as the school appeals system was challenging to say the least.

There is so little information about the appeals and how the process works online. Choice advice really explained it to me to help me make decisions, they explained what would happen if me appeal was excepted and what would happen if my appeal was refused and what options I had. They were so supportive, not sure what I would have done without them to guide me.

Seeking the support and guidance of XXX has really helped to get a young person that I mentor back into school. XXX has helped to advise the family and talked through the appeal process. We wouldn't have got the result that we were hoping for without the expertise of XXX.

They supported me with writing my supporting statement. They helped me to understand the appeal process and what to expect in the appeal. XXX also joined me in my face to face appeal and was a great support. I could see who I was talking and who was talking to me. I felt part of the process and could follow exactly what was happening. I felt more able to get my case across and like I was being heard and listened to.





Somerset SENDIAS

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Somerset Integrated Care Board

Somerset NHS Foundation Trust



Somerset
Council

