



## **Impartiality Policy**

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SENDIASS Leicester is funded by the Leicester City Local Authority. The service operates at arm's length from the Local Authority and it is based within the voluntary sector and is managed by the School Development Support Agency (SDSA).

In terms of direct support to parents/carers and children and young people targets agreed within the Annual Plan relate to the number of interventions that have taken place to support children and young people and their parents/carers. This emphasis upon numbers rather than outcomes means that the Service has greater potential for impartiality; there are no restrictions such as aiming to reduce the number of SEND appeals (which might be a target imposed centrally upon LAs).

SENDIASS Leicester strives to offer an impartial service to all children and young people and their parents/carers who use the service. By impartial, we mean that the information, advice and support provided will be as fair and free from bias as possible – that is to retain total objectivity in all areas of our work. Our aim is to enable children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers to have their say regarding the education the child/young person receives. Enabling children and young people and their parents/carers to 'have their say' or have a voice may involve advocating for them over the telephone to other agencies etc, helping them to develop the skills to self-advocate in meetings or advocating on their behalf or assisting them to put their views in writing.

In terms of the relationship with the Local Authority, at a managerial level, the service has a Lead Officer within the Local Authority who is responsible for all contractual arrangements. The Service Manager meets on a regular basis with the Lead Officer in the LA – the Service Manager for the Special Education Service. These discussions focus upon contractual arrangements and outcomes for the Service. At an operational level the SENDIASS Officers and Manager communicate with the Education, Health and Care Inclusion Officers (EHCIOS) within the Special Education Service and discussion may focus upon new developments, training, trends that have been noted (any cases referred to, are anonymised in such a way that parents/carers cannot be identified) etc. Specific cases are only discussed with explicit permission from parents/carers.

The Service is managed by a Service Manager who works in partnership with a Strategic Development Lead. Reports to the Chief Executive and to the Advisory Board are delivered. This group has multidisciplinary membership that includes:

- Parents/Carers of children who have special educational needs and the young people themselves

- Voluntary organisations and parents' groups
- Representatives of CYP and Adult Services in Leicester
- Health and Social Care Representatives
- Educational Psychologists/Education Welfare Officers/Specialist Teachers from the Special Needs Teaching and Student Support Service
- Representatives from Schools e.g. Headteachers and SENCOs

At the outset, membership was sought from a wide range of professionals that the Service has contact with. In terms of children/young people and parental representation, the Service is keen to involve children/young people and their parents/carers. Members of the Group are regularly consulted about the membership of the group and attempts have been made to ensure that the group is as representative as possible.

The position of Chair cannot be occupied by an LA Officer. Dates of meetings are agreed in advance and circulated to all members and further meetings are normally set at the end of a meeting. Members of the Group are made aware that they can raise agenda items through contacting the Service Administrator.

The role of the Group includes:

- to raise awareness of the SENDIASS and advice on information and publicity
- to monitor the impartiality of the Service
- to monitor the performance of the Service
- to establish evaluation criteria and receive regular feedback from children and young people, parents, schools and the SENDIASS Team
- to contribute to the development of the Service
- to provide support, guidance and encouragement to SENDIASS staff
- to influence policy and practice within the city
- to represent the interests of children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers in all activities of the Service
- to integrate SENDIASS into local neighbourhood initiatives

There is no case discussion within these meetings but the Group does have a role in monitoring the impartiality of the service and in scrutinising managers in this regard. The role of the Group is to shape future service development but ultimate responsibility for the project remains with the Trustee Board.

Fundamental to the day-to-day management of the Service is the regular supervision of Officers and Volunteers. Officers receive supervision every six weeks. Volunteers receive supervision once a month (as well as on an ad hoc basis dependent upon the requirements of the intervention) and they have group support once a term. When volunteers are recruited, there is a recruitment drive. Volunteers are provided with in-house training which includes training around impartiality and how to recognise partiality in the views of others. All Officers and Volunteers have the opportunity within supervision to discuss interventions and support and are encouraged to reflect upon their practice including the impartiality of support provided to children, young people and their parents/carers.

In terms of meetings with service users, most meetings are held at Alliance House – this building is based within the city centre and is a neutral venue. The meeting rooms are private and confidential as well as being fully accessible. Meetings can also be held upon request, where there are specific reasons to do so such as a parent's disability/health needs or family circumstances, at a parent's home or other community venue. Where there may be interpreting needs, interpreting (including BSL) is bought in from the Local Authority.

Officers and Volunteers all receive regular training from a range of providers including for example: in-house, Safeguarding Children's Board, LA and national organisations such as the National Information Advice and Support Services Network (NIASSN) and the Independent Parental Special Educational Advice Service (IPSEA). The practice of all Officers and Volunteers is informed by resources provided by IPSEA and the online legal training modules undertaken (3 levels) which are written by a team of lawyers and are therefore as free from bias as possible.

The Service has developed a very positive working relationship with the Local Authority and there is a mutual understanding that at times Officers may be supporting children and young people and their parents/carers to achieve an outcome which may be different from that sought by ECHIOs e.g. Officers may be supporting a parent to submit a SEND appeal and this may involve attending an appeal in support of a parent at which the ECHIO will be present representing the position of the LA. It is the job of Officers/Volunteers to provide parents/carers with information; there may be occasions where the Officer/Volunteer is supporting a parent to achieve an outcome which they may consider inadvisable, however, their role as advocate is still to enable the parent/carer to have a voice regardless of the outcome sought.

At the initial contact with the service user, the Officer/Volunteer seeks to ascertain the aim of the service user and would then provide the necessary information to enable them to make an informed decision / achieve their aims. The Officer/Volunteer would only speak to other agencies on behalf of the service user where explicit permission has been given that this contact can be made and agreement has been made about the content of the information to be disclosed. The Officer/Volunteer would make it clear to the representative from the other agency that any information disclosed would be passed on to the service user in order that the representative make an informed decision about what to disclose and that the service user is fully informed in the process and information is not withheld from them.

All records kept by the Service are kept in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the SDSA's data protection policy. Service user agreement is explicitly sought for the information to be kept on the computerised database (this database is password encrypted). All service users are made aware of the procedure for accessing their records on referral. Service users are also encouraged to self-refer in line with an empowering method of practice.

The Service also seeks to enable children, young people and their parents/carers to influence the strategic planning of services within budget constraints. The LA regularly seeks the assistance of the Service in gaining children, young people and parental/carer views

regarding service delivery etc. Where these views are sought, they are passed on to the LA without amendment regardless of the opinions expressed. Even where the views expressed by parents/carers may be challenging or controversial, no attempt is made to edit these views.

The Service seeks to involve service users in shaping services and as such seeks regular feedback from service users. Upon closure of an intervention, all service users are sent a questionnaire asking for their views about the service they have received (this can be done anonymously). This information is used to give feedback as well as identifying strengths and weaknesses in the service. It is also presented as monitoring information to the Advisory Group and the LA. Service users can also submit comments via the SENDIASS website contact form.

A commitment to the ethos of impartiality is embedded into all the work of the SENDIASS Service. This impartiality policy is reviewed annually and we welcome any views or comments.

***Reviewed: Sept 2020***

***Next Review Date: Sept 2021***