



Annual Report

2022 - 2023



INTRODUCTION

The SENDIASS Service, (Special Educational Needs Information Advice and Support), was established in September 2014 and replaced the Parent Partnership Service. The Service was created in response to legislation contained in the Children and Families Act (2014), Sections 19(c), 26(3), 32 and 49. This legislation states that local authorities must provide a service offering information advice and support for children, young people, and parents/carers, covering special educational needs (SEN), disability, health, and social care. The service provides free, confidential, and impartial information, advice and guidance which supports families to navigate SEN processes and understand their rights.

The SENDIASS team currently comprises of the Service Manager, one Information, Advice and Support Officer, with additional staff currently being recruited. Staff have a wide range of experience and qualifications. Staff have undertaken IPSEA solicitor accredited legal training to an advanced level and continue to broaden their knowledge with continuous training offered externally, as well as via Camden LA and Camden Learning.

1. Operating standards

The Service operates in compliance with the SEND Code of Practice 2014, (CoP), Chapter 2 – Impartial Information, Advice and Support, and the revised National Minimum Quality Standards for impartial SEND Information, Advice and Support Services.

In line with national best practice, SENDIASS has a Steering Group, which meets on a termly basis and has a membership of key stakeholders, a majority of parents/carers, and an independent Chair. Group members promote the Service within their local service area or schools, whilst also contributing to service planning and development.

Membership of the Steering Group is currently under review.

The Group receive a report from the SENDIASS Manager, which includes how effectively the Service is meeting the targets set out in the Annual Development Plan (based on the Minimum Quality Standards mentioned above).

Further measurement of Information, Advice and Support Services is undertaken by the Information, Advice and Support Service Network (IASSN), through Benchmarking, in which all Services in England and Wales are invited to participate. Services provide information on budgets, number of staff employed (and their hours), age range of children covered by the Service and the extent to which the Service influences policy and practice through its involvement in strategic groups. There are also questions on the extent to which Services are compliant with the Minimum Standards. The published report shows data for all Services nationally, with Services being identifiable to enable comparison with regional and statistical neighbours and/or others with a similar demographic profile and number of schools.

2. Staffing

The SENDIAS Service was outsourced in July 2018. SENDIASS was commissioned to Camden Learning, with Helen McNulty continuing to line manage.

Camden Learning is a joint enterprise between Camden schools and the council which brings education practitioners together to share expertise, drive improvement and achieve excellent practice. It has dedicated SEND improvement resources, such as a SEN school improvement advisor, and a well-attended and effective SENDCO forum network, the content of which is led by schools.

Camden Learning provides the school improvement partner role for all special schools, which includes free and independent schools who are associate members.

SENDIASS staff regularly attend Camden Learning Team meetings and have continued access to schools via attendance at all SENDCo Forums which are facilitated by Helen. The SENDIASS Manager also attends the Camden Learning Wider Leadership Group.

Over the last few years, the Service has seen a reduction in staffing levels. SENDIASS capacity was continuously raised by the Service Manager in LA working groups and in directorate level discussions. An increase in SENDIASS core funding was agreed, enabling the recruitment of three new members of staff from September 2023.

2020: 4 members of staff, (2x full time, 1x part-time), (term time only, funded via Information, Advice and Support Programme/1 member seconded from Swiss Cottage school).

2021: 2 full time members of staff.

2022: 1 full time member of staff, (Service Manager).

2023: (Jan – Sept): 2 x full time members of staff, (Service Manager & IAS Officer).

IAS staff have IPSEA, solicitor accredited qualifications Levels 1-3, (with updated training offered by IASSN throughout the year), along with continuous professional training, relating to their role.

3. Statistics for year

CROSSDATA FIGURES SEPT 2022 – AUG 2023

- Admissions/Placement: **17**
- ARs: **7**
- Attendance: **2**
- Bullying: **1**
- Concerns: **35**
- Disability Discrimination: **1**
- EHCP: **14**
- Exclusions: **8**

- Home Schooling: **1**
- IEP: **1**
- Information: **38**
- Local Offer: **1**
- Managed Move: **1**
- Mediation: **1**
- School Refusal: **2**
- SEN Support: **16**
- Statutory Assessment: **27**
- Transition to Adulthood: **3**
- Transport: **2**
- Tribunal: 18

(See Appendix A)

Top cases: Statutory assessments, EHCPs, Placement, SEN Support

4. Intervention levels

Green: 23 (Low level information)

Amber: 47 (Casework involvement)

Red: 12 (Complex casework)

Blue: 9 (Tribunal casework)

Due to database training requirements, not all rag ratings were recorded for this period. (A whole Service training day was booked for 10th November 2023, to ensure consistency and full training to be provided for new staff).

5. Tribunal Figures

31/08/22 – 31/08/23 = 18 cases (Cases progressed to Tribunal appeal)

Whilst SENDIASS does support service users with their Tribunal appeals, the Service actively works with those service users, the LA, and Nurseries/Schools/Colleges, to resolve any issues without the necessity of an appeal.

SENDIASS Officers can support the service users in gathering and understanding their evidence, proofread the Tribunal application form before submission, (and making suggested amendments), look for any information/evidence that may be missing, inform of the law and educational processes, and support in discussions in Mediation, with the LA, School etc, to try and resolve the issue without the need for a legal hearing.

The Tribunal process currently has a **one year** waiting time, between submitting the application, to partaking in the hearing. By actively working to resolve disagreements/differences of opinion, SENDIASS ensures the parent/carer does not have the stress and additional workload of preparing for a hearing, (submitting documents/adhering to timescales etc), they understand the process and next steps, (with minimal cost to the public purse), resulting in appropriate provision for the child/young person, allowing them to achieve their outcomes and aspirations.

This is one of the main factors for SENDIASS Camden continuing to support service users in meetings with schools, other partners, and the local authority. Many IAS Services do not have the capacity to support in face-to-face meetings. After reviewing the feedback from our parents, I made the decision to continue to offer this option, as we recognise how valued our support in meetings, is held by service users, Schools, and the Local Authority.

The Service has supported Service Users to submit their appeals whilst continuing to liaise with other parties. This has resulted in several appeals being either conceded by the Local Authority or withdrawn by the parent, as the LA have reconsidered their decision, and an appeal is no longer required.


Two examples are:

01

SENDIASS supported a parent with their placement and contents appeal, sections B, F & I. The SENDIASS Officer, as part of their work with this family, attended the parent's house for a Case Management video call. The LA agreed to name parent's preferred specialist provision. Parent was happy to withdraw appeal once she had the placement she wanted. The working document was discussed, and the majority of outstanding issues were resolved. Parent was happy for new school to update the EHCP at the next annual review meeting. All parties in agreement.

02

SENDIASS supported a parent in identifying issues with the annual review paperwork, amending the outdated EHCP, liaising with OT etc, to progress school transfer, as per the parent's wishes. LA updated the EHCP, consulted the parent's preference where a placement was offered.

