



# Somerset SENDIAS

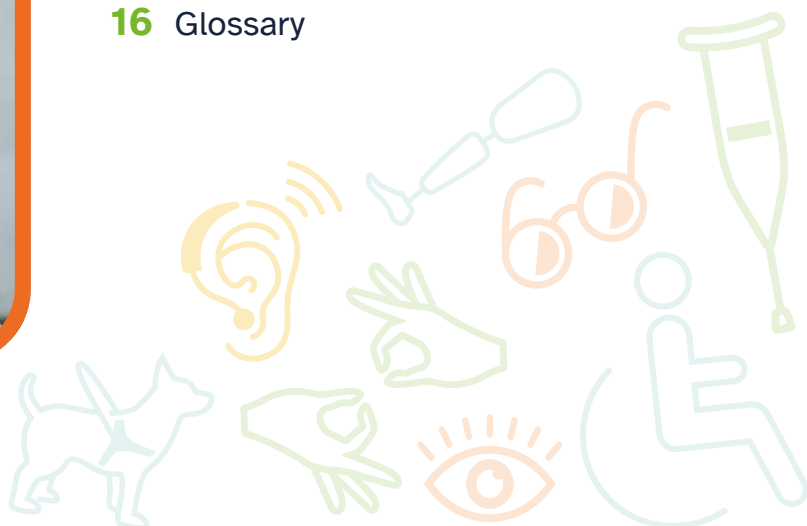
Annual Report | 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026



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# Introduction



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 parent 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 and parent 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 parent carers. They undertake legally based training from IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) to Level 3. This includes Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) 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 members of the team and volunteers.

SENDIAS Officers provide Information, Advice and Support at IASSN 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 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 jointly commissioned by the NHSfT and the Integrated Care Board (CAHMs).

### SENDIAS SEN Support Worker

SENDIAS SEN Support workers aim to enable and empower parent carers to have their voices heard and play an active part in 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. Their training is updated by 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 additional interventions in school and may require an Education Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). The SENDIAS SEN support worker will transfer the family for 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. SENDIAS SEN Support workers are trained to IPSEA Level 3.

