



Dorset SENDIASS

Annual Report

1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

31st March 2025

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Introduction

Dorset SENDIASS is a free, confidential and impartial service for children, young people and parents/carers requiring information, advice and support about SEND.

The aims of the SENDIAS Service:

- Provide a high quality, impartial, accurate and confidential service, which is at arm's length to the LA
- Provide advice relating to the relevant legislative frameworks by an IPSEA trained member of staff
- Ensure that service users understand their rights, roles and responsibilities
- Empower children, young people and parents/carers to take an informed and active part in decision-making in order to pursue desired outcomes
- Contribute to partnership working with providers of education, alternative provision, training, supported employment, health and social care
- Ensure service users' views are heard and understood
- Influence the future shaping of services for users through strategic partnerships and links

On 1st February 2022, Family Action, a charity delivering a wide range of family support services nationally, was contracted by Dorset Council to take over the delivery of Dorset's SENDIAS service in order to ensure that an impartial, compliant and effective service is provided.

Staffing and Teamwork

At the end of this financial year in March 2025, following successful recruitment campaigns, we had 4 Case Officers (part-time contracts - one 0.8, two 0.6, one 0.4), 1 Triage and Information Officer on a fixed-term one-year part-time contract (0.4) with a pending start date, 1 Project Manager (0.8) and an Operational Manager (0.2) in post.

The team has experienced staffing changes during the financial year. The SW Services Lead left the service in August 2024. The Triage and Information Officer left the service in July 2024. A part-time Case Officer (0.8) took flexi-retirement, moving to a 0.6 week since September 2024; however, this was balanced by another part-time Case Officer (0.6) increasing working hours to 0.8. At the start of the autumn term, the Service was operating with only two part-time Case Officers. New staff have been recruited and commenced their roles in October (0.4 Child and Young Person Lead) and January (0.6 Case Officer). A new Triage and Information Officer (part-time, fixed term for one year 0.4) started in April 2025 and at the time of writing this report is undergoing an Induction period.

The SENDIAS Service team focus remains service delivery and response times for initial enquiries, while staffing capacity has been addressed through the recruitment process and induction and training up of new starters. The Project Manager manages the team to ensure cases are only opened if Level 3 work and above is required. Longstanding ongoing cases are being worked on to ensure closure at the earliest opportunity as part of the transition to the new working model, in collaboration with Dorset Council SEND Services managers and Provision Leads. As part of this, parent/carers and other agency professionals' expectations are being managed to ensure understanding of the SENDIAS Service's remit, outcomes achieved and how re-referral can be made for further input as and when required.

All staff have completed the initial mandatory Family Action training and, with the exception of the new TIO, are trained in IPSEA Level 1, 2 and 3 (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) legal modules where relevant for their roles; these have been completed by attending the IPSEA webinars, including refresher courses. The TIO has commenced L1 IPSEA training.

Each staff member has an ongoing cycle of monthly case audits which are graded according to Family Action's evaluation criteria. These are undertaken by the Project Manager and conducted within the context of individual supervision sessions with the member of staff and case overview discussion of all active cases worked on by the Case Officer. Dip sampling of Initial Enquiries using a Level 1 / 2 audit tool is also conducted. This promotes good practice and enables all elements of service delivery to have quality and effective oversight, to allow for reflective learning, feedback and to promote a culture of continuous improvement. In December 2024, all staff completed the Family Action appraisal process. In between these times, there are team meetings, team briefings and peer support sessions. The team work remotely, meeting together on a bi-monthly basis in-person at Dorset County Hall, and maintain open and fluid conversations around case challenges, working positively together to maintain an efficient and creative outcomes-led service.

Initial Enquiries (Intervention Levels 1 and 2) and Casework (Levels 3 and 4)

During the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, **1302** parents/carers or young people contacted our Service (1198 in the previous financial year) – an increase of 104.

If an enquiry is marked as 'Closed Successfully', there has been information, advice or signposting provided that has been accepted by the service user as meeting their needs. There were **1227** Initial Enquiries closed successfully – an increase of **167** on the previous year.

All support given by the Case Officers is based on their IPSEA SEND Law Levels 1-3 training, knowledge of the SEND processes and experience of the Dorset County pathways. This support is accurate, impartial, confidential and at an arm's length as a service from Dorset Council.

The Service has implemented a new working model of advice at Levels 1 and 2 aimed at empowering service users to advocate for themselves, armed with the information and advice provided by the Service. Cases become active according to the Minimum Standards if support is required at intervention level 3 or 4: where a young person is accessing the service independently; cases are complex; or families need additional support (such as parents having learning needs or children and young people being in the care system). The new model successfully ensures consistent service delivery, reaching more service users in a timely manner and enabling enhanced outcomes.

Safeguarding

The Designated Safeguarding Lead is the SW Operational Manager; Deputy DSL is the Project Manager. The Project Manager has completed the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (PDSCP) - Multi-Agency Working Together in Safeguarding (Level 3) and PDSCP - Safer Recruitment. It is anticipated that the Project Manager will take over the role of DSL for the service once all internal and external training and policy requirements have been reviewed and are met.

All staff are trained or working towards completion of Safeguarding for Children and Adults Levels 2 and 3; Domestic Violence and Abuse Levels 2 and 3; and Bullying and Sexual Harassment e-learning by Family Action.

Cases during the financial year requiring a RAG rating of Red were as follows: Q1 – 3; Q2 – 2; Q3 – 1; Q4 – 3 = 9 total. Current cases with a RAG rating of Red (as of 31st March 2025) relate to school placement re-consideration following LADO referral; and 2 Annual Review support for young people accessing independently where safeguarding concerns were at a high level. SENDIASS Case Officers, with oversight from the Project Manager, work closely with Dorset Council SEND Service Managers/Provision Leads and Children's and Adult Services (via the new Learning and Belonging structure) to mitigate risks and support /empower young people and parents/carers through SEND processes.

Risk Assessments are conducted on opening of every case. A rigorous review system and safe closure procedure is in place, whereby risks are monitored and escalated/de-escalated through the RAG ratings

throughout intervention, or each time the service receives new information which impacts the risk levels identified. Red risk assessments include cases where children are missing education; mental health crisis or escalation; or those that have been referred to social care, including cases involving children in care and children under a Child Protection order. Special alerts are placed on accounts to inform the team of crucial information, such as social care status, self-harm, suicidal ideation or attempts, high risk vulnerability, gender identity and preferred pronouns, or parents needing support with learning or mental health needs.

Data Protection

All cases comply with Family Action's Data Protection Policy and there has been no breach of confidentiality at a level that requires reporting to the ICO.

During an Initial Enquiry at Level 2, staff gain service user's permission (parents/carers, or a child/young person) to hold and keep data on Inform, Family Action's case management system. Confidentiality and information sharing is discussed, after service users have read the Privacy Notice, which is signposted on our website, on the initial contact form and email response. The nature of consent is agreed and recorded on Inform. Consent, data handling, processing and retention processes are clearly detailed on all feedback survey forms and service users are asked to confirm that they have read and understood the Privacy Policy.

Summary of Data

INITIAL ENQUIRIES

Number of Initial Enquiries during 2024-25: 1302 (+104 from 2023-24 (1198):

Reason for contact	Number of Initial Enquiries
Assessment	15
Check-in/update	3
Complaint	41
Consent	0
Education	198
EHC plan	627
Exclusion	32
Feedback	1
Funding	7
Health Care	5
Outreach	7
Preparation for Adulthood	4
Professional Consultation	4
Provision/placement	241
Service information requested	8
Signposting only	24
Social Care	4
Transition	9
Tribunal	68
Tasks	0
Unknown	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>1302</i>

- **EHC Plan** continues to be the main reason for enquiries, totalling **627**. This has increased by 288 from 2023-24 (339).
- **Provision/placement** is the second highest reason for enquiry at **241**. This is an increase of 171 since 2023-24 (70).
- **Education** is the third reason for enquiry at **198**. In 2023-24 it was 344; a decrease of 146.
- **Tribunals** as the subject of enquiry at **68** has decreased by 85 from 153 in 2023-24.
- Data is somewhat consistent with 2023-24 with EHC Plans, Provision/Placement, Education and Tribunals as the top 4 main reasons for enquiry, with some fluctuation in positioning.

Initial Enquiries by Locality and Reason:

Reason for contact	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Unknown/Out of Area	Total
Assessment	5	1	2	0	3	2	2	15
Check-in/update	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Complaint	8	2	20	3	1	4	3	41
Consent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education	35	19	48	24	14	25	33	198
EHC plan	90	70	154	149	44	61	59	627
Exclusion	5	1	15	4	3	1	3	32
Feedback	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Funding	1	0	1	2	0	0	3	7
Health Care	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	5
Outreach	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	7
Preparation for Adulthood	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	4
Professional Consultation	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	4
Provision/placement	44	33	49	43	18	35	19	241
Service information requested	1	0	1	0	2	0	4	8
Signposting only	3	2	3	0	1	1	14	24
Social Care	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Transition	0	0	2	2	0	1	4	9
Tribunal	16	4	20	15	5	5	3	68
Tasks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Total	214	134	317	251	93	138	155	1302

Note: Enquiries from the same service user may be received more than once as repeat initial enquiries. This strategy will influence totals, although not dramatically.