 **Parent feedback:** *As you probably know by now, we have found a very good school for T, Primrose Hill PS, in Camden. We went for a visit, and it really felt like a place that T would love and blossom. We were so happy, and I was even happier as we wouldn't need to go to Tribunal for a placement. I am so incredibly thankful for your help. Since the day I contacted you, everything started to change. If T is going to an autism provision in September, it's definitely thanks to you. Thank you for your dedication and all you've done.*

6. Working with Parents/Carers, Children and Young People (CYP)

This is primarily achieved through parents/carers/children/young people self-referring to the Service. Referrals are usually through telephone contact or e-mail, although new casework can be generated through publicity or training events where contact is made directly with parents/carers/CYP. Training events have been reduced this year due to Covid. Contacts from parents did increase following the Annual Review workshops and previous positive Ofsted report. There has been an increase in referrals from other professionals such as SENDCos, support workers and social workers. The SENDIASS referral form was adapted and distributed to ensure relevant information was gathered initially, in order to advise the parent/carer, young person, appropriately.

Information is maintained and shared in compliance with the Data Protection Act, GDPR and the Service's own Confidentiality Policy. Parents/carers, children and young people are advised on operating standards upon first contact with the Service, including its policies on Impartiality, Confidentiality, Safeguarding and working protocols. Such policies are included on the web site, which went live in July 2016, and can also be sent in the post or electronically to interested parties. Supporting parents/carers/CYP effectively often necessitates liaison with other officers within CSF, health, or schools. Such contact is only undertaken when parents/carers/CYP consent to the

Service divulging information, (on a need-to-know basis), and this is recorded on the case file. Most parties are only too happy to give consent and when this restricts the type of support they may be given, they are informed of this.

An information pack containing all Service Policies, the Roles and Responsibilities document, consent for sharing information, and registration forms and information on the Local Offer, are given to all new Service users at their first face-to-face meeting with a SENDIASS Officer or can be sent electronically. This ensures users are aware of how the Service operates and how they can work with the Service in supporting their child. All Service policies have been updated.

The Roles and Responsibilities document was revised, (June 2022), in order to emphasise the expectations of both the SENDIAS Service and parent/carers.

A wide range of support is provided to parents/carers, which includes:

- Informing parents/carers/children and young people on any aspect of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND Code of Practice 2014), Children & Families Act 2014 and other relevant legislation/guidance.
- Attending meetings with parents/carers/young person at school or local authority offices. Either remotely, or face-to-face.
- Advising parents/carers/young person on writing letters and reports.
- Helping parents/carers/young person understand and complete documentation.
- Sign-posting parents/carers/children and young people to local services and provision.
- Sign-posting parents/carers/children and young people to support groups for advice and support.
- Talking matters through and discussing options available.
- Helping parents/carers/children and young people understand the implications of objectives set out in the EHCP, (Education, Health, and Care Plan).
- Informal mediation.

- Providing information and advice about the SEN & Disability, Tribunal and Disagreement arrangements.
- Helping parents/carers/young people prepare for SENDIST Tribunal hearings, including support, (representation at the hearing will only be offered in exceptional circumstances, dependent on the needs of the parent/carer/YP).
- Supporting parents/carers/young people following a fixed-term exclusion at any stage of the proceedings.

The Service has raised its profile over time. Having successfully developed working relationships with more schools, there continues to be an increase in head teachers and SENDCos contacting the Service for support in working with families and for information and advice themselves. Regular attendance at the termly SENDCo meetings and new SENDCo induction days also ensures that the impartial SENDIASS role of 'critical friend' is fully appreciated and understood. We aim to attend as many SENDCo Forums as possible, despite demands on our time, to continue to build a trusting relationship with SENDCos.

We have developed a strong working relationship with the Special Parent's Forum and undertake to attend as many SPF meetings as possible, and workshops, when able to do so.

7. Information and publicity

The Service actively promotes itself in a range of ways:

- Stand Alone Web site.
- Pages on Camden's Local Offer.
- Information on the KTCC web site.
- Service flyers sent to schools electronically.
- Attending events in schools and the local community where possible, e.g. Meet the Parents, School Coffee mornings, etc.
- Participation in a range of local national conferences.
- Attendance at termly regional meetings with other SENDIASS practitioners.
- Attending the team meetings of other LA services when invited. (E.g. SEN Team, Transitions Team, Youth offending, etc).

SENDIASS continues to offer IAS to individual young people who contact the Service, either directly or via their parent. There has been a slight increase in young people supported directly by the Service, as more professional referrals for IAS for a young person have been received.

8. Training advice and support

SENDIASS revised their parent/carer training on EHCPs and Annual Reviews. Workshops were successfully presented to the Special Parents Forum and Robson House, (primary PRU), parents. Parent feedback from the most recent session, held remotely via Zoom and attended by 21 parent/carers:



"Excellent. The presentation was clear to view, to understand and rich in information for parents".

We parents of disabled children need workshops like this to guide us to better deal with EHCP process and obtain the best help for our children".

"It was perfect, and enough time was given to examine all the questions/concerns".

"Thank you for making us as parents more aware and empowered to ask to questions/insist on things!"

"Very good considering it was online!"

"I am very grateful for the help and support from these sessions. They help a lot. Thank you."

"Online worked fine and was easier to be able to attend that way."

9. How Parents/carers heard about SENDIASS

The majority of parents/carers were referred to SENDIASS by:

- Other parents
- School
- SEN Team
- Early Help
- Social Care
- Family Support Services
- SENDCos
- Special Parent's Forum
- Connexions
- MOSAIC/Health

SENDIASS HELPLINE CALLS 2022/2023

Two of the most common reasons for parents/carers calling SENDIASS during 2022/2023 were:



**My child needs extra support
and I would like help to
apply for an EHCP.**



**I need support in changing
placements from mainstream to
specialist as my child's needs are
not being appropriately
supported in school.**

Parental enquiries relating to concerns around the school, or school support for those children/young people without an EHC plan, have continued to increase. These issues centre on the type and level of support given to the child, how the support is delivered, (SEN Support/ENG/EHCP), and concerns about the general attitude of the school. Placement queries also rose this year. Parents contacting SENDIASS report at being unhappy with their child's current provision or, feeling their child needs a specialist placement.

Mental Health issues in young people continue to rise, in line with national trends, with numbers of school avoiders rising also, particularly following the Covid pandemic. SENDIASS works jointly with other agencies to support these young people and their families to help them return to education.

10. Satisfaction with the support provided by SENDIASS


SENDIASS carries out a systematic monitoring and evaluation of all interventions with parents/carers, and when supported, children and young people, to determine satisfaction levels. There continues to be a high level of satisfaction with the support provided by the Service. In addition, where support is provided at a meeting, the Chair is asked to complete a form in order to evaluate our effectiveness.

(See Service User feedback APPENDIX B).

11. Impartiality

SENDIASS offers impartial information and advice to parents/carers/CYP about all aspects of SEND, exclusion, bullying and disability discrimination. Our impartiality policy sets out what this means. The Service upholds the confidential and impartial nature of our work whilst also maintaining relationships with key partners/stakeholders.

12. Parent testimony

 *I am writing this testimonial to say thank you to SENDIASS for all of the support, information and encouragement you have given me.*

I attended my daughter's first parents evening in her new secondary school and was disappointed to learn that her tutors were totally unaware of her SEN, despite this information and reports being included in her school file, and a duplicate set hand delivered to school, by myself, when handing in our placement acceptance form.

I contacted SENDIASS for advice as, when I questioned the SENDCo, her response of, "your daughter must have slipped through the net – let's just set her some quick targets now," was totally unacceptable.

I asked for a meeting with the Head Teacher and, in my pre-meeting with SENDIASS, I was advised to write a bullet point list of my concerns. I found this advice totally invaluable, as I have no confidence in my speaking abilities and was worried I would be nervous meeting the head teacher and would forget all of the points I wanted to address.