### 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.

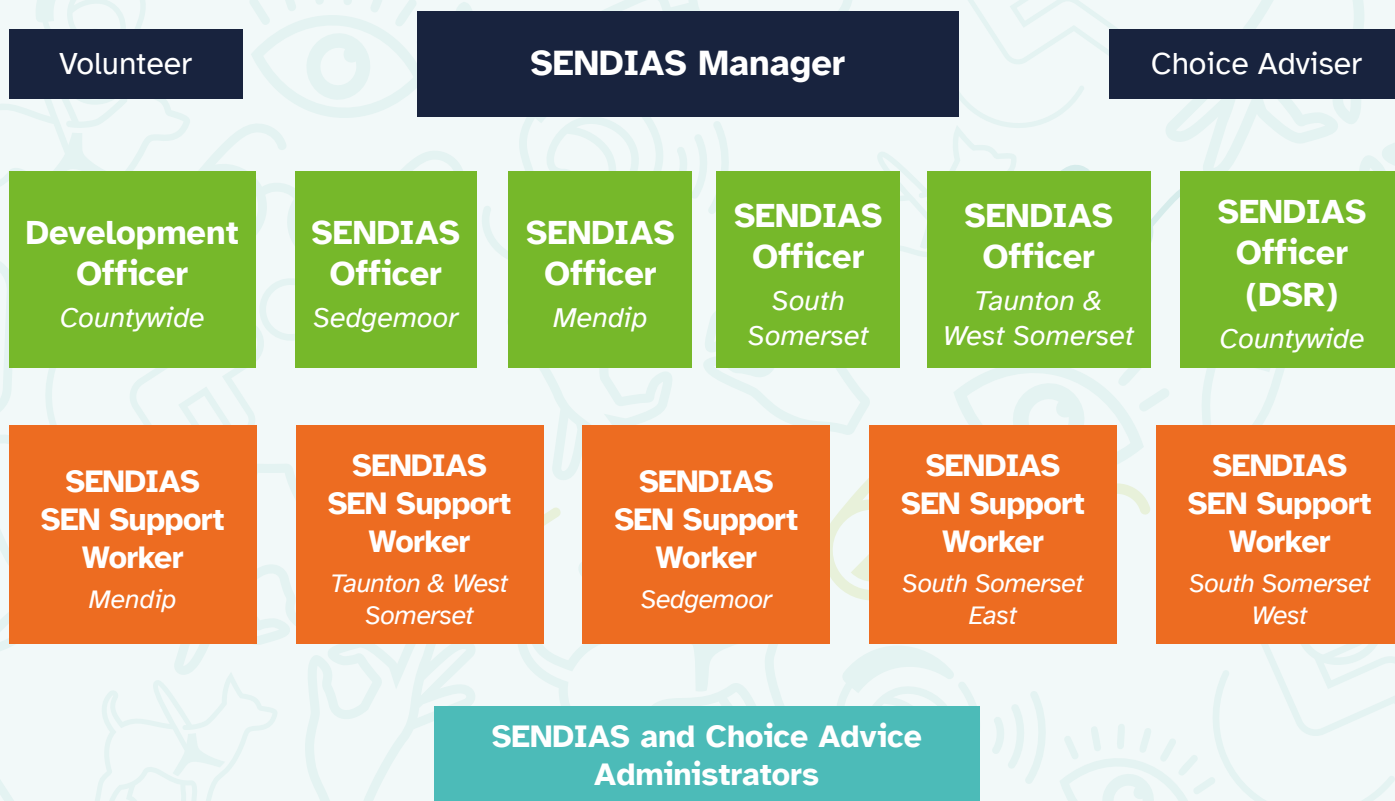
The SENDIAS Development Officer provides Information, Advice and Support at IASN Level 3 and Level 4.

### SENDIAS Administrator

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



# 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 members of the team

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. The Service Level contract has been agreed, formalised and signed with the Integrated Care Board until September 2027. This commissioning arrangement maintains the current members of the teaming levels which is managed by the SENDIAS manager.

- 1.2** The IASS is designed and commissioned with children, young people and parent carers, 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, National Health Foundation Trust and the Integrated Care Board includes the funding for 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 can offer these families is now widely known within Health and Social Care. Due to the rise in demand from young people, parent carers, around SEN Support the team referrals and requests for support are high impacting the capacity to deliver the service to the highest standards.

- 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. The dedicated SENDIAS Administrator manages the helpline and inbox enquiries from parent carers and other interested parties.



- 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 however it is held and 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 homepage, this has clarified any confusion regarding the impartiality of the service for parent carers, and other interested parties. Continued reinforcement of this message in meetings, parent groups, information sessions, ensures awareness of the importance of the service meeting this Minimum Standard. The service is based in a Children's Centre which reinforces the SENDIAS service duty to be arms-length and meets this standard.

- 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, collaborative way, all members of the team work towards promoting the service to all potential users by attending events such as the Somerset Parent Carer Listening Events for parent carers, coffee mornings in mainstream, special schools, local SEN related conferences and community groups.

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.

Information sessions are offered to other services within the council and wider services and agencies such as school nurses, Barnardo's, Family Intervention Services and more.

- 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, Participation and Engagement team, Young People's Champion. The SENDIAS Advisory body met three times in this period.

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.

Somerset SENDIAS contributed evidence to the national IASS Network's submission to the Education Select Committee, demonstrating the impact of the Somerset SEN Support Worker model. The 'Somerset model' has been acknowledged nationally as good practice. The SENDIAS Manager has been invited to share this approach through the IASSN as a webinar session with other SENDIAS service managers across England in April 2026.