- The Annual Report 2023-2024 consistently showed Chesil (18%) and East Dorset (18%) as the areas with the highest number of enquiries, with North Dorset third (15%).
- In 2024-25 East Dorset (24%) had the highest number of enquiries, with North Dorset next (19%) and then Chesil (16%).
- Across all localities, EHC Plan is the main reason for enquiries, which reflects the overall trend in reasons.
- 'Out of Area'/'Unknown' (155) – accounts for Out of Area (where service users are signposted to the relevant SENDIAS service for their council area) and Not Disclosed by the service user. Of the Not Disclosed, these include mainly IEs at Level 1 where detailed data is not recorded.

Breakdown of Reasons for Initial Enquiries:

Provision/Placement:

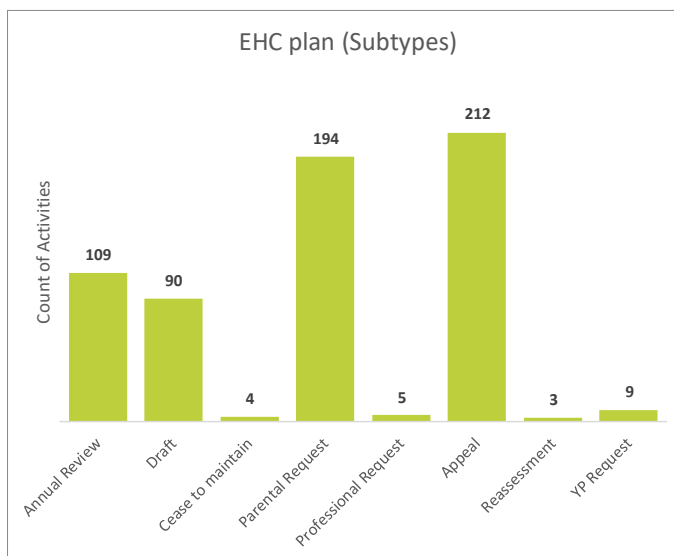
Provision/Placement does not have sub-categories on the Inform system and therefore breakdown of reasons cannot be provided. However, this over-arching category of reason for contact will cover enquiries where the CYP has an EHCP (and for these, the enquiry will relate to implementation of provision or how to request a change of placement, for example); and those where the CYP does not have an EHCP (where the enquiry will relate to SEN Support in school and the Graduated Approach). Whilst it will be recorded in the notes, there is no way of recording this currently on the Inform system under this category, for data download purposes.

EHC Plan

EHC plan

Subtype	Count of Activities
Annual Review	109
Draft	90
Cease to maintain	4
Parental Request	194
Professional Request	5
Appeal	212
Reassessment	3
YP Request	9
Unknown	1
Total	626

1



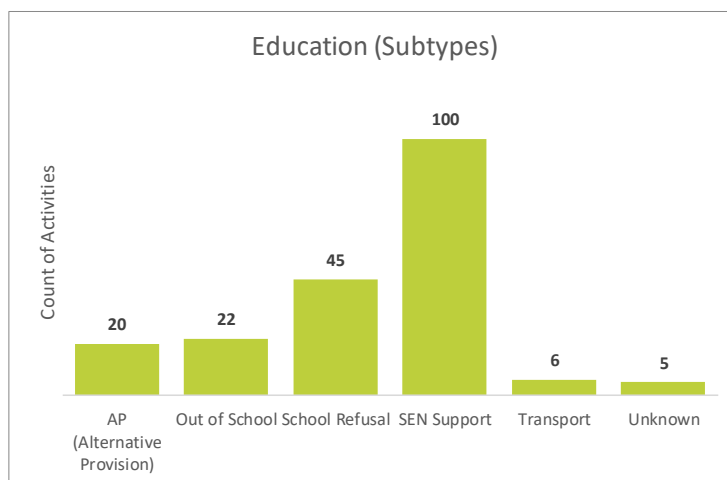
- Appeal accounts for the majority (34%) of IEs relating to EHCPs, with Parental Request (31%) the next highest subtype of reason for contact.

Education:

Education

Subtype	Count of Activities
AP (Alternative Provision)	20
Out of School	22
School Refusal	45
SEN Support	100
Transport	6
Unknown	5
Total	198

0



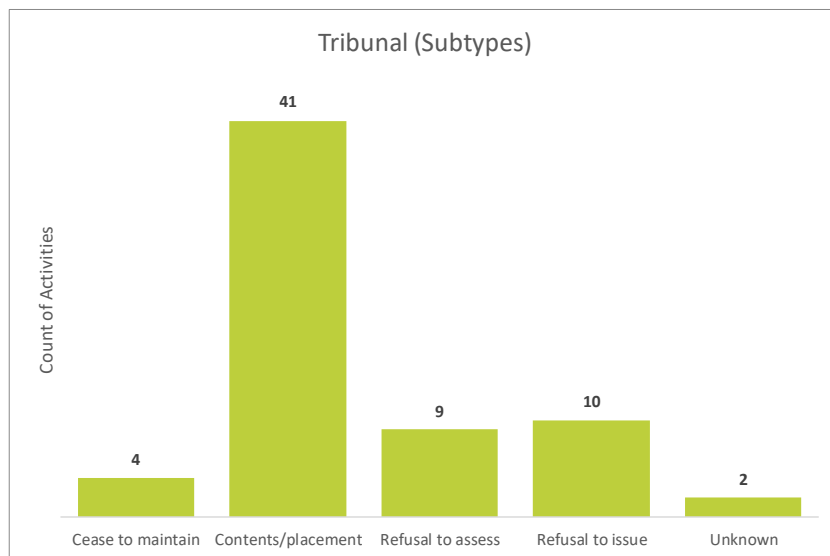
- SEN Support (51%), along with School Refusal (23%) and Out of School (11%), account for the majority of IEs relating to Education.
- There is a link between subcategories (SEN Support and Parental Requests), with many enquiries asking about ordinarily available provision and when an EHC Needs Assessment is triggered for the school or parent to submit an application.

Tribunal:

Tribunal

Subtype	Count of Activities
Cease to maintain	4
Contents/placement	41
Refusal to assess	9
Refusal to issue	10
Unknown	2
Total	66

2



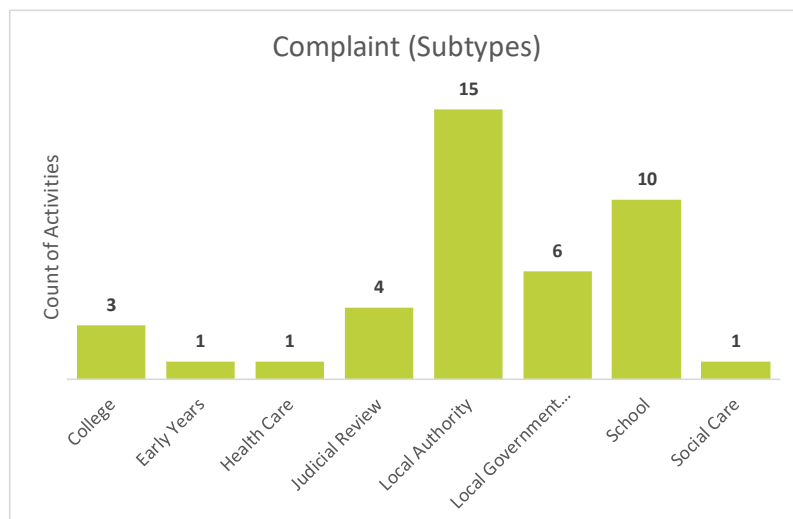
- The majority of enquiries within the Tribunals category relate to Contents/Placement Appeals of existing EHCPs (62%). Refusal to Assess (14%) and Refusal to Issue (15%) combined account for the next highest reasons for enquiry.

Complaints:

Complaint

Subtype	Count of Activities
College	3
Early Years	1
Health Care	1
Judicial Review	4
Local Authority	15
Local Government Omb	6
School	10
Social Care	1
Total	41

0



- There were 41 IEs relating to Complaints, (37%) in relation to the Local Authority and (24%) regarding Schools.

[Note: where the subtype is unknown this will be due to enquiries at Level 1 where generic information is provided around processes or the service user has not disclosed detail in their enquiry.]