With SENDIASS support, I expressed my disappointment with my daughter's needs not having the appropriate provision, as well as other mis-communication issues I had with the school. SENDIASS gave me information on what the school should be doing for my daughter. This also helped to increase my confidence, as I knew that there were procedures that should have been followed and weren't, and therefore, I knew I was doing the right thing by bringing this to the schools' attention.

My SENDIASS officer supported me at the meeting with the head teacher. This gave me the extra re-assurance and support I needed. The meeting did not start well as the head teacher, after shaking my hand to welcome me, turned his back on the SENDIASS officer and did not offer

her his handshake. This made me increasingly nervous as I felt if he was being disrespectful now what would he be like once I relayed my concerns to him?

Once the meeting was underway, I started to feel more confident. The head teacher allowed me to address my concerns and seemed grateful for the additional copy of my bullet list I brought to give him. My SENDIASS officer encouraged me and spoke on my behalf at points where I became emotional and overwhelmed. I think this helped the meeting to go well as the head teacher could see that the SENDIASS officer was there to support and encourage me, rather than be adversarial towards the school.

After the meeting, the head teacher promised to follow up on my concerns and I received a letter from him the following week explaining how he had rectified the issues I raised. He also shook both mine and the SENDIASS officer's hands on our way out and thanked her for coming!

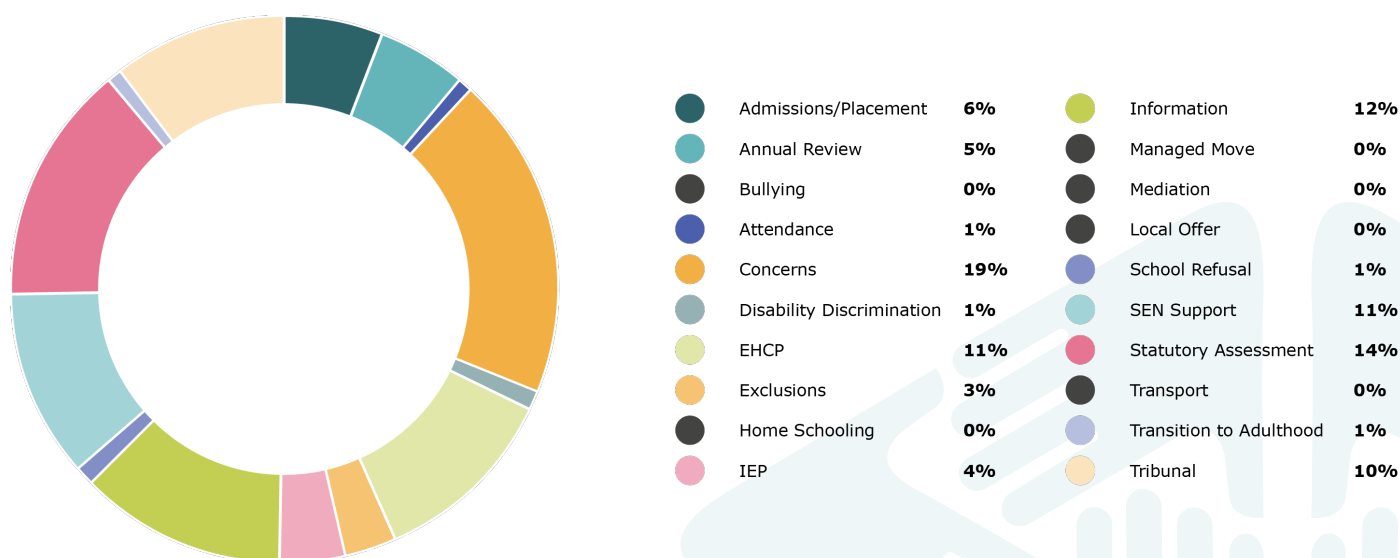
Now, when I attend parent's evenings, the head teacher always makes a point of coming to find me to ask how things are going, which has made me feel that we are now working together.

The SENDIASS officer also gave me information on making a one-page profile for my daughter to give each of her teachers, so that they are all aware of her needs. This had brilliant results the very first day. I received a telephone call from one of my daughter's teachers saying they did not realise the extent of my daughter's needs but found the 'how to support me' part very valuable and this will help them to support my child.

Thank you SENDIASS!

APPENDIX A

Case Issues



Number of Cases: 01-09-2022 to 31-08-2023 = **262**

Number of Contacts Total: **1524 (4197 hours 53 minutes)**

Numbers of contacts with or on behalf of Organisations and People - this includes the first Case contact and any subsequent contacts for that Case in the requested date range.

Number of Cases Closed Total: **181**

APPENDIX B



IASS Service User Feedback

Survey period starting:
01/09/2022 –31/08/2023

No of parents/ carers
surveyed: **44**

Key: 4 = Very Easy/Helpful/Neutral/Satisfied/Would recommend to
0 = Very Difficult/Unhelpful/Biased/Unsatisfied/Would not recommend

Q1 How easy was it to get in touch with us?

	0	1	2	3	4
Number of returns:	5	7	2	5	25
Percentage:	11.36%	15.91%	4.55%	11.36%	56.82%
	Total Returns 44		Return Rate 100.00%		Mean Rating 2.86

Q2 How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?

	0	1	2	3	4
Number of returns:	7	1	1	2	33
Percentage:	15.91%	2.27%	2.27%	4.55%	75.00%
	Total Returns 44		Return Rate 100.00%		Mean Rating 3.20

Q3 How neutral, fair and unbiased do you think we were?

	0	1	2	3	4
Number of returns:	5	2	1	3	33
Percentage:	11.36%	4.55%	2.27%	6.82%	75.00%
	Total Returns 44		Return Rate 100.00%		Mean Rating 3.30

Q4 What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made for you?

	0	1	2	3	4
Number of returns:	3	1	1	6	33
Percentage:	6.82%	2.27%	2.27%	13.64%	75.00%
	Total Returns 44		Return Rate 100.00%		Mean Rating 3.48

Q5 Overall how satisfied are you with the service we gave?

	0	1	2	3	4
Number of returns:	4	2	0	2	36
Percentage:	9.09%	4.55%	0.00%	4.55%	81.82%
	Total Returns 44		Return Rate 100.00%		Mean Rating 3.45

Q6 How likely is it that you would recommend the service to others?

	0	1	2	3	4
Number of returns:	4	1	2	0	37
Percentage:	9.09%	2.27%	4.55%	0.00%	84.09%
	Total Returns 44		Return Rate 100.00%		Mean Rating 3.48

APPENDIX C

ANNUAL FEEDBACK REPORT 2023

Highlighting the Challenges Faced by Parents & Carers of Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Camden

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to share the feedback provided by a group of Camden parents and carers who have children and young people with special needs and disabilities (SEND). By looking at their comments, we aim to provide insight into the numerous challenges they face in the areas of education, health, and social care. This report (and all feedback given by parents, carers, children and young people) provides an important opportunity to see how people *experience* the local system and provision - how it feels to them rather than how the system thinks it is doing.

Parents and carers of children and young people with SEND play a crucial role in advocating for their child's rights and ensuring they receive the support they require to thrive. Through surveying these parents, we give you the opportunity to understand their experiences and concerns. Their feedback serves as a valuable resource for identifying areas where changes are needed within the SEND system in Camden.