In 2025, the SENDIAS Manager stepped down from the role of Chair for the South West Regional Information, Advice and Support Network (SWIASSN), with the Vice Chair from SEND & You (North Somerset IASS) taking on the Chair position. Despite this change, the Somerset SENDIAS Manager has continued to play an active role in supporting the regional network, particularly through collaboration with the Southwest Regional Improvement Innovation Alliance (SW RIIA). During their tenure as Chair, the Manager led the commissioning of an independent regional report to evidence the impact of SENDIAS services for children, young people, parents and carers, and to highlight the benefits of ensuring services are adequately resourced. Regional managers are now working collectively toward implementing the report's recommendations and strengthening service provision across the South West.

## **The Impact of Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support, (SENDIAS) services in the South West Region.**

Also attended meetings with the South West Information, Advice, Support Regional Network, the regional Global Mediation & Disagreement Service, South West Tribunal User Group, and the South West Regional Improvement Innovation Alliance (SW RIIA) and the regional 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, Virtual School 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 monthly 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 regular National, Information, Advice and Support Service Network (IASSN) meetings with other Information, Advice and Support services.

The SENDIAS Manager and the SENDIAS Development Officer attend the Post 16 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. Parent carers

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 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:

*Somerset SENDIAS is compliant with this standard.*

- 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

### 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.

A focus this year has been on raising awareness of the SENDIAS service and its offer to the job centre staff across Somerset. It was, in part, to try and address challenges faced by parents and carers whose children are out of education due to fixed term exclusions, part-time timetables, at risk of a permanent exclusion, emotional based school avoidance, which can affect the parent and carers availability to work.

This resulted in two pilot projects which have been set up in Frome and Bridgwater where parents and carers can meet staff from the SENDIAS team and have 1-1 confidential, information, advice and support discussion about their individual situation.

Initial feedback has been very positive from the SENDIAS team and the Department of Work and Pensions staff and clients. The families who received support were not aware of the SENDIAS service until support was offered by the Department of Work and Pensions team. Many of these family's situations and their children with SEND are very complex. Parents and carers often find it difficult to understand what support available and what steps they need to take to help their children with SEND return to education.



- 4.1** All advice and support providing members of the team 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 members of the team have completed the three levels of IPSEA legally based training including face to face.*

*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 members of the team and volunteers have ongoing supervision and continuous professional development.

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

There have been some changes to the staffing of the service during this period. The Manager will be retiring at the end of April 2026, a new manager has been appointed and will be starting in the post at the start of May 2026.

Two SENDIAS SEN Support Workers have resigned to further develop their careers and new staff have been appointed.

A SENDIAS Officer has been successful in securing a new post who will be leaving the service and a the post will be recruited to as soon as possible.

