

The logo for Information Advice and Support Kent features a stylized kite with a purple, green, and yellow body and a blue tail, set against a white background with a faint grid.

**Information  
Advice and  
Support  
Kent**

A service for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities  
– helping you to make informed choices

# Information, Advice and Support Kent

## Annual Service Report 2020/2021

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***‘T was an amazing support in breaking things down to a smaller scale with her expertise. She gave amazing support with understanding things. She took pressure off, listened to my child and empowered me’.***

*(parent feedback survey 2020/21)*

## **Overview of IASK - Kerry Miles Service Coordinator**

This report gives an overview of Information, Advice and Support Kent over the past year, and also covers statistics relating to outputs for the six-month period 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021, with comparisons to the previous six months covered in an Interim Report.

The service has continued to provide the same level of service over the past year including during the ‘Lockdowns’. We were able to quickly adapt our ways of working to use technology to our advantage, ensuring there was no disruption to service provision. We increased our availability through offering flexibility for parents to access the service, by holding virtual one to one information sessions (instead of our drop-ins) at different times of the day, including the evening and early morning. Call backs to parents also considered parents preferred times to fit in with their family commitments. We have ensured that information was printed off and posted to parents who were struggling to read important documents that were sent in email format only. The provision of virtual support at meetings has been a new experience for staff and families alike, but everyone adapted well to preparing and planning prior to meetings as well as using text messaging during meetings, and families felt well supported.

Our intention this year was to draw down funding from the Information, Advice and Support Programme to recruit again to the temporary post of Participation and Engagement Officer to continue with the development work relating to promoting the service and working towards engaging parent and young people volunteer champions. We did not draw down the funding as we still had some money left from the previous year and we had gone into lockdown. We did not feel that we would be able to engage with young people and families during this stressful time. We achieved all other development targets for the year including joint commissioning of the service between Education, Health and Social Care.

We used the IAS Programme funding from the previous year, to explore the use of ReachDeck and found that there were many features in the package that could be used to ensure that the IASK website continues to remain accessible for all clients, specifically for users with visual and hearing impairments or with English as a second language. There are added features such as creating an MP3 file to download the text being read out, providing a personal record of the information as well as Picture Dictionary which can be used alongside the easy read documents.

In addition, we are having two videos produced to explain about the IASK service, using positive testimonials from parents, children and young people. This will be done in an accessible way using subtitles and a signer. The promotional films will be broken down into a series of smaller modules so that they can be used independently to promote various areas of the service work via social media. The rationale being that we know from feedback that parents say that we need to promote the service more, we were also aware from being asked to provide a small video clip of our service for a virtual transition event, that our amateur attempt was not very interesting or engaging for young people with SEN. We have also produced two videos which explain how to complete paperwork for appealing to the SEND tribunal.

### **Impact:**

The service has conducted user feedback surveys for cases that closed between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. We sought feedback from **212** service users who received more than 2 hours support during a six-month period at intervention level 2,3 or 4. We have utilised staff time to telephone parents for feedback, but found that although parents were extremely busy due to lockdown we had **59** responses and achieved a **28%** response rate.

**92%** of respondents rated IASK as good (3\*) or very good at being neutral, fair and unbiased.

**95%** of respondents felt IASK listened to their views.

**98%** of respondents felt that we understood their questions concerns well (3\*) or very well.

**93%** felt very satisfied with the service they received.

**70%** feel more confident.

**97%** of respondents were likely (3\*) or very likely to recommend the service to others.

For full details about the user feedback responses, please see Appendix 2.