Initial Enquiries Response Times:

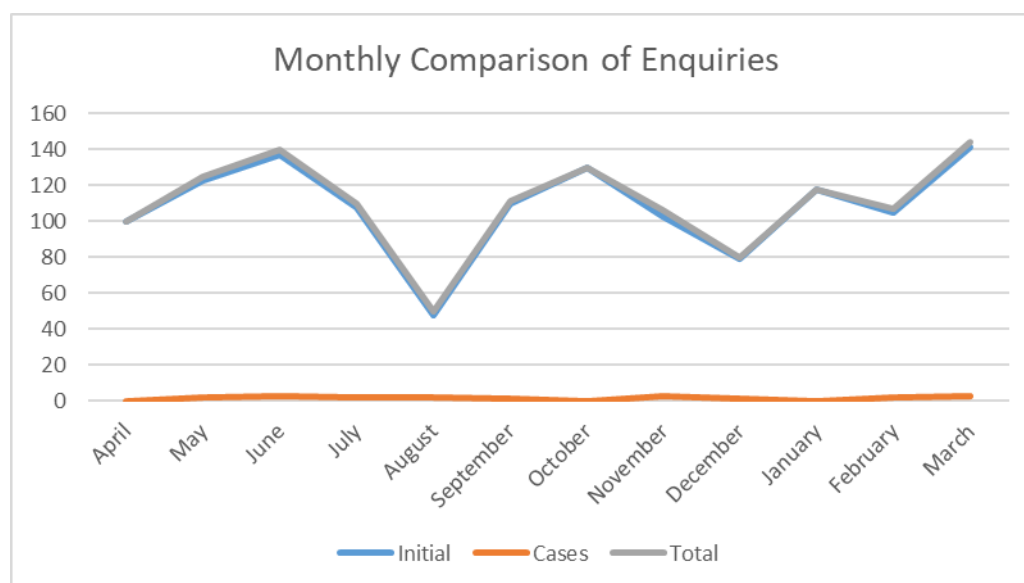
Response days (working days)	Number of Initial Enquiries	% (cumulative)	Target
2 days or less	389	30%	90%
3-5 days	466	66%	100%
More than 5 days	444	100%	
Not yet responded	3	100%	
Incorrect Dates	0	100%	
<i>Total</i>	1302	-	

Response days (working days)	Number of Initial Enquiries	% (cumulative)	Target
0	107	8%	
1	143	19%	
2	139	30%	90%
3	166	43%	
4	144	54%	
5	156	66%	100%
More than 5 days	444	100%	
Not yet responded	3	100%	
Incorrect Dates	0	100%	
<i>Total</i>	1302	-	

- 66% of enquiries were responded to within the target of 5 working days.
- 30% of enquiries were responded to within 2 working days.

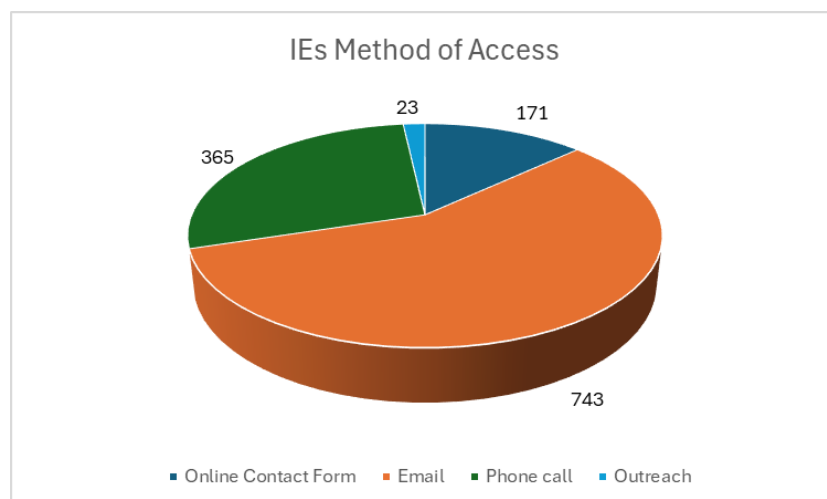
Staff capacity challenges, previously outlined, have contributed to the fall in this target with the Service operating without a Triage and Information Officer for 3 consecutive quarterly reporting periods. Service users are informed on receipt of their enquiry that we aim to respond within 5 workings days, but that during busy periods this can be up to 10 working days. With a full team of staff in place as of 31st March 2025, the target will be more achievable. It is worth noting that the quality of information, advice and support provided has been maintained to a high standard, as evidenced by the appreciation communicated via feedback from our service users.

Monthly Comparison of Enquiries Q1-Q4 2024-25:



The average number of enquiries per month from April 2024 to March 2025 is 109 (mean). Across the year, peaks are seen in June 2024 (137), October 2024 (130) and March 2025 (141). Overall, Initial Enquiries have continued to increase throughout the financial year. We experienced significant peaks of enquiries during key SEND process periods across the academic year in October 2024 (130), when Annual Reviews for phase transfer are taking place; June 2024 (137), when service users' concerns are raised about transition to new schools the following September; and March 2025 (141), when phase transfer EHCPs have been issued in the February.

Method of Enquiry:



Email remains the main method of enquiry, with phone call second and contact form third. The service remains accessible to all enquirers and therefore the reluctance of some to complete details in the online form does not preclude them from accessing SENDIAS services. 23 enquiries this year came from Outreach work at the Let's Talk SEND events in October 2024.

Types of Service Users and Locality:

	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Unknown/Out of Area	Total Cases
Parent/Carer	204	129	312	239	89	134	132	1239
Child	3	2	3	5	2	4	4	23
Professional	7	3	2	7	2	0	17	38
Friend	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neighbour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
<i>Total</i>	214	134	317	251	93	138	155	1302

- These 2024-25 figures are largely consistent with 2023-24, with 95% of service users being Parents/Carers (2023-24, 89%).
- The CYP Lead is dedicating time to direct work with young people who either self-refer into the service (23) or whose parents contact the service on their behalf and the CYP Lead follows up for young person's consent.
- There were 38 enquiries from professionals. These may be general enquiries for information, or referring a CYP into the service. In the latter situation, SENDIASS will then follow up with the CYP and parent/carer to gain their direct consent for involvement.

Initial Enquiries Total and Activity for Cases worked on by Locality during 2024-25:

	Initial Enquiries	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Total Cases
Active	1302	10	3	9	9	1	4	36

The number of cases with activities worked on in 2024-25 (36) has dropped significantly since 2023-24 (147). This is due to the new working model with fewer cases open.

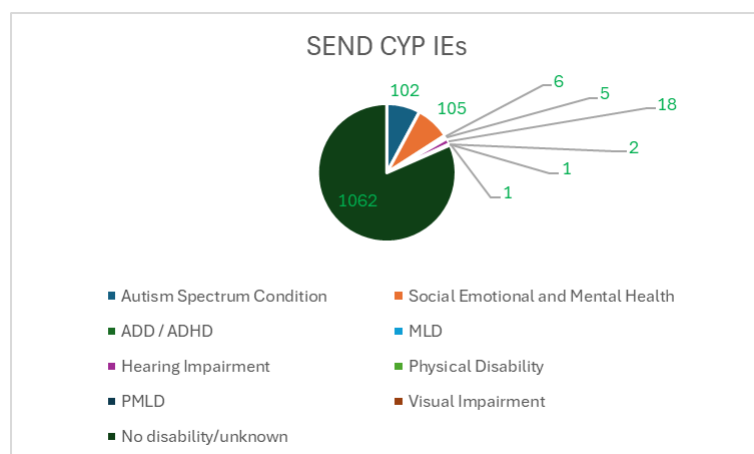
Enquiry Outcomes: Closures and Case Conversions during 2024-25:

Enquiry Status	Number of Initial Enquiries
Closed - made 3 or more attempts to respond	48
Closed - responded successfully	1226
Closed - no availability for meeting	5
Converted to case	18
Received	5
<i>Total</i>	1302

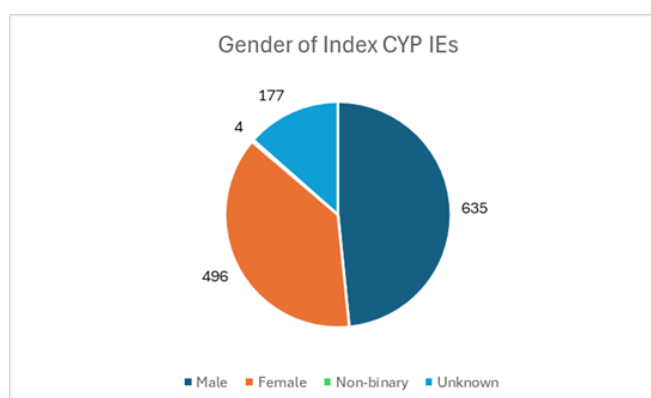
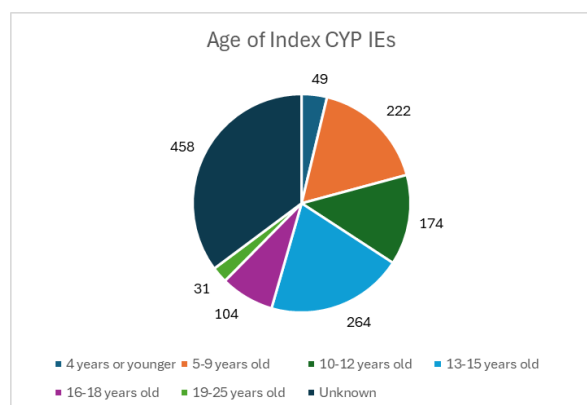
The number of IEs converted to case in 2024-25 is significantly lower (18) compared to 2023-24 (82); again, this is due to the new working model.