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

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

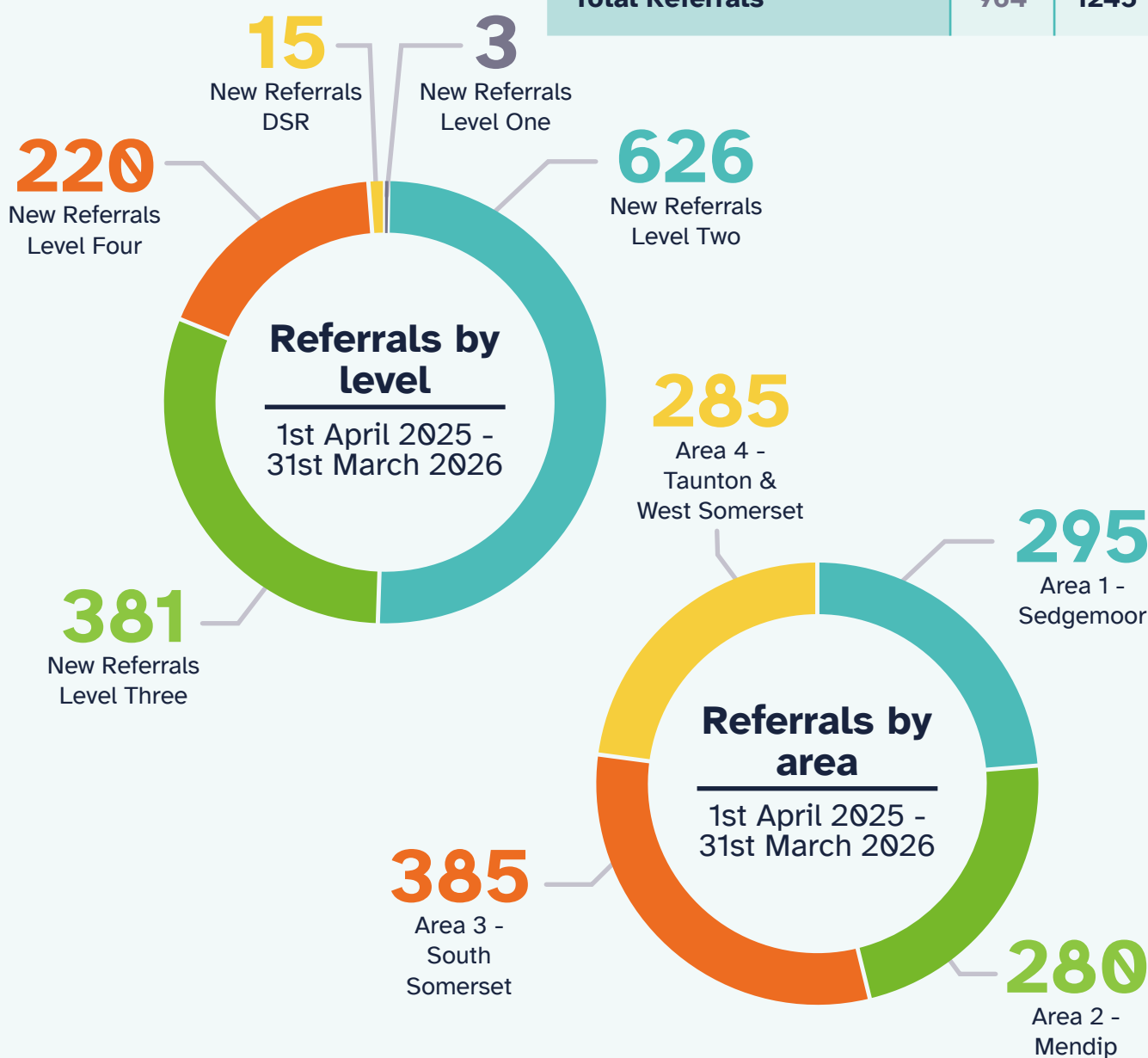


# Information from the point of referral



Between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026 the SENDIAS Service had:

		24-25	25-26	
Helpline Calls	680			
Helpline Emails	2164			
Total Helpline Contact	2844			
		New Referrals - Level Two	440	626
		New Referrals - Level Three	293	381
		New Referrals - Level Four	219	220
		Dynamic Support Register (DSR)		15
		<b>Total Referrals</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>1245</b>