## 'Thank You' emails from service users outside of the usual survey:

Compliments direct to the service:

*'I really appreciated your help and wise advice. Your explanation of the outcomes in the EHCP, was particularly helpful, as we had been concerned that the outcomes stated did not extend beyond KS2, but your explanation allayed these concerns'.*

*'your advice, expertise and help has been invaluable throughout the process. We are so pleased that because of this, X will now receive the support she needs in an appropriate setting'*

*'Thank you so much for all your help and support once again. Everything was very clear and easy to understand when I worked with you on the application, which I would have found really daunting on my own'.*

*'We cannot thank you enough for all your support through our most difficult days and on this arduous journey. The reward has so been worth the journey. I know for sure I could not have stayed so level-headed without your kindness and support, with all your wonderful experience certainly supported us'.*

*'Please extend our thanks to X on the helpline who has been very empathetic and helpful on the numerous occasions we have spoken to her, and the rest of the team. The IASK service has enabled us to navigate this complex process, to the best of our ability, without needing legal representation - this has a very real impact on our quality of life with our son'.*

## Case Study 1:

### Background

Belinda has a diagnosis of ASC and attends mainstream primary with support from an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan. Parents requested a special school placement ready for transition to secondary school. Consultation with the school identified that they were full and over-subscribed. Parents and primary school felt that the mainstream school that was named in the EHC plan was not a suitable environment due to her needs.

### Support

Parents contacted IASK, they didn't know whether to go to mediation or lodge an appeal to the Special, Educational Needs and Disability tribunal, because they were not happy with the school named in their daughter's education, health and care plan. A full explanation about both procedures and the relevant timescales were provided, and options clearly explained. Parents decided to go to appeal for the placement as well as some changes that they had identified relating to Belinda's needs (section B in the plan) and the provision to meet the needs (section F in the plan) as they felt this was the better route for them to achieve the right school placement to meet Belinda's needs.

Parents asked for support with completing the appeal paperwork. IASK helped parent to understand the process and procedures to empower them to complete the form and to be able to identify what information they needed to provide to the local authority and the tribunal.

Although the initial preference for the parent was a special school, parents considered another school which was closer to home that might meet needs depending on the academic profile, which they named in their appeals paperwork.

Parents received the LA's response and following negotiation, the LA named the parents' original school preference, because the second choice of school felt they could not meet the needs as Belinda was too academically able and would therefore not have a peer group. Again, IASK explained options and parents agreed to accept the placement offered and agreed to resolve amendments to Section B at the next annual review to end the appeal to tribunal.

### Impact

Parents were able to understand the tribunal process and her options at each stage, were empowered to complete the paperwork and they felt confident to make the decisions, because they could talk them through with IASK.

Parents are very happy with this result as there is a definite placement for Belinda who can now prepare for transfer. The family no longer have the anxiety of a hearing and uncertainty around placement. Parents stated that they could not have navigated the process without IASK support and felt that without the help they would not have been successful in getting a positive outcome without attending the tribunal hearing.

## Case Study 2:

### Background

Alan was on a part time timetable and not coping in school.

The school SENCO suggested that IASK support parent at a meeting to discuss a request for EHC needs assessment. Parent is deaf and school felt IASK could support parent to play an active role throughout the process. Parent's priority was for Alan to attend school full time.

### Support

At the school meeting, with assistance from an interpreter, IASK were able to explain the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process and what parent can expect, and the support that we could provide. Parent's preferred method of communicating with IASK was via WhatsApp messaging. IASK supported parent to complete appendix 1.

Parent found that communication with school and other professionals was difficult and she felt 'disconnected' from the school, having missed key school information, because they could not speak to her over the telephone.

Consent was obtained so that IASK could inform the SEN team the best methods for contacting the parent. IASK also spoke with health and SEN professionals to ensure that they were aware of the parents preferred method of communication. This ensured good communication when arranging appointments etc. and throughout the process.

The SEN team arranged for interpreters to attend the meetings so that parent was able to express her views and wishes, discuss any concerns and potential school placements. IASK supported at the meetings so that parent was able to communicate with our service with any queries relating to the meetings.

### Impact

Parent felt supported and empowered to take a full active role in the statutory assessment process. Parent was more confident during the process because she had an opportunity to check out her thoughts at each stage and she was able to practice using MS Teams with IASK before the meeting (as this was something she had not done before). When the Education, Health, Care (EHC) plan draft was issued and during discussions about school placement, parent felt supported and felt confident to look at the paperwork and to negotiate for the school placement. The result being that parent and Alan's preferred school placement was achieved, parent is happy with the final (EHC) plan and Alan is getting support to increase attendance at the current school and to prepare for transfer to the new school in September. Parent has expressed that she could not have completed this process or been as fully involved as she has been without our support.