It is our hope that this report will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by parents and foster meaningful discussions among policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders. By listening to the voices of these parents and working collaboratively, we can strive to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for children with SEND enabling them to reach their full potential.

2.6 Local authorities should involve children, young people and parents (including local Parent Carer Forums and Youth Forums) in the design or commissioning of services providing information, advice and support in order to ensure that those services meet local needs. Local authorities should do this in a way which ensures that children, young people and parents feel they have participated fully in the process and have a sense of co-ownership.

Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years. January 2015

Background

The current climate surrounding special needs education and support services is characterised by a multitude of challenges that put extra strain on parents – locally and nationally.

The government's SEND and AP Improvement Plan describes 3 key challenges as they see it:

01

The system is failing to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

02

Parents' confidence in the system is in decline. Too many parents have lost faith in a system that is not sufficiently responsive to them, which is increasingly adversarial, and in which they face long waiting times to access information and support for their children, including accessing therapists and mental health support.

03

Despite substantial additional investment, the system has become financially unsustainable.

Chapter 1, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan, March 2023.

While the SEND system was designed with the intention of ensuring equal access to education and support for all children, it has faced significant criticism and scrutiny in recent years. Parents have expressed frustration with issues such as inadequate funding, delays in assessments and EHCP provision, lack of appropriate resources, and insufficient collaboration between different agencies. These concerns have left parents feeling overwhelmed, unsupported, and uncertain about their child's future.

Gaining feedback

The methodology used in gathering parent carer views for this Annual Feedback Report was intended to reach as many parents as possible and provide as comprehensive an understanding as possible of their perspectives. Here is an overview of the methodology:

Distribution: The survey was launched at our SEND Day, an event bringing parents together with various people from Camden on March 23rd 2023. We had community researchers at the event helping parents access the survey on iPads. Over 70 parents and carers attended the event.

The survey was then widely distributed through various channels. It was shared via the mailing lists held by both the Camden Special Parents Forum and SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice, and Support Service), SENDCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) in schools, and MOSAIC (Camden's integrated support service for children and young people with disabilities and their families).

Survey duration and reminders: The survey was open for a month to allow parents sufficient time to participate. Reminders were sent out through usual communication channels to promote maximum participation.

Low response rate and parent fatigue: This report acknowledges the low number of replies received, which suggests a sense of fatigue among parents in constantly providing feedback without perceiving significant action being taken, in addition to the burden of additional paperwork and admin faced by SEND parents & carers. This insight is crucial in understanding the sentiment and challenges faced by parents in engaging with the system.

A total of **55** survey responses were received.

This report also includes comments from SENDIASS and the Forum which reflect feedback from discussions and meetings with parents over the last year.

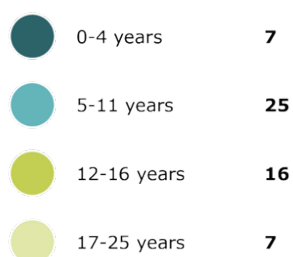
THE SURVEY

Who?

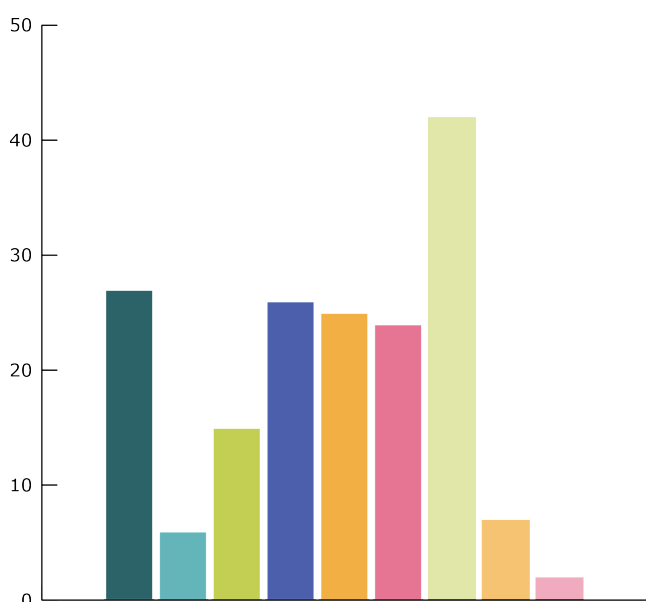
The majority of people responding to the survey had SEND children of school age between 5 and 16 years (74%), with 13% having under 4's and 13% having young people of 17-25 years (all of these young people had an EHCP, with the majority attending a special educational setting).



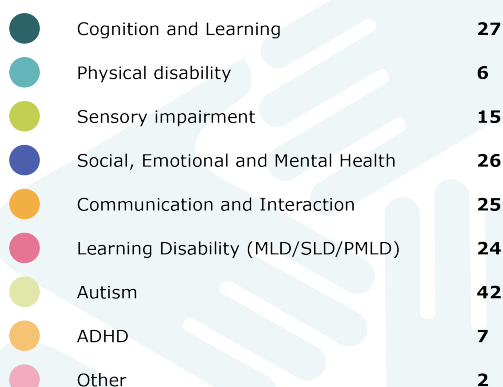
1. What is the age of your child?



The highest SEND need listed was Autism, with similar levels for Cognition & Learning, SEMH, Communication & Interaction and Learning Disability.



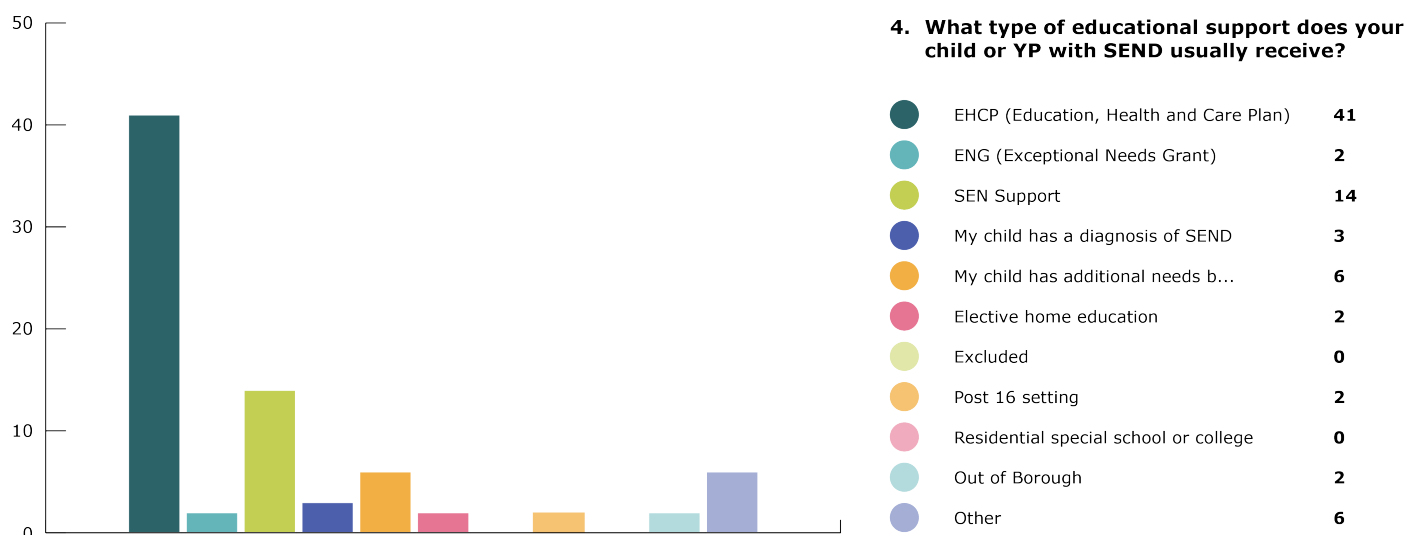
2. What are your child's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities SEND?