# SEN Support – Level 2

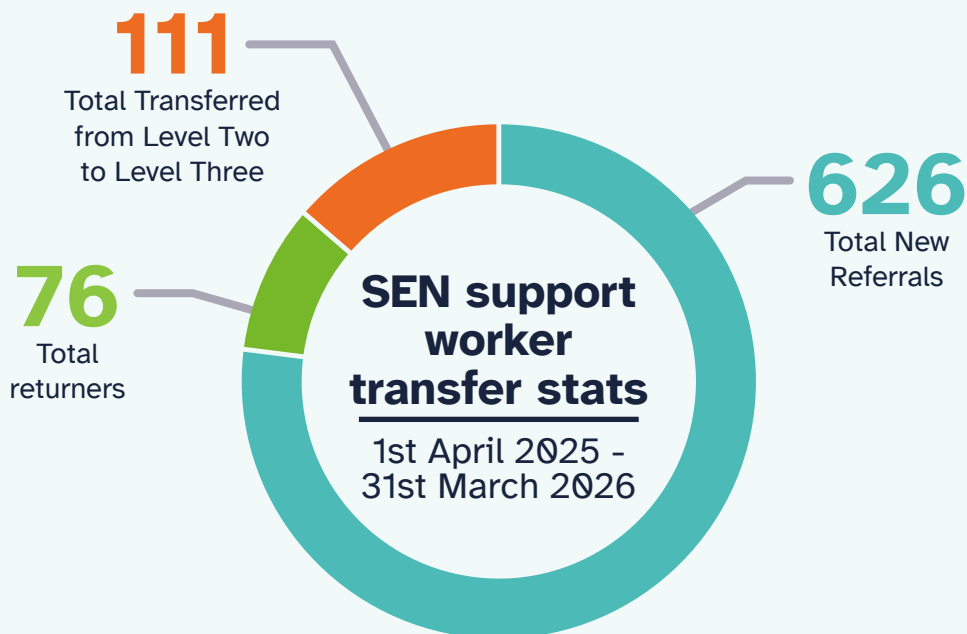


The SEN Support worker role is now embedded in the SENDIAS Service. Over the past five years data has consistently evidenced that where SENDIAS SEN Support workers support a family and school for a child at SEN Support, the child remains in school at SEN Support and usually an Education, Health and Care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

## SEN Support Worker Totals Transfer Stats

24-25    25-26

	24-25	25-26
<b>Total New Referrals</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>626</b>
<b>Total Returners</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Total Transferred from Level Two to Level Three</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Total Referrals</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>813</b>
<b>Remained at Level 2</b>		<b>515</b>



In 2025/2026, 82.3% of Level 2 referrals did not require escalation to Level 3 for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment, indicating sustained support at early intervention level.





It gave me a chance to reflect on things and see them in a more balanced way, as well as feeling more confident in having conversations with the school.



Thank you to the service for enabling our most complex pupils to find the support they need by working together with their families; your understanding, individualisation and professional knowledge is greatly appreciated!



SENDIAS certainly help me understand the process, especially the legal/ Tribunal aspect which was daunting. SENDIAS help put the process into plain English, with less jargon, which made making decisions easier



Very good service which is very important to help parents through the EHCP and send process. Many thanks.



## 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.

Across 2025/26, families continued to seek support with consistently high levels of complexity particularly around admissions, appeals, and SEND related needs.

Although the overall number of school admission appeals lodged and heard has significantly reduced. Choice Advice has seen rising demand for certain support areas. Enquiries relating to first admissions, SEND, and school transport have all risen. This highlights a growing need for detailed, personalised guidance as families navigate increasingly complex circumstances.



## Admissions - In Year

In year admissions remained the most common reason families contacted the service. Parents often required guidance with:

- Finding a place when preferred schools were full
- Navigating unplanned or mid year relocations
- Understanding oversubscription criteria
- Challenging unmet expectations around local school availability
- School transfers also featured heavily, often linked to unmet need or wider family circumstances.
- Preparing school admission appeal statements
- Understanding appeal outcomes

The Choice Advice Service continues to provide a consistently high quality, highly valued service. Parents repeatedly describe the support as essential in helping them navigate a system that can feel confusing, daunting, and emotionally challenging.

Overall, the service continues to make a significant and measurable difference to families across Somerset.

## Parents Feedback



Choice Advice made a real difference to us. [\*\*\*] informed us and guided us through the appeals process, which we had no idea how to approach. She equipped us with all the necessary information, including school transport, which was later approved. She also supported us by following up on our applications. We are truly grateful for her help.

The choice advice made a difference because [\*\*\*] informed us and guided us through the appeal process... including school transport which was approved.