## Service Outputs for the period 1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021

- 1049 initial telephone calls and emails came through the helpline representing a 45% increase on the previous six months.
- 242 families have received support at meetings via video or telephone conference calls and 3 face to face in the office, this represents a 53% increase on the previous 6 months.
- 363 New referrals for casework showing a 27% increase.
- 437 Level 1 enquiries (information and advice given but not opened as a case) increased by 45%.
- 52 **virtual** one to one information sessions with three slots were offered. 64 people attended.
- Virtual attendance at: 4 Multi Agency NDLS parent sessions, 4 presentation to parent support groups, 2 virtual stallholders.
- 60 young people over age 16 were accessing the service with support from their parents and 12 young people were receiving direct support from a caseworker.
- 20 young people were supported to participate in meetings with five feeling confident to speak for themselves.
- 131 families have received information, advice and support relating to appeals to the SEND Tribunal.
- Staff have virtually attended 1 mediation, 2 Telephone case management hearings and 12 tribunal hearings to support families who would otherwise have found it difficult to attend on their own. With IASK support 34 appeals were resolved before the hearing date.
- 10 calls were recorded as a sole enquiry relating to Covid/Lockdown other conversations about Covid have been recorded as part of other discussions with the service.
  
- School support continues to be the highest reason contact with our service and we have seen an increase in parental concerns about mental health and wellbeing of their children. Parents report that schools are not acknowledging the difficulties that some children are



facing when returning to school relating to their anxieties about returning, as well as being behind with their work and worried about exam results and accessing further education. Queries statutory assessment requests and information about appeals to the SEND Tribunal.

- Health discussion are mainly related to queries regarding CAMHS and mental health services. Social care queries have reduced with the most queries being related to the Max card.
- Virtual Workshops:  
9 workshops were delivered to 49 parents, practitioners, and a young person with their parent. This makes a total of 16 workshops delivered over the year with 131 attendees. We received 100% positive feedback from respondents, who also said they would recommend the workshops. Examples of feedback received:

*'Clarity about a very confusing process, a sense of empowerment to understand next steps and gratitude and relief that nursery is doing everything they need to be'.*

*'I now know what support IASK can give. More understanding on how to best to communicate with schools. What schools are legally obliged to fulfil for a SEN child. The types of help I should be questioning and requesting from the schools. That they are there to help and advice where they can'.*