Demographics of Initial Enquiries during 2024-25:

Main Disability Index Child	SEND CYP IEs
Autism Spectrum Condition	102
Social Emotional and Mental Health	105
ADD / ADHD	6
MLD	5
Hearing Impairment	18
Physical Disability	2
PMLD	1
Visual Impairment	1
No disability/unknown	1062



[Note: 1062 (no disability/unknown) reflects the fact that a new system for recording primary area of need (according to DfE reporting categories) has only been implemented on the Inform system since February 2025 and therefore the previous data has not pulled through for this report under these new categories of recording. Within this figure, there will also be enquiries where the service user has chosen not to disclose this information (at Level 1 for example).]



[Note: This level of data is not mandatory for recording for Level 1 enquiries, and some service users may choose not to disclose this information, hence the 'unknown' category.]

Casework during 2024-25

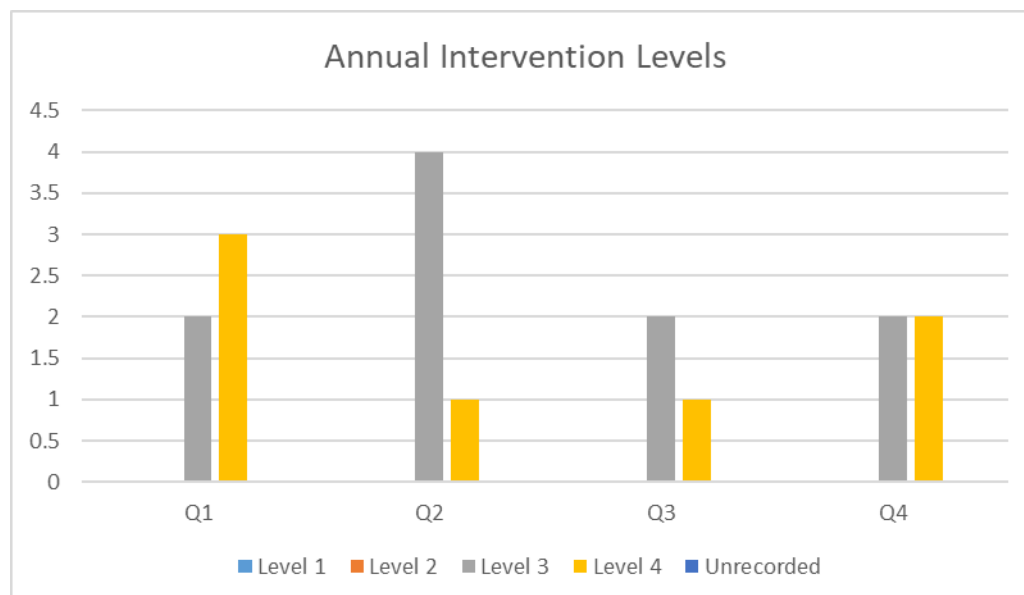
Intervention Levels of Cases opened and closed:

Intervention Level	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Total
Active							
Level 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Level 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Level 3	3	1	2	1	1	2	10
Level 4	1	1	3	2	0	0	7
Unrecorded	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	2	5	3	1	2	17
Closed							
Level 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Level 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Level 3	2	1	1	1	1	1	7
Level 4	1	0	2	2	0	0	5
Unrecorded	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	1	3	3	1	1	12

[Note: This table shows client accounts active during the reporting period (top table) and client accounts that were active and closed during the reporting period. 17 were active during the reporting period, of which 12 were closed during the reporting period, leaving 5 client accounts remaining active by the end of the reporting period.]

Comparison of Intervention Levels of Cases opened and closed during Q1 to Q4 2024-25:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Level 1	0	0	0	0
Level 2	0	0	0	0
Level 3	2	4	2	2
Level 4	3	1	1	2
Unrecorded	0	0	0	0

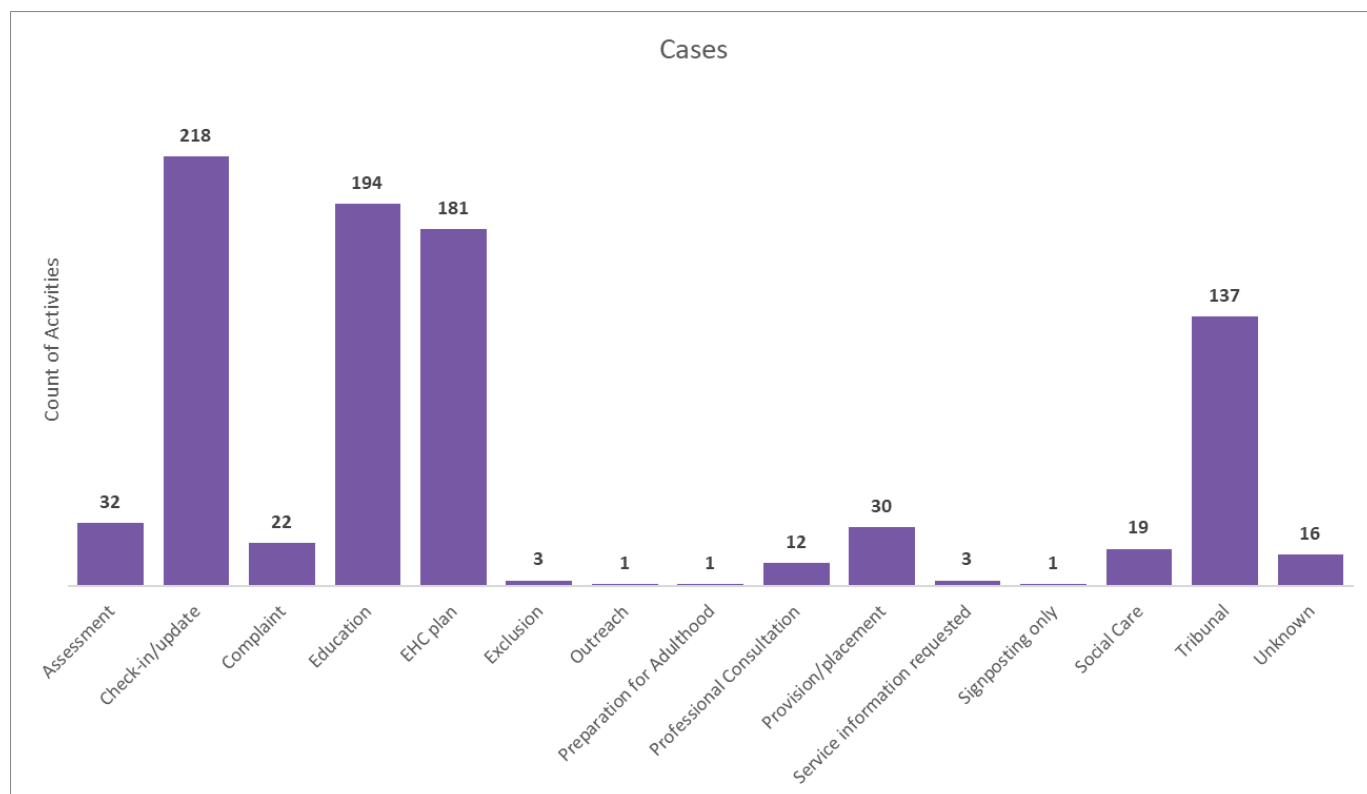


Closure of Cases and Outcomes during 2024-25:

Closure Type	Chesil (Weymouth and Portland)	Dorchester	East Dorset	North Dorset	West Dorset	Purbeck	Total
Disengaged	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Left Area	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Outcomes Achieved	4	2	5	3	0	2	16
Outcomes Partially Achieved	1	0	2	2	0	0	5
Signposted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Solicitor/professional Involvement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No availability for meeting	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Closed Families	5	2	7	5	1	3	23

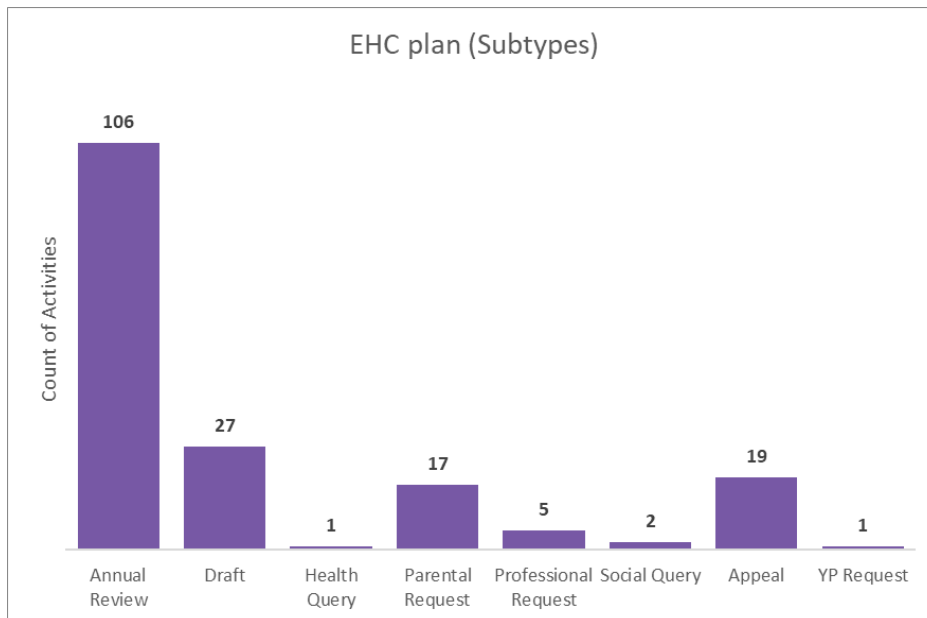
[Note: These figures relate to referrals opened and closed during the reporting period. Some may be the same client accounts, hence the higher number of 23 compared to 17 in the table above.]