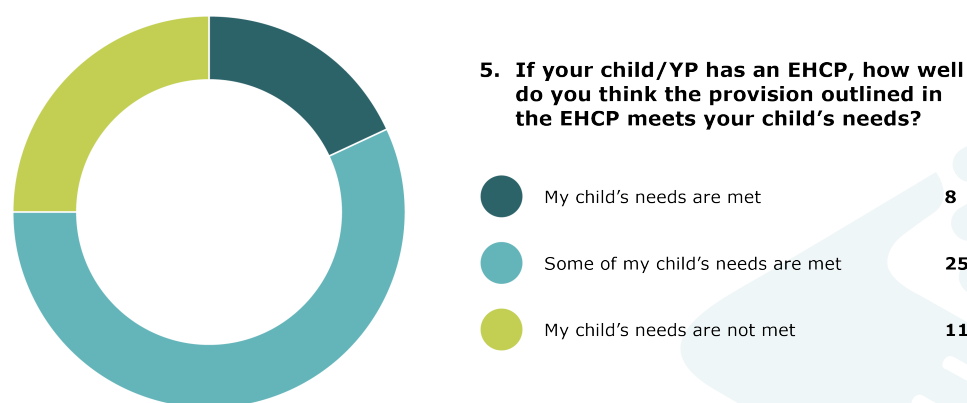
Education

The majority of children and young people went to special or mainstream school or college in the borough, with only 2 out of borough.

Most parents/ carers who completed the survey had children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).



The majority with an EHCP felt that the provision outlined in the EHCP met some or all of their child's needs.



Around 2/3rds of families saying their child received SEN support were not happy with the support provided.



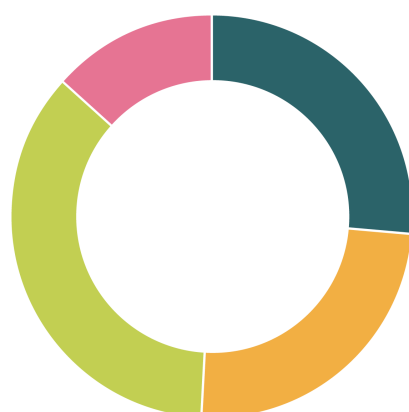
6. If your child does NOT have an EHCP - Are you happy with the support your child is getting in education?

Yes	7
No	15

When asked why they were not happy they mentioned unmet needs, waiting for an EHCP, only basic support offered, limited communication amongst school staff about the child's needs and not enough external specialist input.

Nearly all parent/carers stated that education had numerous areas for improvement, such as better joint working with professionals, especially when things were not going well. They highlighted the importance of parents/carers being listened to and raised concerns at the under reporting of SEND needs. Furthermore, they emphasised the need for schools to improve the support offered to children and young people with sensory needs and social, emotional, and mental health needs.

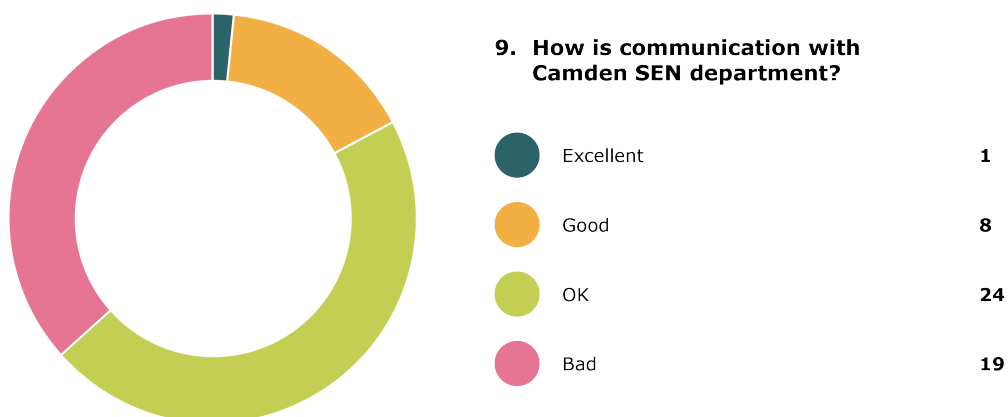
When asked about communication with school, the majority felt this was satisfactory (excellent, good, or OK).



8. How is communication with School?

Excellent	14
Good	13
OK	19
Bad	7

When asked about communication with the Camden SEN Team the majority felt it was OK or bad.



Parent/carers survey comments on education:

"My child is in yr 6. The senco at the school is useless and no help at all"

"Wait times are horrible ... Communication is lacking between departments - Too many teams within 1 service"

"CAHMS and other professional are saying that my son needs an EHCP but the school are saying that they won't do it because they feel he doesn't need one ..."

"The school has failed with their teaching practice. Despite spoon feeding them they don't want to differentiate their teaching content to child capabilities. They don't know how to sensory regulate their learners but are adamant to follow their ineffective teaching strategies and practice."

Summary

Children and young people receiving SEN support and ENG funded support in Camden far out-numbers those who have an EHCP. It is noted that a relatively small number of these families attended the event and/or completed the survey to give their feedback.

The views and experiences of these families play an important part in understanding the effectiveness of SEN support and identifying areas for improvement.

Parent/carers experiences show that there is a huge pressure on the SEND education system and that many families feel let down and that things are not good enough. This is evident throughout parent/carers experience of the system; from communication with families, assessments, decision making processes right through to the meeting a child or young person's needs in education (whether in or out of a school building).

SENDIASS Comments

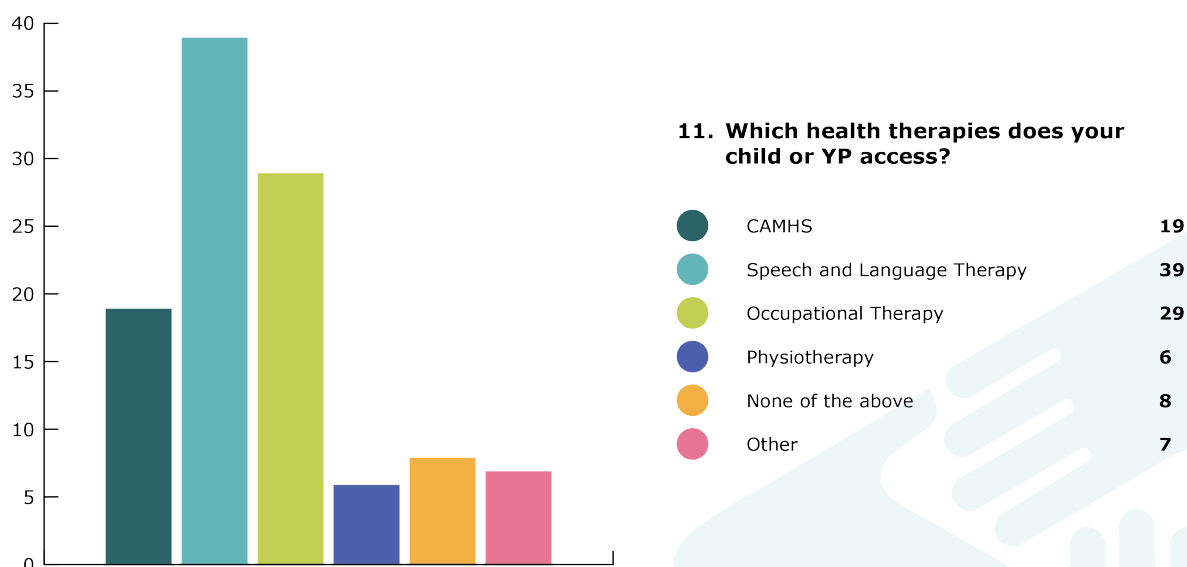
Evidently most parents/carers, who contact SENDIASS, have children/young people who do not have an EHCP and have concerns with aspects of their child's SEN support. For instance, issues with their Support Plan/Individual Education Plan (IEP), absence of identified needs, uncertainty of provision/interventions given and its regularity, lack of regular Support Plan/IEP review meetings and parent/carers not invited to be part of the discussions, planning or target setting.