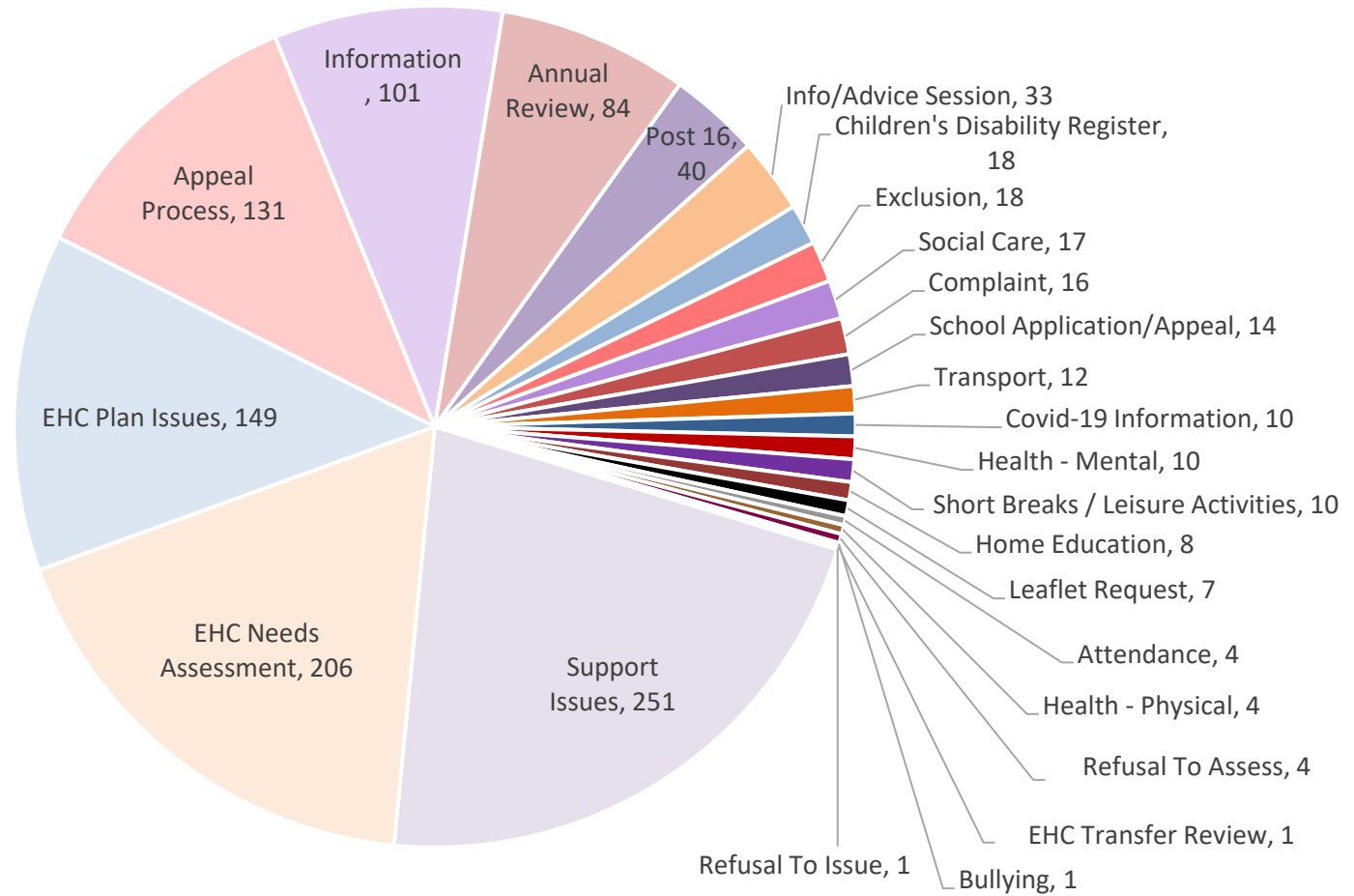
*Make sure the school are doing everything and communication with me. Ask for another meeting'.*

*'Thank you for a great workshop'.*

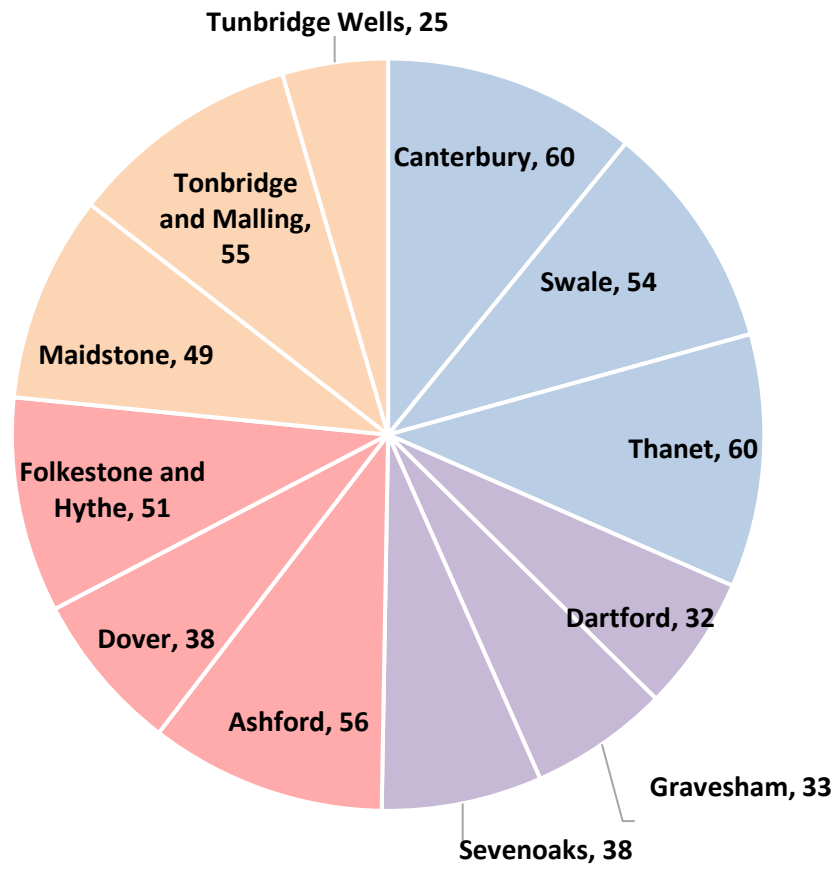
- Website Usage: Website use and new users have increased by 150% in the past 6 months to a total of **11,329** hits and **11,074** new users. There has also been an increase of 75% in page views to **26,716**. The top seven viewed, excluding the home page, were: Parents and Carers, EHC plans, young people, leaflets, Information sessions/drop-ins, FAQ and Helpline. Email communication that has come through the website has doubled in the past 6 months.