Reasons for Case Activities during 2024-25:

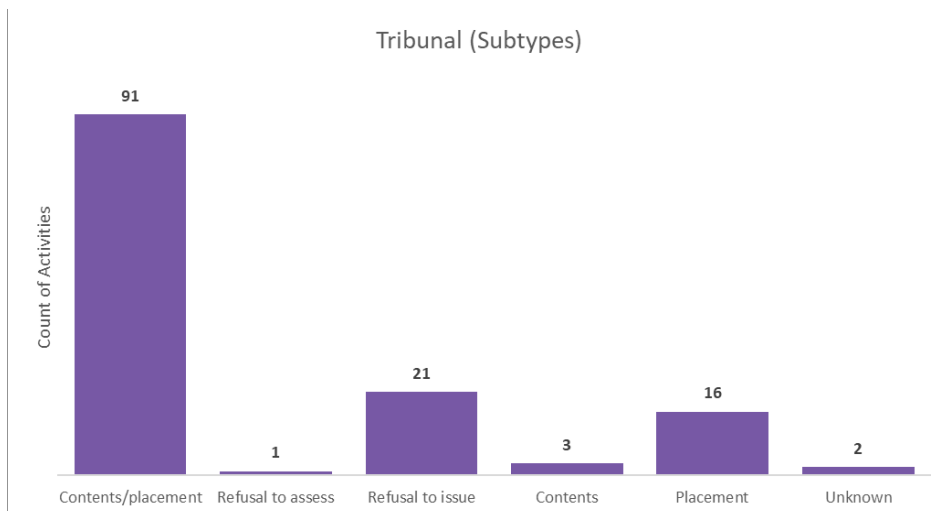


Breakdown of Reasons for Case Activities during 2024-25:

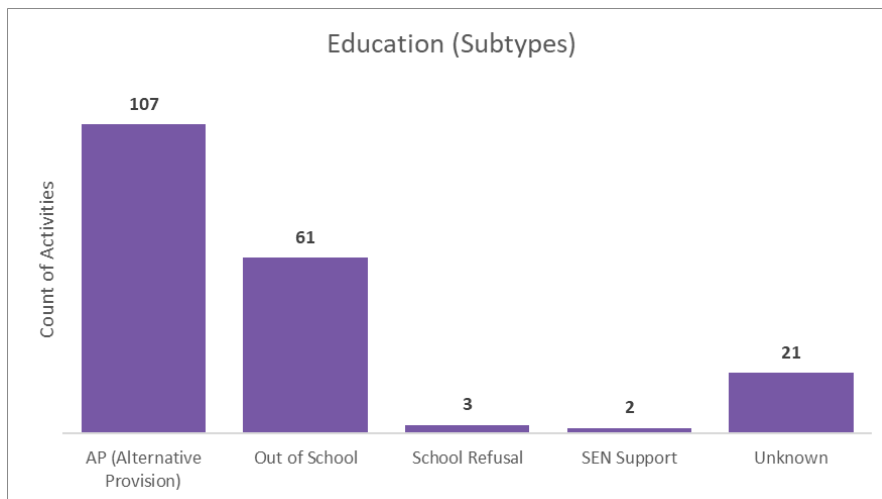
EHC Plan: (Note: There were 3 reasons for activities as EHCP with no subtype recorded, hence the difference between 181 overall and total of subtypes recorded below 178).



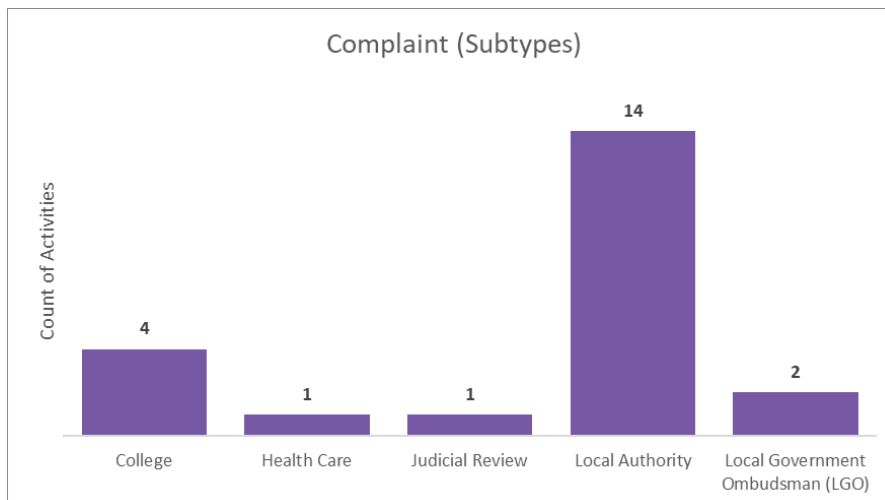
Tribunal: (Note: There were 3 reasons for activities as Tribunal with no subtype recorded, hence the difference between 137 overall and total of subtypes recorded below 134).



Education:



Complaint:



Where Education is the main reason for casework activity, this is around Children Missing Out on Education and Alternative Provision. (Note: Work to improve database recording around categories for CME, CMOOE and other definitions (EOTAS, EHE, EBSA) is current across Family Action, in order to provide meaningful data with greater depth of breakdown for Commissioners.)

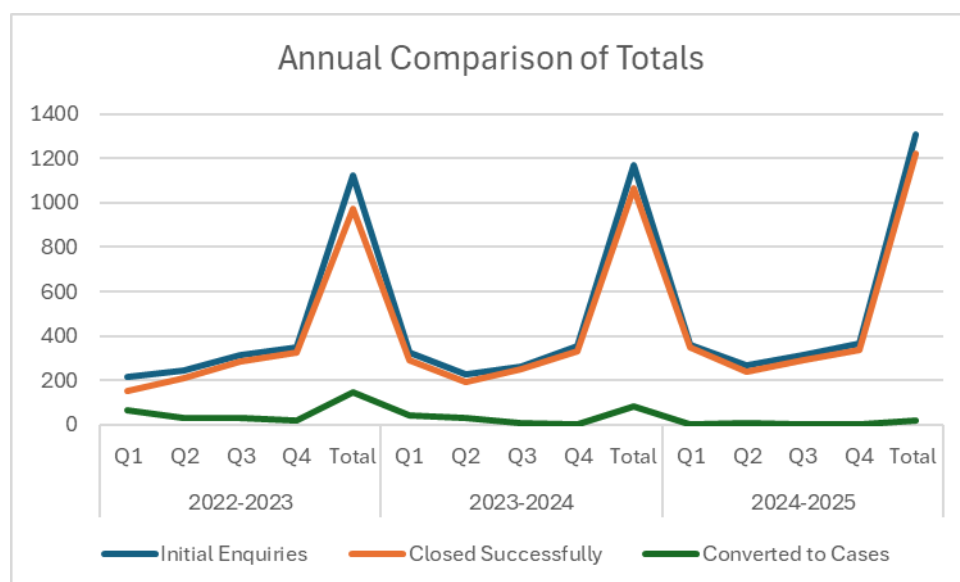
Schools with 2 or more cases in 2024-25

School District	Number of Index Children
East	2
Purbeck	2
EOTAS	3
Out of School	2