I wouldn't have been able to get as far as I did in the appeal process, and to be able to be heard fairly if it wasn't for the support and information from Choice Advice and [\*\*\*]. This service is invaluable and there are so many parents out there needing to appeal and just don't know how, or what to do. This information and impartial support was a lifeline.



Absolutely, when I first reached out, I didn't know what way to turn or what I needed to do. But talking it through calmly and logically made it all much easier. They were able to answer questions and also helped to find answers if they were not sure. They checked in with me regularly, making sure I was ok and that my son was ok. Helping with questions I could ask in appeals. Supporting me with the whole process! Amazing team!



# Information, Advice, Support Service Network (IASSN) Intervention Levels



- Somerset SENDIAS
- Information, Advice and Support Service
- National IASSN 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"> <li>• The legal framework</li> <li>• Local SEN processes and procedures</li> <li>• Support groups</li> <li>• Particular special educational needs or disabilities</li> <li>• Funding arrangements</li> <li>• Local services</li> <li>• Web based resources</li> <li>• National organisations</li> </ul>	<p>Phone or email support - tailored to the particular circumstance of the service user.</p> <p><b>Note</b> 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"> <li>• Help to understand or complete documentation</li> <li>• Support in communicating with school, the LA, other services, etc.</li> <li>• Detailed and personalised guidance on following SEND or exclusion procedures</li> <li>• Assistance in accessing services</li> </ul>	<p>Any or all of Level one plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone or email support over a period of time</li> <li>• Research and provision of specialised advice and information</li> <li>• Home visit by IASS or office visit by service user</li> <li>• Provision of support at/for meeting</li> <li>• Liaison with other agencies</li> </ul>



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

### 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"> <li>First Tier Tribunal (SEND), including DDA complaints to Tribunal</li> <li>Complaints to Ombudsman</li> <li>Judicial Review</li> <li>Disputes about Child Protection</li> </ul>	<p><i>Any or all of Level one, two and three plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>

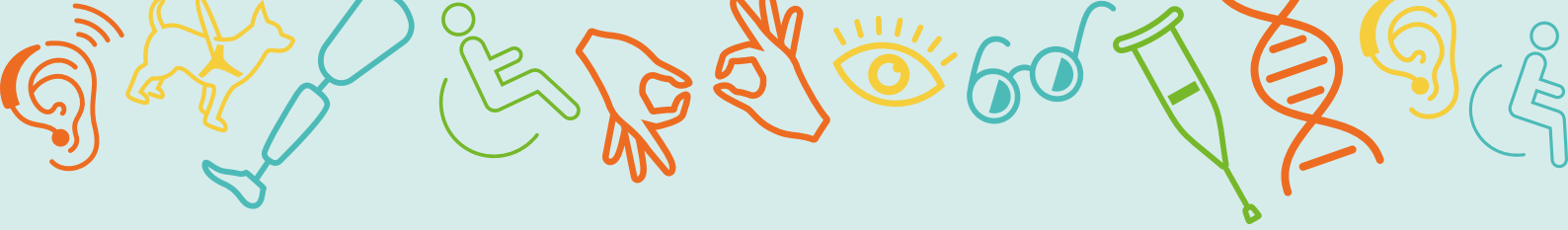


# Glossary



<b>CAMHs</b>	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
<b>C&amp;FA</b>	Children and Families Act
<b>CCG</b>	Clinical Commissioning Group
<b>DDA</b>	Disability Discrimination Act
<b>DSR</b>	Dynamic Support Register
<b>EHCNA</b>	Education Health and Care Needs Assessment
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>IAS</b>	Information, Advice and Support
<b>IASSN</b>	Information, Advice, Support Service Network
<b>IPSEA</b>	Independent Provider of Special Education Advice
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SENCos</b>	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities
<b>SENDIAS</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support
<b>SENDIST</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal
<b>SWIASSN</b>	South West Regional Information, Advice and Support Network
<b>SW RIIA</b>	South West Regional Improvement Innovation Alliance





## **Somerset SENDIAS**

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