The chart below shows the reasons for contacting the service in the timeframe, more than one referral reason can be recorded against both an enquiry and a referral for casework which means the overall referral reasons is larger than the number of service users recorded.

### Total Referral Reasons from 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021

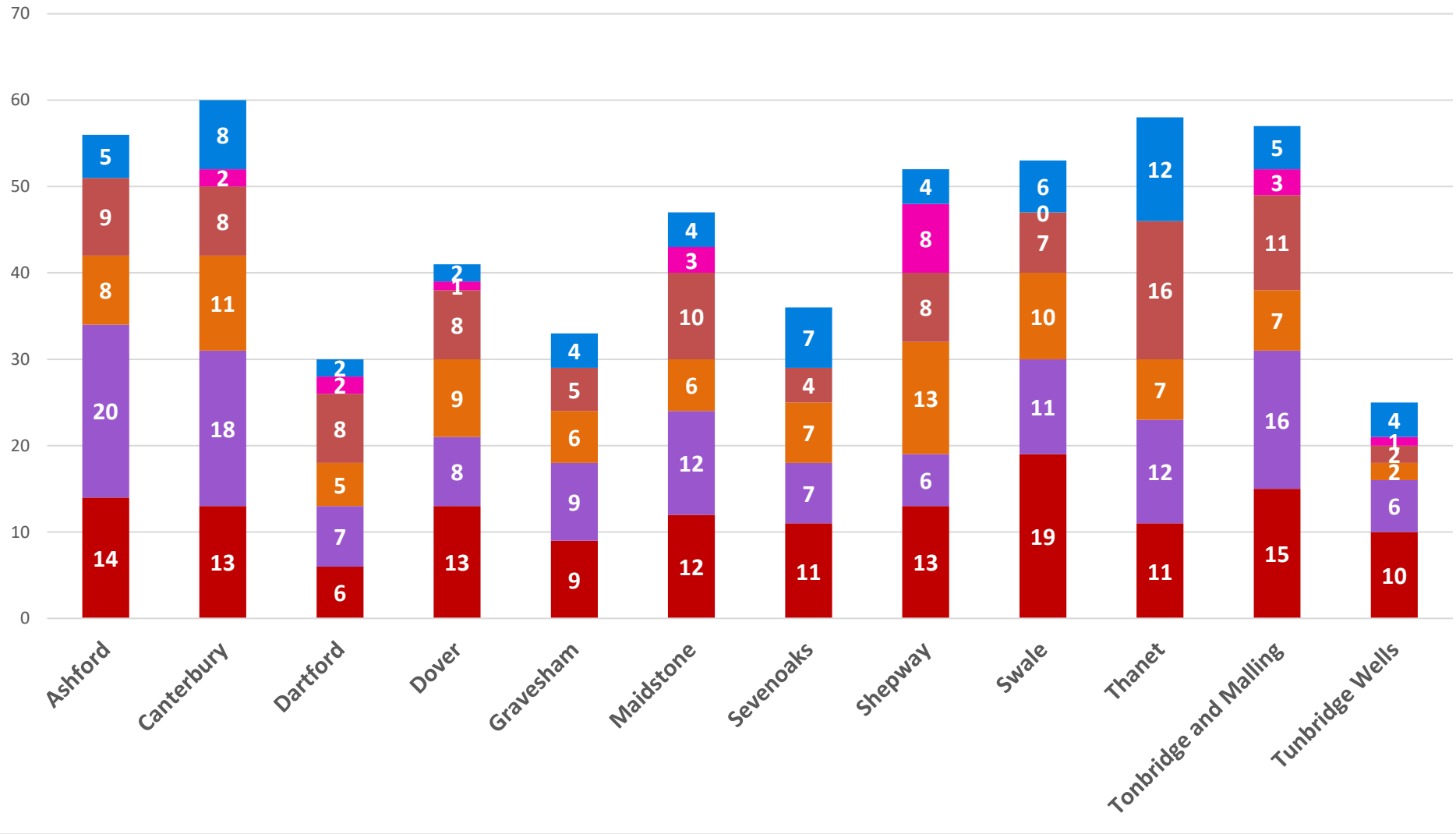


**Number of Referrals by District of Kent  
from 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021**

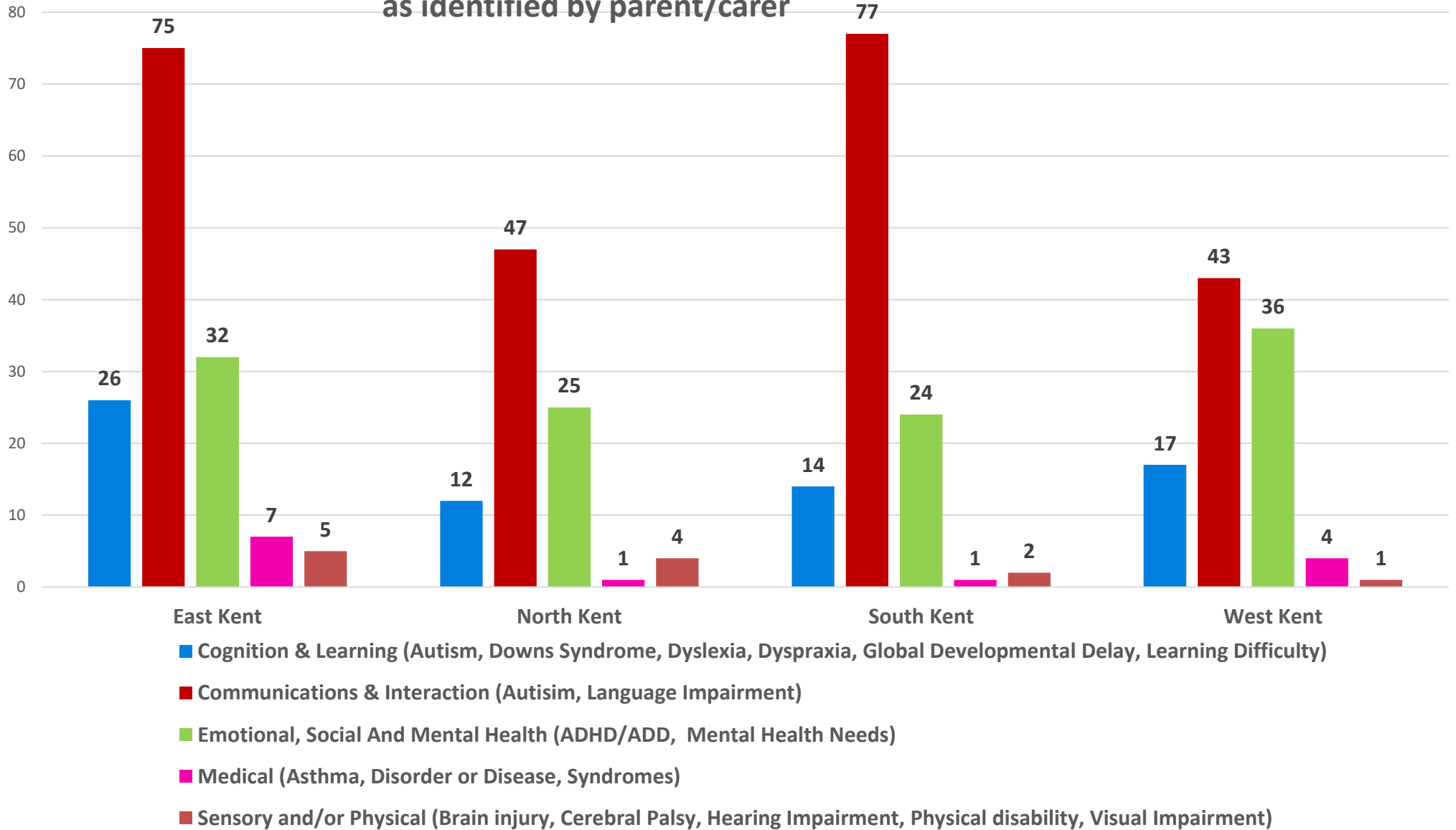


### The top six referral reasons by district

■ Support Issues  
 ■ EHC Needs Assessment  
 ■ EHC Plan Issues  
 ■ Appeal Process  
 ■ Information  
 ■ Annual Review



## Referrals across the four areas of Kent, by Area of Need/Main Disability as identified by parent/carer



## Annual perspective 1 April 2020 – 30 March 2021

- IASK continues to be a regular participant at the South East Regional Information, Advice and Support Services network meetings with Kent chairing the meetings for the past two years. With support from colleagues in the South, two well-being events were delivered for all staff across the region to provide information about self-care of your well-being during the pandemic, there was also an opportunity to have peer discussions. All staff found the events helpful and relevant to them with positive feedback from staff e.g. *'I have taken a lot about coping mechanisms and strategies to use both inside and outside of work'*.
- the service also regularly attends a National meeting specifically relating to working with children and young people.
- regular attendance at Kent County Council workstream meetings relating to the Written Statement of Action following Ofsted and CQC's visit in January 2018.