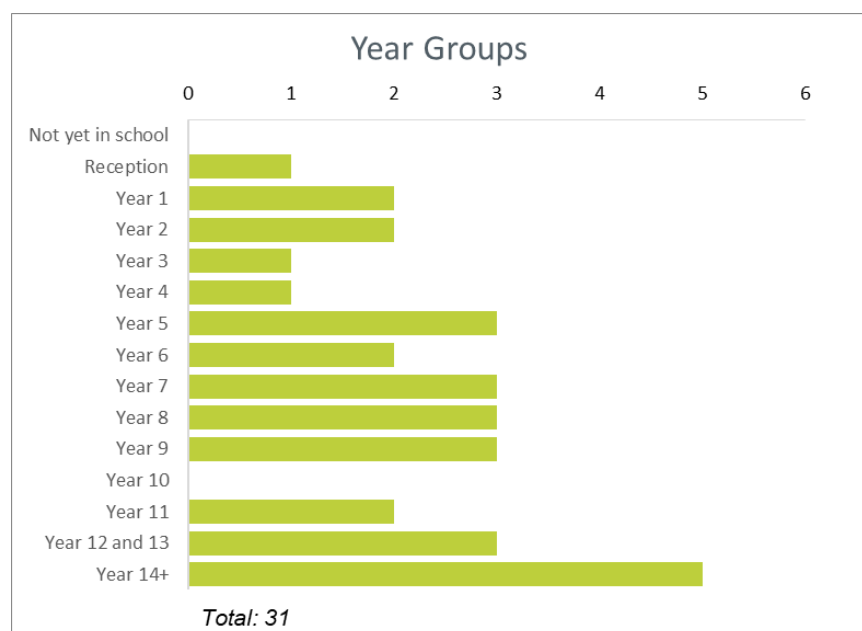
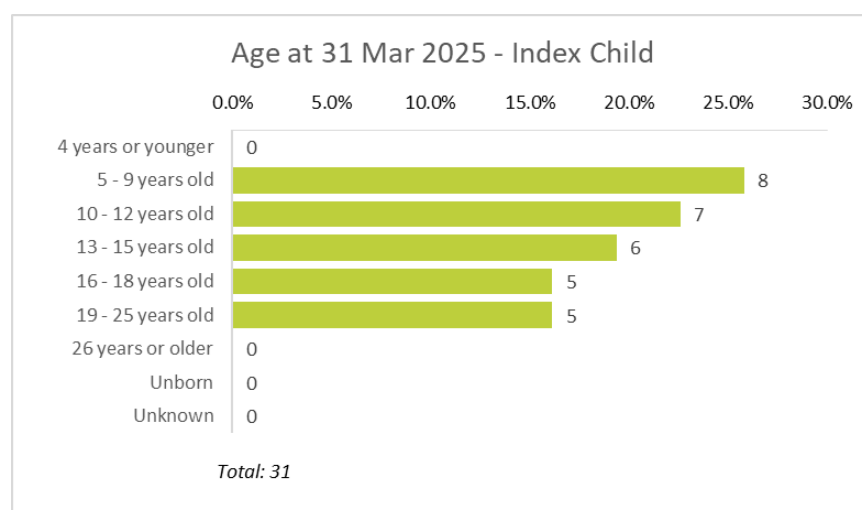
Comparison of Yearly Data over Quarters:

[Note: When running data throughout a year, there are small movements after the fact from data clean-ups and late recordings. Hence the discrepancy between the data reported quarterly and totalled in the table below (1309) and the end of year data (1302) earlier in this report. The deviation of 7 in a dataset of 1309 is to be expected and is not significant enough to cause concerns about data integrity.]

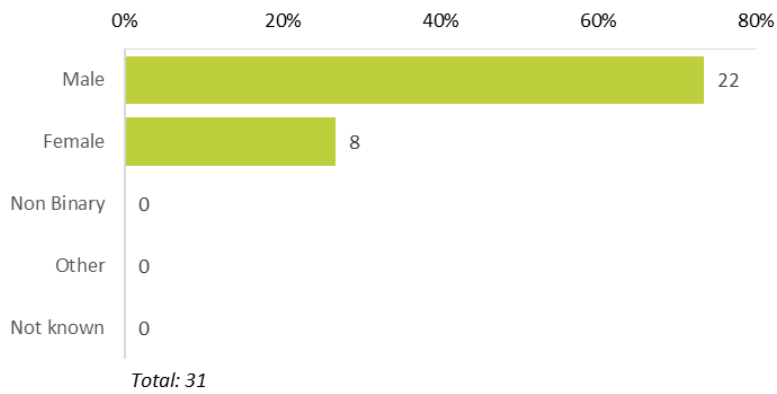
Annual Comparison	2022-2023					2023-2024					2024-2025				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Initial Enquiries	218	244	313	350	1125	328	225	261	355	1169	362	269	314	364	1309
Closed Successfully	155	208	283	328	974	290	194	253	331	1068	347	242	293	337	1219
Converted to Cases	63	34	30	22	149	40	32	7	2	81	3	6	4	4	17



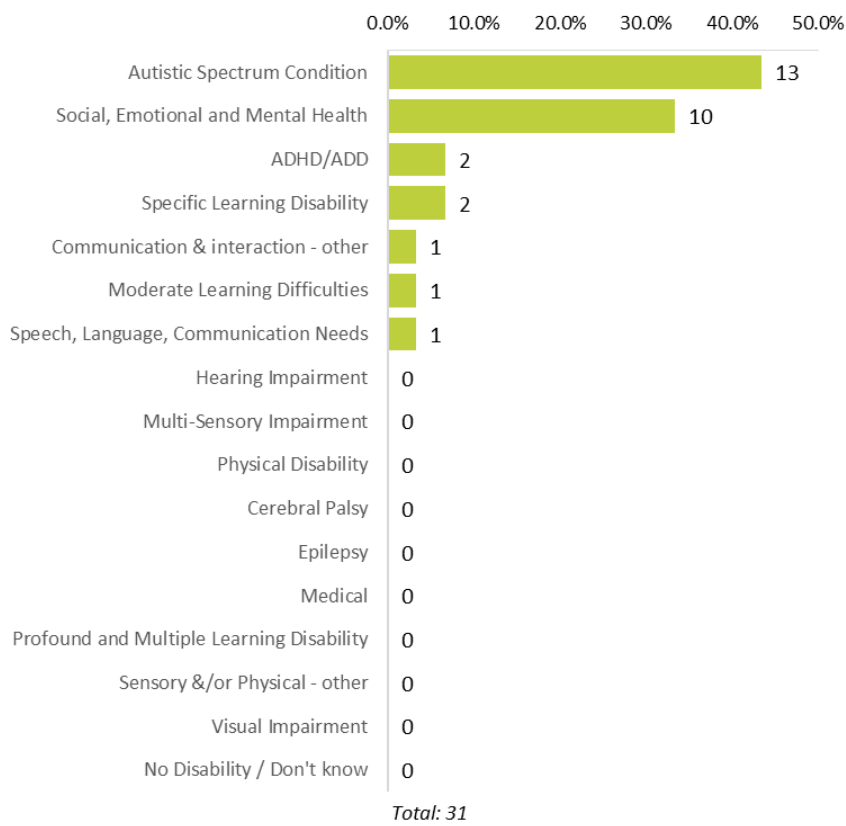
Demographics (Index Child/YP) relating to CYP with active casework on 31 March 2025 (including C/F from previous quarters)



Gender - Index Child



Main Disability - Index Child



Tribunal Data 2024-25

The data considered 6 active cases during the financial year, with a Tribunal Hearing date between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025.

This is a significant reduction on cases actively worked on that had a Hearing date within the reporting period compared to 2023-24 (50). However, it must be noted that with the new working model, information, advice and support relating to Appeal and Tribunal is increasingly being managed at IE Level 2 in 2024-25 when this is purely information-based advice, where service users are empowered to complete Appeal paperwork and move through stages of the Appeal process themselves. Also, there were 10 cases with Appeals lodged in the reporting period, but 4 had Hearing dates outside the reporting period and so are not included in the table below.

Locality	Type of Appeal	Outcomes
North	Placement only (I)	Tribunal Ordered in favour of parent
East	Contents and Placement (B,F,I)	LA Conceded prior to Hearing
Chesil	Placement only (I)	LA Conceded prior to Hearing
North	Contents and Placement (B,F,I)	Tribunal Ordered in favour of parent in respect of placement and partially in favour of parent in respect of contents
East	Contents and Placement (B,F,I)	Tribunal Ordered in favour of parent
North	Contents and Placement (B,F,I)	LA Conceded prior to Hearing

Mediation

All staff have attended, or are booked on, Global Mediation training over the past year and in the coming months in 2025. SENDIASS continued to work on advising families about opportunities for mediation and ensuring the child and young person voice was represented. During the financial year, Case Officers supported families to prepare for mediation and attended meetings where parents requested support as they felt unable to attend alone following advice received.

Strategic Themes Arising from Initial Enquiries and Casework

Strategic Thematic meetings are held between SENDIASS and LA representatives three times a year. The aim is to proactively promote collaborative working to support early intervention and improvement in transparency of processes and inclusive practices, thereby supporting positive outcomes for children and young people across the county:

- EHC Needs Assessment: transparency of processes and statutory deadlines; communication and co-production with parents/carers and CYP
- Placement/Provision – parental preference and the difficulties of visiting special schools, understanding Alternative Provision options, implementation of provision in EHCPs
- Mental Health in schools – EBSA and attendance
- Annual Review of EHCP – statutory timelines according to the Devon Ruling, draft amended plans and consultation processes for requests for change of placement
- Mediation – meetings not being arranged by the LA within the 30-day time period and LA representative attendance (particularly in role as decision-maker).