Forum Comments

The biggest issue we have heard from parents and carers this year is lack of "appropriate" provision – mainstream schools not meeting needs and a lack of specialist provision. The "system" response to this really contributes to parents' difficulties. With parents often feeling the system is bureaucratic, unsympathetic and unable to respond with flexibility. Lack of communication and accountability adds to this. Parents continue to feel confused about processes and the advice and support given by different schools, individuals and services can vary widely.

Health

Parent/carers reported their children accessing mainly Speech & Language Therapy, Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Occupational Therapy (OT.)



There was a split response to services with 51% being happy with therapies and 49% reported not being happy.



12. Are you happy with the health therapies your child/YP receives?

Yes	24
No	25

When asked why they might not be happy they commented:

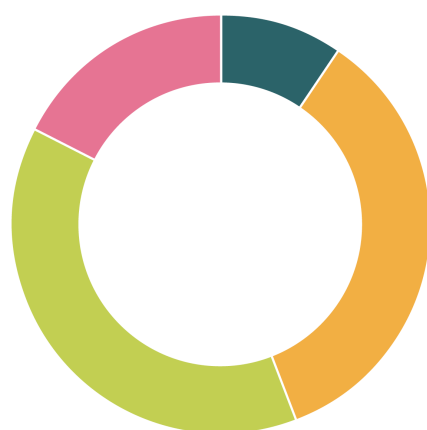
"Therapies are low quality/ short term and impossible to obtain and are frankly negligent at best."

"The support is low level and not regular, despite her very poor mental health."

"Not enough hours are dedicated to the required therapies. (15hrs a year for speech therapy!!)"

"We're happy with the private salt and private ot, but we shouldn't have to be paying for private salt and private ot just because he's not able to access the ones in a school, and because his EHCP isn't properly specified and quantified."

Respondents thought communication with health professionals was satisfactory with the majority finding it OK (38%), good (35%) or excellent (10%).



14. How is the communication with health professionals?

Excellent	5
Good	18
OK	20
Bad	9

When asked what else they would like to say about health provision some parents commented:

"I have found us to be "bouncing" from 1 service to another where 1 service would recommend another & vice versa without us getting some ACTUAL support/outcome in a timely manner."

"I think more things could be face to face - a lot of things seem to be done from zoom! and I think there's a lot of chasing - it would be good if they could keep people up to date via phone or email."

"The health check for post 14yr olds is unacceptable - how can the NHS pay for this when it's a non-service?"

Summary

Some parents criticised the quality and availability of therapies, describing them as low quality, short-term, and difficult to obtain. They considered the lack of regular support concerning, particularly for children with poor mental health. Inadequate allocation of therapy hours was also mentioned.

Some parents expressed frustration at having to resort to private therapy options due to the lack of services in schools and the insufficient specification and quantification of their child's Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

The reliance on virtual platforms like Zoom for appointments was a concern for some parents, who expressed a desire for more face-to-face interactions.

Parent/carers also mentioned the need for better communication via phone or email to keep them updated on their child's progress and highlighted the issue of being bounced between different services without receiving tangible support or outcomes in a timely manner.

SENDIASS Comments

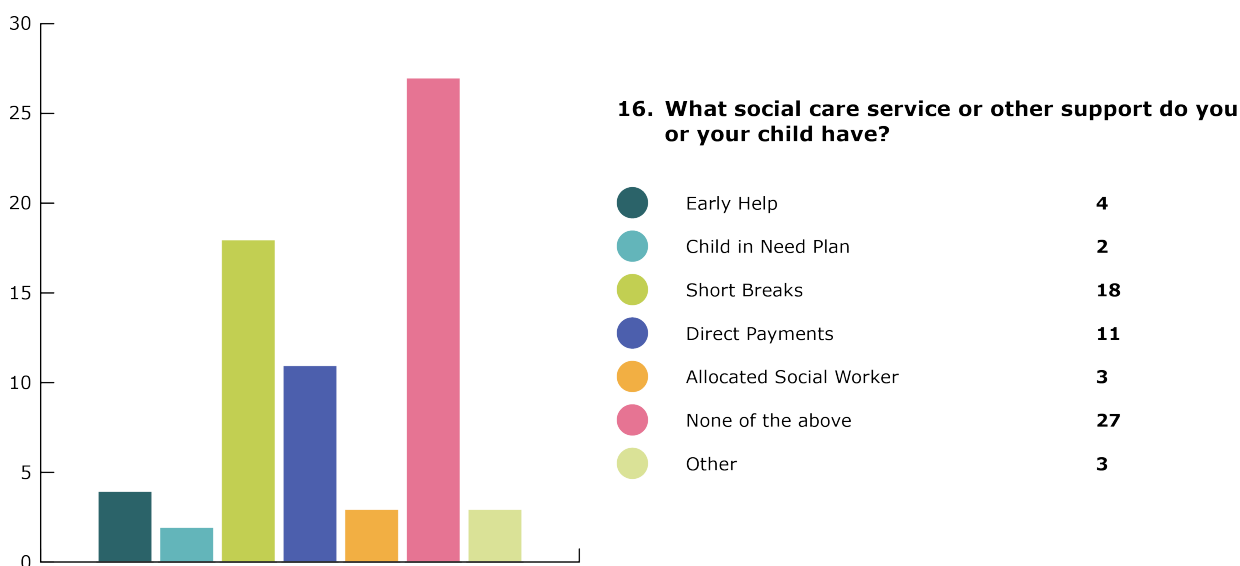
Parents/ carers are often unsure who should be making referrals for health services and they 'bounce' back and forth between GP's and educational settings. The waiting times for an assessment is their main issue, children are undiagnosed for long periods and parents are uninformed about how they can support their child. While young people are left feeling unsure about their SEN, which impacts their SEMH. Parent/ carers are often unsure about the expectations of SLT and OT involvement and there is a confusion about their role in the annual review process.

Forum Comments

This year parents and carers have highlighted issues around therapy provision – plans are not specified enough, the delivery of provision is unclear or lacking and the sense that getting therapy support for those without an EHCP is patchy and limited. There is also concern around waiting times for CAMHS and for Autism assessment and diagnosis, the actual support there might be post-diagnosis and some concerns around "gatekeeping" – the system relying on school's input more than parents and this causing a barrier to support.

