

## Impartiality Policy

*Note: All references to parents throughout this policy include parents and carers*

### Introduction

SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS's) are statutory services offering free, accurate and impartial information and support for parents, children and young people on special educational needs (SEN) procedures as set out in SEN legislation and the SEND Code of Practice 2015. SENDIASS's are expected to meet "Minimum standards" as prescribed by the national Information Advice and Support Services Network, Department of Health & Social Care and the Department of Education.

To ensure parents, children and young people have confidence in the Service it is important that staff and volunteers are able to operate impartially.

#### **Definition: Impartial:**

*"not favouring any person or party more than another, but striving to be fair and unbiased, based on objective criteria rather than on the basis of bias or prejudice"*

### Impartiality Statement

"Demonstrating impartiality - the Parent Partnership Practice Guide" (Stone 2004:20) states that an impartial stance is demonstrated by:

- *Reflecting the perspectives and wishes of parents (and young people)*
- *Being seen not to have a vested interest in the outcome of any discussions*
- *Ensuring that staff and volunteers who attend decision making meetings are clear whether their role is:*
  - *to support or represent an individual*
  - *to contribute and discuss on strategic issues*
  - *to participate in making decisions*

SEND IASS officers will use this guidance in supporting casework, with a very clear emphasis on enabling those they are supporting to make informed decisions. This will be done by presenting factual information and advice grounded in legislation and the SEND Code of Practice. (For more information, see "Supporting Parents children and young people" section).

### Aim

Coventry's Information Advice and Support Service aims to engender service user confidence by the provision of neutral, factual information and advice based on current special educational needs (SEN) and exclusion legislation and thereby empowering and informing them of the options available to them. The IASS will also act strategically to create vehicles that enable the full range of parents' & young people's views to be heard and to influence service developments. Service staff will aim to operate impartially when fulfilling these roles.

## **Practical arrangements**

### **Relationship with the Local Authority**

- Coventry's Information Advice and Support Service (IASS) is an "in house" service. This means that the service is funded by the Local Authority and service staff are Local Authority employees. It is understood that in order for the Service to be seen as independent, neutral and impartial, it must operate at "arms length" from the Local Authority. The Local Authority recognises and respects this position.
- The Service is managed separately with the Service Manager having autonomy over service development and delivery.
- The Service will keep secure all information specifically communicated to it (either orally or in writing) by parents. Any Subject Access Request should be made directly to the IASS.
- The Service has a delegated budget and independent recording systems.
- The service occupies its own office space with separate entrance and access to private meeting rooms within a Local Authority building based well away from the Statutory Assessment and Review Team (START).
- The Local Authority supports the role of the IASS as an impartial service in networking and collaboration at national, regional and local levels.

### **Supporting parents, children and young people**

The role of the Service is to empower parents, children and young people by providing them with relevant information, advice and guidance that includes national legislation and its application through local policies and practices. It seeks to help them to understand the pros and cons of any decisions they ultimately take.

IASS staff (or volunteers) will:

- provide parents, children and young people with a balanced and comprehensive range of information setting out all options available, enabling them to make informed decisions dependent upon the individual circumstances of the referral.
- may, with consent, put forward the views and wishes of parents, children and young people either during meetings or telephone calls whilst, at the same time, ascertaining the views of professionals involved with the family.
- inform the Manager of any conflict of interest in relation to individual families e.g. governor at the same school. These cases will be referred to other team members.
- signpost parents, children and young people to other agencies that enable them to verify the impartiality of the information and advice provided e.g. Advisory Centre for Education, IPSEA, Contact, Family Law Advice
- where possible and circumstances permitting, state their role at the beginning of meetings they attend in order to clarify the position taken.
- maintain a professional relationship with parents, children and young people they support.

## **Liaising with Other Professionals and Organisations**

IASS Staff (and volunteers):

- may have parental/young person's consent to act as an intermediary by relaying their perspective to school or Local Authority professionals. This does not indicate bias in favour of the parent/young person, nor does it represent the views of IASS staff.
- should make it clear that they have no vested interest in the outcome of any decision-making process in relation to an individual child/young person or family, and do not work to an IASS agenda.
- will maintain an impartial stance whilst collaborating and engaging with relevant organisations and networks.

## **Publications**

- Coventry IASS has its own identity including service logo and headed notepaper which takes precedence over other service identities
- IASS publications routinely include references and recommendations for further reading.
- The IASS has responsibility for the content and maintenance of its own web pages; it includes relevant internal / external links and downloadable documents.
- The IASS writes its own materials with input from parents, children, young people and professionals. New information and publicity is monitored for its impartiality.

## **Training**

- The IASS will ensure that all staff and volunteers access high quality, independent training in current and relevant education law, policy and practice in relation to Special Educational Needs and Exclusion.
- Information sessions and training provided by the IASS will include a range of providers and organisations to ensure impartial delivery.

## **Steering Group**

- The IASS Steering Group has representation from a number of agencies and professionals and includes parents who have been involved with the service and who are well placed to provide a parental perspective on the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Meetings are currently chaired by a special school Head teacher.
- The Steering Group has Terms of Reference which include monitoring the effectiveness and impartiality of all Service activities.

## **Policy effectiveness**

- On initial contact the impartiality statement will be verbally shared with parents, children or young people either over the phone or face to face. IASS literature states the impartial nature of the Service.
- A copy of the Impartiality Policy will be displayed in the IASS office and on the IASS website.
- Copies of the Policy will be made available to parents, children or young people who request it
- Every effort will be made to publicise the impartial role of the IASS to other services and organisations

- Existing and new staff and volunteers will be introduced to the policy via induction and training
- It is expected that all staff will adhere to the principles of Impartiality outlined in the policy

### Monitoring

- Day to day monitoring of the Policy will be undertaken by the Service Manager.
- Feedback from service users via the IASS survey will act as a reflection of service satisfaction.
- Parents and Members of the IASS Steering Group will periodically be asked to monitor the impartiality of the information developed / provided by the IASS.
- The Policy will be reviewed annually by the IASS Steering Group; any amendments should be agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

<p>Policy approved by the Information, Advice and Support Service Steering Group</p> <p>Signed:.....(Chair)</p> <p>Date:.....</p> <p>Review date:.....</p>
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