Strategic Functions and Accountability

Stakeholder Group

The Stakeholder Steering Group met three times during the year, interested parties included: Dorset Council, DPCC and Family Action, amongst others, including a wide range of represented roles such as Educational Psychologist, Designated Clinical Officer, DC SEND representatives, 0-25 Birth to Settled Adulthood Designated Social Care Officer for SEND and Service User representative. We continue to seek further involvement in the Steering Group from other sectors, such as Inclusion professionals and young person representatives, in particular, and welcome representation.

The strategic direction of the Steering Group is of co-production in line with our Minimum Standards and revised Terms of Reference (February 2024) and information sharing, which influences our Continuous Improvement Plan.

SW Operational Manager or Project Manager ensure SENDIASS attendance at strategic meetings, including the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board Meetings, and the DfE Ofsted Inspection follow-up meeting in March 2025.

As a result of an action from the 4th July SEND Inclusion and Partnership Board meeting, the Project Manager met with Dorset Council Data Reporting Team in order to clarify DfE data reporting categories around CME and progress work around aligning the 'Out of School' data from SENDIASS with these in order to provide more meaningful data reporting. This work is in progress and the Project Manager has met with Family Action's National SENDIASS Project Lead, who is currently working on improvements to the Inform database.

Project Manager met with NYAS Advocacy and LA Commissioning Manager to develop understanding over advocacy service remit, overlap and referrals between NYAS and SENDIASS.

Promotional and Community Events, Publicity and Feedback

a) Online Presence – Website and Facebook

Website Users, Views, Visits and Hits have continued to increase in 2024-25 with a total number of Active Unique Users at 8166 (Q1 2113; Q2 1800; Q3 2056; Q4 2197) of the Website and 405 followers on Facebook.

Resources and a new national FA SENDIAS website, with local links built in, is currently being developed with anticipated launch in late summer 2025. Co-production with local partners (Dorset Family Information Service, Dorset Parent Carer Council, Dorset Youth) will be coordinated by Dorset SENDIASS Project Manager over the coming months. This will provide a new set of resources for scheduled Facebook posts.

b) Networking and collaboration:

Networking with Dorset Council, health agencies and community/voluntary groups continues to remain a priority:

- DPCC meetings with Project Manager.
- Project Manager attendance/involvement at monthly themed Let's Talk Live Online Events.
- Project Manager meets regularly with Dorset Council with Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards Adviser, with a focus on early intervention and collaborative opportunities, quality assurance and potential training provision by SENDIASS for SEND Provision Leads in 2025.
- Project Manager meets monthly with Family Information Service (Information Development Manager) as part of a continuing collaborative initiative to align information and improve service user engagement at enquiry Level 1.
- Project Manager continues liaison with SEND locality leads, and, where required, initiates escalation to Service Managers in the Learning and Belonging Team.
- Project Manager has attended workshops and Core Group Project Meetings organised by Impower relating to the new VSEND Toolkit.
- Project Manager met with the EEET (Education, Employment and Training) Team to develop appropriate signposting and liaison for young people 16-18 years.
- All team members have attended various COP (Community of Practice) sessions within Family Action. These include SENDIASS, SEND, Family, YP and Safeguarding COPs. All team members attended the SENDIASS Community of Practice National Conference 21/01/25.
- Staff regularly book onto Continuous Professional Development courses run by IASSN; this year has included Vicarious Trauma Helpline Training and Tribunal Training.
- Project Manager attended the SW IASSN Regional Managers Conference 8-9 January 2025. This afforded the opportunity to also meet with the national IASSN team and national Parent Carer Forum representative.
- Project Manager attended and presented to the Team Around the School Early Years Locality Meetings set up by the Best Start in Life Advisors across the county.
- Operational Manager attended the two scheduled Senior Managers' SENDIASS New Model meetings held this quarter and also attended the YP focus/working group session.
- CYP Lead regularly networks and attends: Dorset Youth Regional Group, Local Alliance Groups, SEND Employment Forum, Dorset Unstoppables.

c) Feedback and evaluation: Survey data 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

Long Survey on case closure (6 responses):

Q: I found it easy to get in touch with the service

A: Strongly Agree – 67%

A: Agree – 33%

Q: The information, support and/ or guidance I received was helpful

A: Strongly agree – 100%

Q: I am happy with the service I received

A: Strongly agree – 100%

Q: I feel the service is impartial and fair

A: Strongly agree – 100%

Q: I am likely to recommend the service to others

A: Strongly agree – 100%

Q: I now have a greater understanding of the SEND arrangements that should be made for myself or my child/young person

A: Strongly agree – 100%

Q: How effective has Dorset SENDIASS been in helping you achieve these goals 1-5 😊😊😊😊😊?

A: 1 – 33%

A: 5 – 67%

Q: Is there anything SENDIASS could have done differently?

A: No – 100%

Q: What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made for you/your child/young person?

- *Helped me know my rights and the law around having a child with extra needs and their rights when unable to attend school as support wasn't right.*
- *It has supported us along this whole journey, it has been explained in a way we understand, it supported us in getting the best outcome for our son.*
- *It's given us all the hope and more than we could have wished for.*
- *To know legally we were doing everything we could, also understanding how best to achieve our outcome for our son.*
- *I couldn't have done it on my own.*
- *I didn't expect to get the high quality of support that I did receive from **** in getting **** into an education placement, she really is a credit to the service.*
- *Holding college accountable for safety.*
- *Without the support I would still be in a mess and mentally.*
- *Felt understood and needed their support to be in a better place. All the paperwork and laws with LA are not clear and run rings around us parents. It's like being on a roller coaster.*
- *No comment on that, but wanted to say a massive thanks to ****!! You are amazing at your job! Thank you.*
- *What a great service to have for parents like us, it can be extremely daunting not knowing what you're entitled to and how best to achieve our goal, we couldn't have done it without this service, thank you.*
- ***** has been a great support to me and ****, we would still be at a loss without her, she's such a lovely caring person and guided me every step of the way and deserves the utmost credit in **** finally finding a placement that seem to suit him and his needs, without her support and knowledge and understanding he would of still been a child that has slipped through the system, **** is an angel in disguise.*

- *We won our Tribunal and my daughter starts her new school on November 4th. I am severely dyslexic, and I could not have done this on my own. ***went above and beyond to help me. She helped me with everything from reading the paperwork for me to helping me sort it all out. She had the patience to help me learn to send the paperwork. She helped me with deadlines, she liaised between me and the LA if I couldn't. My daughter wouldn't be going to this school without everything *** helped me with. Her advice, patience, understanding and compassion is outstanding. She genuinely cares about the people she helps anybody that has *** on their side is very, very lucky.*

Short survey on IE closure (14 responses; however, one respondent ticked not to share written data and so their responses are not included in the data below):

Q: My query was responded to quickly

A: Strongly Agree - 53%

A: Agree – 31%

A: Disagree – 8%

A: Strongly Disagree – 8%

Q: I was satisfied with the response to my query

A: Strongly agree – 92%

A: Strongly disagree – 8%

Q: Do you have any other comments about the difference we have made, or the support you have received today?

A: Such a comfort to know someone can advise and listen. Thank you. I feel great relief knowing someone can support who understands the system and child's rights etc...

A: The lady I spoke to was extremely helpful and explained my options and gave me contact details to help me get a response from the council. She also made me aware of my son's rights so I was able to go back to his current school and insist they increased his hours. There is not much help out there for people whose children do not fit into the norm at school. I found your service really helpful and it was great to finally have someone explain what rights we have and the ways we can go about getting the education my son needs.

A: Supportive phone call. Empathetic and constructive.

A: Excellent and supportive advice.

A: Very knowledgeable and was able to answer all our questions

A: Very helpful and much appreciated.

A: Provided useful information and links that we were not aware of. Really helpful and clear advice; has helped ease a few concerns we had.

A: As always very helpful advice given. Excellent service throughout.

*A: As always *** provides clarity to an extremely confusing process for parents and, other than a solicitor which is always expensive, is the only direct source of help available to parents of special needs children on the intricacies of support available to them.*

A: The support was amazing as I felt I was actually listened to which has not always been the case in other organisations. The information received was an eye opener but very informative. It has enabled us to understand what we are entitled to and where we can go if more advice is required.

A: I can't believe how difficult it is to get help. Already at my wits end, not having a reply after a week is heartbreaking.