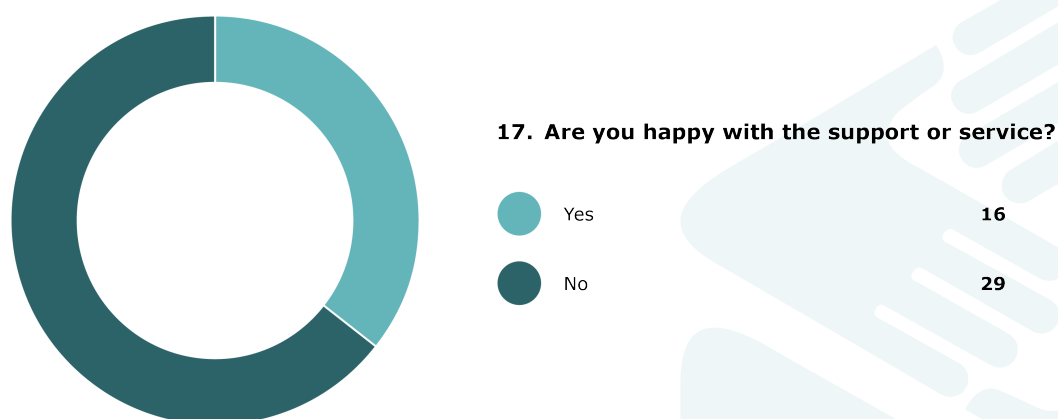
Social Care

Parents/carers reported receiving different social care support with the majority reporting that they did not receive any support. The majority of parents/carers who received social care support (such as short breaks, direct payments and early help) said that their child had an EHCP.



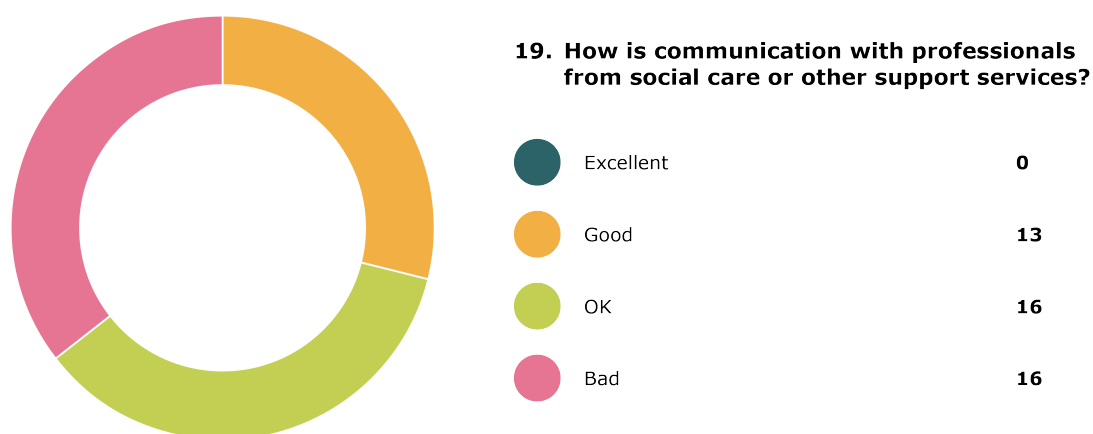
Most parents/carers said they were not happy with the support they were receiving – but it must be noted that many of these had also said they do not receive any support.

The majority of families reporting they received Short Breaks said they were happy with the service.



Many of the parent/carers stating they were unhappy mentioned limited hours, absence of transparency of what could be offered, low payment for carers causing difficulties with recruitment and the reduction in support when transitioning into adult social care. Many of the people responding that they were not happy with the support also stated they were not receiving any support - so their dissatisfaction would be with eligibility rather than the service provided.

People felt communication with social care was mixed: bad **36%**, OK **36%** and good **29%**.



When asked for any other comments about social care services they said:

"Too long a wait for everything."

"Services need to be more up front about what they can and can't deliver and more creative about finding alternatives."

"Early help are not an appropriate option for my family's level of complex needs."

"It's not enough hours. We asked for some respite and were denied. It's also been hard to recruit and retain carers for short breaks, the rate they pay is too low and the administration is a lot on top of all the other things we have to do."

"I often find myself burnt out trying to get the best possible support for my child. It can get exhausting & you kind of settle with what is offered if any."

"It all feels very opaque and more focused on internal structure, organisation, budget management etc. than on meaningful communication, collaborative working and identifying and meeting needs."

"... it's also been hard to recruit and retain carers for short breaks, the rate they pay is too low and the administration is a lot on top of all the other things we have to do."

Summary

The picture is mixed as people have very different experiences of social care depending on the needs of their family - eligibility and thresholds remain a concern.

One significant issue that needs to be recognised is the national shortage of support workers and the ongoing recruitment crisis. Many parents/carers have expressed difficulties in finding and retaining carers for short breaks due to low payment rates and the administrative burden involved. This shortage has resulted in limited hours of respite care and added strain on parents/carers, leading to burnout. It is crucial to recognise and address the national crisis in support worker recruitment to ensure adequate and sustainable support for families in need.

Overall, there is a need for clearer information about available services and alternatives, as well as addressing the challenges of long wait times to access in borough short breaks services and the difficulties in recruitment of support workers.

SENDIASS Comments

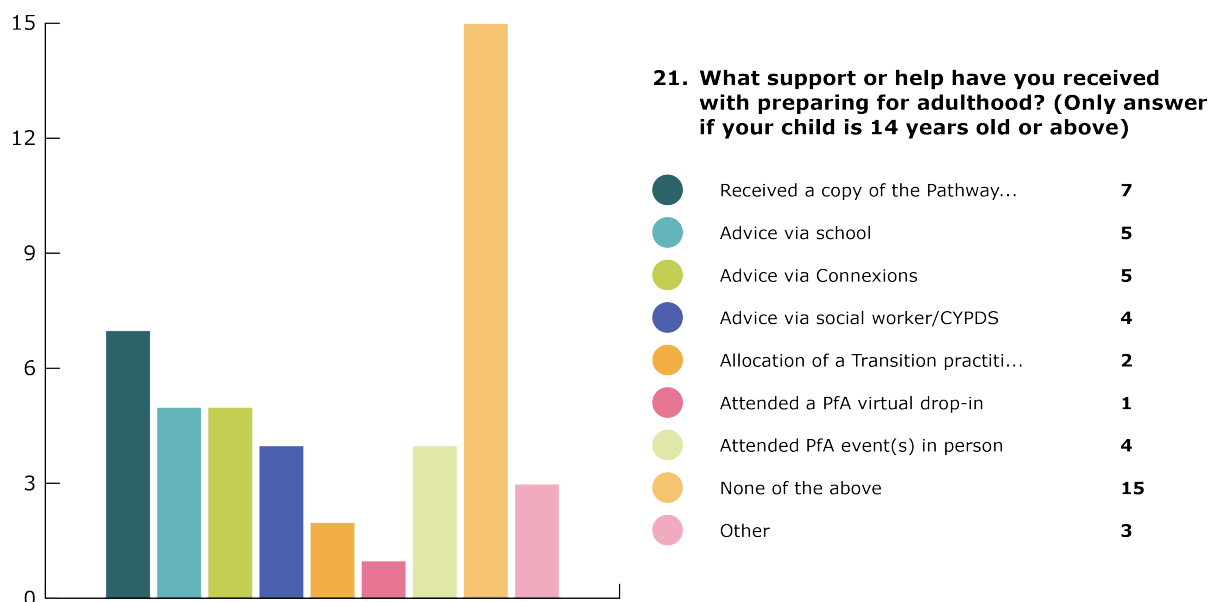
Most parents/ carers who contact the SENDIASS service have social care needs that can be met through the universal and targeted services, and they require information. A few contact us feel they need additional help like a break from their caring role or someone to help their child access the community as they are isolated. Parents/ carers are unsure how they can access social care support and are unaware of the care and needs assessments (Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014) they can request. Those with EHCP's do not understand how they can get a personal budget.