*A: *** was very patient with me and answered all my (many) questions. She was really informative.*

Service Development

a) Service Level Development Plan

Significant progress has been made with the following areas:

- ✓ Recruitment of a Project Manager experienced in SEND to meet Minimum Standard requirements.
- ✓ Co-production strategy, including addressing themes with the LA; for instance, involvement in DfE post-Ofsted meetings; presentations and discussions in Steering Group meetings regarding early intervention strategies; careers' advice/linking with youth work teams and co-production with the LA and DPCC for the Let's Talk events.
- ✓ Attendance and representation on local boards, e.g. Dorset SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board.
- ✓ Recruitment of the Child and Young Person Lead Officer.
- ✓ Publishing of the Young Person Development Plan so that the relationship with young people is fully established and young people feel better consulted, supported and empowered to be part of the decision-making process regarding their own futures.
- ✓ Continuing embedding of the new working model and refining the staffing structure for the service to meet growing enquiry complexity.
- ✓ Mandatory safeguarding and legal training completed.
- ✓ Auditing and compliance follow-ups in relation to risk assessments as evidenced in audits and case supervisions.

Priorities for the year ahead will include:

- ✓ Continue to ensure that intervention levels are used accurately so service users receive the right level of intervention for the identified needs at the right time, with timely conversion of case work where needed.
- ✓ Continue to ensure consistent use of the recording on the secure database (Inform Tabs - Assessment; Plans; Chronology and Data Recording) for improved record keeping relating to case work on Inform; and linking with continued accurate and timely Risk Analysis and reporting of CME cases (according to DfE definition) to the LA.
- ✓ Increase engagement directly with children/young people with the first phase of implementation of the Young Person Development Plan; priority areas are:
 - Further develop 16+ YP consent form and other methods of gaining consent
 - YP feedback form
 - Develop the role of YP Lead to implement the YP Development Plan with oversight from the Project Manager
 - Training for local networks
 - Advocacy
 - Collaboration and Co-Production
 - Accessibility
 - Knowledgeable / Accurate Information on PfA and Post 16 Options for SEND YP in Dorset.
- ✓ Developing website and social media presence via the new Family Action national SENDIASS website launch in summer 2025, co-produced with parents/carers and young people in Dorset, to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

- ✓ Identifying further training priorities in-line with Minimum Standards so wider professionals, parents/carers and YP have an increased knowledge about legislation for the benefit of service users. The monthly drop-ins have been launched via a pilot at Dorchester Family Hub in summer 2025. This will be extended to include other localities across Dorset as feasibility is assessed following the pilot.
- ✓ Raising profile of SENDIASS to best support the needs of the community, according to data, within SEND law and signposting to holistic services.
- ✓ Identify and develop key roles and responsibilities for individual Case Officers to provide an enhanced offer and support progression with fully meeting the Minimum Standards.
- ✓ Evidence of positive outcomes for children, young people and their families with moving case work forwards using a collaborative approach (appropriate support and challenge) with LA, Health and Social Care partnership working.

b) Young People Development Plan

- Direct work with young people at Level 3/4 casework continues, particularly around empowering young people to express their views independently of parents. There were 13 cases involving YP 16+ during 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025, of which 2 were accessing independently of parents/carers and 5 of which were aged 19-25.
- A new, revised Young People Development Plan has been shared with Commissioners and the first phase will be implemented in summer/autumn 2025 (highlighted in green on the plan).
- CYP Lead has attended a number of networking meetings and is developing outreach work in special school Post 16 settings (see networking above).

c) Training Offer

Training of external services continues and there are plans for further proactive training in 2025, in order to encourage signposting of SENDIASS through a variety of services, such as GP surgeries, CAMHS, mental health networks and the voluntary and community sector, as follows:

- Presentation to 0-25 Voluntary Community Sector Forum (September 2024)
- Presentation to Family Hubs Partnership Day (October 2024)
- Stall Holder at Mid-Dorset Parent Carer Network (November 2024)
- Attendance at Impower VSEND Workshop for Early Years Settings SENCOs/Managers (November 2024)
- Presentation to 5 Team Around the School Early Years Locality Meetings (January/February 2025)

d) Continuous Improvement Plan

The CIP is reviewed regularly throughout the financial year to track progress against identified objectives. A revised CIP for 2025-26 has been written by the Project Manager in liaison with the Operational Manager and will be shared with the Steering Group in the summer 2025 meeting, in-line with Minimum Standards annual reporting requirements.

e) Minimum Standards

All staff working within the Dorset SENDIASS team are aware of the Minimum Standards for SENDIAS Services. We benchmark the Service against these regularly to evidence compliance and they are referred to during team meetings and supervisions. We also share our progress and priorities regarding the Minimum Standards during Steering Group meetings.

f) KPIs

Area	Target	Actual	Commentary
Support to parent/ carers	550 - 650	1,302	This KPI has been exceeded by 652. IEs converted to cases have now been reduced due to the SENDIASS new working model.
Young People reached (increase in direct work/ independent access to the service)	12 – 15	13 cases involving YP 16+ during 1 st April 2024 – 31 st March 2025, of which 2 were accessing independently of parents/carers and 5 of which were aged 19-25 IEs 16+ = 135 (104 aged 16-18); (31 aged 19-25)	With the CYP Lead in post from October 2024, direct work with young people has increased. This involved home visits to young people to support them to express their views independently. The CYP Lead also worked alongside other Case Officers where the young person is happy for their parents to be involved, but need support for them to engage in the process and express their views. On completion of IPSEA Level 3 SEND Law training, early in January 2024, the CYP Lead now case-holds young people; although all Case Officers are trained and have the knowledge to support this age-group.
Co-production	Contribution to development of the service	Positive examples of co-production have been established	Regular DPCC/SENDIASS meetings; Core Group Impower/VSEND; Steering Group; Strategic Themes meetings; Locality Team Manager meetings; meetings with DC QA Manager to establish joint training / learning circle collaboration; monthly meetings with the Family Information Service; SENDIASS involvement in Let's Talk events; 0-25 VCS Forum; DYRG. This continues to be an area for strategic direction, with a focus in 2025-26 on establishing further co-production with young people as part of the YP Development Plan

			(Unstoppables). Co-production with DPCC, Steering Group and Unstoppables around the new FA website will be a new objective for 2025-26 in the near future (for summer 2025 launch).
Visitors to website	Increase in visitors for SENDIASS website – Starting point: Unique visitors: 3,559 No. of visits: 6,561 Hits: 88,668	Unique users: 8166 No. of visits: 23029 No of Hits:56779	<p>Unique visitors increased from 7,000 to 8166, an increase of 1066 from the 2023-24 financial year.</p> <p>Visits have exceeded target.</p> <p>Hits have not met target.</p> <p>Our focus continues to be an inclusive website that is accessible for service users. We continue to aim to provide holistic signposting, including to the Local Offer, and resources that empower service users to advocate for themselves around SEND processes with the Local Authority and NHS.</p> <p>This will be further developed with the Family Action national SENDIASS website with link to a local Dorset-specific website.</p>
Communication Plan implemented, including digital communication	Increase of digital viewing (previous data unavailable as n/a)	Reach: 3879 Followers: 400 Visits: 1260	<p>We prioritised posting a variety of relevant SEND content to support families. The data shows the strategy ensured an increase in our reach and followers.</p> <p>Family Action's social media strategy relies on Facebook, as its target audience is parents/carers.</p> <p>With the development of the FA national SENDIAS website and resources, a schedule of posts to include key topic areas and information sharing on SEND processes, which receive the greatest number of enquiries, will be prioritised in the coming year.</p>
Satisfaction	Original benchmark = 3.93 overall satisfaction	Average satisfaction as a mean = 3.67 (How effective has Dorset SENDIASS been in helping you	20 surveys returned in total in the reporting period (14 short surveys and 6 long surveys).

		<p>achieve these goals?)</p> <p>92% of respondents to the short IE survey strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the response to their query</p>	<p>The satisfaction rating has dropped slightly (0.26) due to the response times sometimes not meeting the 5 working day target during a period of low staffing numbers.</p> <p>Casework and IE responses consistently receive excellent service user feedback. Positive outcomes are consistent and show focus during case audits. The Project Manager and Case Officers have established, and continue to promote through all casework and IE responses, a collaborative approach with key stakeholders/ partners in LA agencies for early intervention/ improved mediation and impartiality to reduce family stress and CYP mental health decline. The Project Manager has clear oversight of quality of casework checked via monthly Case Audits, Overviews and Supervision to ensure impartiality, collaborative working and solution-focussed next steps prior to Appeal are at the heart of the team's ethos. Escalation to Service Level Managers within the LA, if required, is initiated in order to move the cases forward due to delays experienced within the LA processes. Where statutory timeframes are pressing, service users are impartially informed of their rights.</p>
Annual report	Published on website	Published on website	Latest annual report to be uploaded imminently.
Development of Volunteers' service	N/A	Paused due to staffing issues.	It has been agreed with Commissioners that Volunteer Work will no longer be an objective/KPI from 2025-26 onwards due to safer recruitment issues, motivation of volunteers around longevity of remaining in post and suitability of the work/supervision requirements for students.

Report compiled by Lucy Holliday, Dorset SENDIASS Project Manager (PM)

Approved by Family Action's South West Operational Manager (OM), Helen Wemyss