Forum Comments

Parents and carers have highlighted social care issues around: overnight respite for post 18's (inappropriate offer, timescales for reasonable adjustments to be made, waiting times and unclear delivery processes – it might be in the care plan but how to we access it?), lack of support workers, so DP hours not being fulfilled and access to social care support and eligibility criteria. Parents comment on the gaps between and around Universal services and specialist services. If you don't meet the thresholds for specialist services, but can't access Universal services, what do you do? More information and support is needed to navigate the system and the different services available (LA, voluntary sector and out of borough). The Local Offer website is not considered to be a useful tool. For those with a social care support plan closer scrutiny of what is actually being delivered is needed. The reality, too often, is that families are left without the support they have been assessed as needing.

Preparing for Adulthood

Parent/carers were asked about the transition support they received around Preparing for Adulthood (PfA).



NB. The response is affected by parents of younger children also answering this question, intended for over 14's only.

Nearly all of the parents/carers with children aged 14-16 years were unhappy with the transition support they received and reported that no information was provided to them. The majority had a child with an EHCP and would have been preparing for, or already had, their Year 9 Annual Review.

Of the parent/carers with young people aged 17-25 years; half were satisfied with the transition support they received, but the other half felt they were not given an appropriate level of support and felt there needed to be better communications with and from, relevant professionals.

Parents and carers commented:

"You cannot help but feel that children services - social medical and education want to get rid of you as soon as possible. I've never felt like more of a problem and nuisance than when we hit transition ages."

"Transition to adulthood is a scary time and there are lots of unknown areas. At the moment I feel the information received is good, but I worry a lot about moving across to the adult services. There does not seem to be a real commitment to ensure that my child has much choice of what to do or where to live which makes me very sad."

"Not really any support at all."

"What flipping transition support????"

"YP will be in school till he's 19 but I've got information about the option, when time for him to move."

"Often you want what's available to be better for your child. But I have found groups run by Parent Forum help me to accept those limitations and realise what I can do things about and what I can't. This helps enormously with the psychological stress involved."

Summary

The Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) transition support offered to young people with or without an EHCP was an issue that nearly all the parents/ carers raised. But it wasn't clear what support they felt was missing such as education, employment, independent living, community inclusion or health.

SENDIASS Comments

The majority of parents/carers who have young people with EHCP's are unaware of the importance of the year 9 annual review where PfA discussions should take place and the focus of outcomes shifts to PfA planning. For those who have SEN support, the parents/ carers are primarily thinking about the SEN support their child receives as there are concerns with the support being offered. Unfortunately, PfA transition and planning is not their main focus, and the support of professionals to initiate those conversions would be beneficial.

Forum Comments

Preparing for Adulthood support for families with young people under CYPDS is developing and well received by parents – the Pathways document is helpful to those who see it and the PfA.

Event was thought to be helpful to many. PfA drop-ins are also welcomed. But there's still the sense that, although there might be better planning ahead, it is unclear what it actually leads to. It would be beneficial for education to be more involved so that timely information about college places and Supported Internships could be provided. For people outside of CYPDS the support around PfA is less clear.

ABOUT THE FORUM AND SENDIASS

- **85%** had heard of the Camden Special Parents Forum and **82%** had joined the mailing list and/or forum events.
- **67%** agreed they felt more confident as a result of joining the forum and **73%** felt better informed.
- **93%** had heard of SENDIASS and **65%** were happy with their support.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON SERVICES

Is there anything else you would like to say about your services?

"It is usually individuals, rather than services in general, that stand out, even if it is only for the duration of a phone call or one email exchange - a positive interaction helps, even if the answer is 'no', but a negative one creates another tailspin of despair."

"We are isolated. It plays into the hands of the SEN team for us to not be connected with other families going through what we're going through ..."

"Applied for transport to school help and refused. Appears need to appeal for any service in order to succeed which is unacceptable."

"Would dearly like my son to get involved with activities, there are not much to get him involved in Camden, so he tends to stay home after school and during holidays!"

"Housing Needs seem to be under looked when there is a child with additional needs."

"Happy with the services I get, they are very useful and helpful."

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides the views of the **55** people who answered the survey in **March and April 2023** and additional comments from the forum and SENDIASS. It is a snapshot and there will be many other views and experiences that are not represented here.

The low response rate shows that more needs to be done to meaningfully engage with parents and carers and prove to them that their participation is worthwhile, that their experiences are listened to and acted upon, and that attitudes, approaches and services can change.

This report acknowledges the challenges faced by parents, including inadequate funding, challenges around eligibility, delays in assessments and EHCP provision, lack of appropriate resources, and insufficient collaboration between agencies. These challenges, in addition to continuing difficulties in simply navigating the system, have left parents feeling overwhelmed, unsupported, and often uncertain about their child's future.

Education was a major area of concern for parents, with many stating that the provision outlined in their child's EHCP did not meet all their needs. SEN Support was also highlighted as an area of concern. Communication with the SEN Team and schools varied, with some parents expressing dissatisfaction.

In terms of health services, parents had mixed opinions about therapies, with some criticising the quality and availability of services. Communication with health professionals was considered satisfactory by some, but there were concerns about being bounced between different services without receiving timely support.

Social care support received mixed reviews, with some parents satisfied with short breaks and direct payments, while others expressed concerns about limited hours, lack of transparency, low payment rates for support workers, and reduction in support during the transition to adult social care.

Preparing for Adulthood support was also discussed, with parents highlighting issues such as unclear processes. The Local Offer website was not considered useful by parents.

Next Steps:

- **Address low response rate and parent fatigue:** Recognise the need for a more meaningful and sustainable feedback process that leads to positive change. Find ways to engage parents effectively and ensure their feedback is valued and acted upon.
- **Improve education provision:** Take parents' concerns seriously and work towards better collaboration between professionals, addressing issues of underreporting of SEND needs and improving support for children with sensory and mental health needs.
- **Enhance health services:** Address criticisms regarding the quality and availability of therapies, ensuring regular and adequate support for all children with SEND. Consider more face-to-face interactions and improved communication to keep parents updated on their child's progress. Monitor waiting times and support provided whilst waiting.
- **Tackle social care challenges:** Recognise the national shortage of support workers and the impact it has on families. Increase payment rates to attract and retain support workers, improve access to services, and provide clearer information about available support and alternatives.
- **Support the preparation for adulthood:** Provide better transition support, ensuring that parents and carers have access to the necessary resources and information to not only navigate the system effectively but also to achieve the next steps their young people need. Improve the Local Offer website to make it more useful and user-friendly so that everyone knows where to turn for information and advice.

By addressing these issues and working collaboratively with parents, policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders, a more inclusive and supportive environment can be created for children and young people with SEND and their families in Camden, enabling them to reach their full potential.

Camden Special Parents Forum and SENDIASS 2023

CamdenSPF@kids.org.uk

SENDIASS@camden.gov.uk