- regular attendance and contribution to the SEND Information Hub (Local Offer) operations group meetings.
- Participated in producing a Transition to Adulthood Protocol, engaging three young people to help with commenting on the document.
- Staff Training:
  - Understanding Autism, Supporting Anxiety and Trauma, KCA Understanding Trauma and mending hurts, Understanding Trauma for Managers, KCA Community resilience and toxic stress level 3, Excel Advanced, Environmental Awareness and Smarter Travel. Customer Feedback including complaints and Customer Service training, Understanding different communication styles, Core Skills, Personal Resilience, Social Care Advice in EHC plans. Innovation Team Bite size: An Introduction to project work using MS Teams and MS Planner, Kent's Practice Framework. How to hold meetings in MS Teams, How to make virtual meetings fun and engaging. Understanding the Business: Youth Justice Service, Dover's School's Project.
  - CDC specific IASS training: Holistic Outcomes in an EHC plan, Coronavirus Act 2020, Tribunal Appeals, Challenging Exclusions and introduction to mental health.
  - SEND Podcasts: Developmental language disorder, How Schools can support speech and language, Sensory issues and the impact on school life, Life with Dyslexia, SEN Support in Mainstream Classroom.

## Key Performance Indicators From 1st April 2020 – 31 March 2021:

IASK has mechanisms in place to monitor performance and these are reviewed monthly at team meetings.

**100%** of calls were responded to within two working days **exceeding** the target of 97%.

**100%** of e-mails were responded to within two working days **exceeding** the target of 97%.

**98%** of service users found it easy (3\*) or very easy to get in touch with us, (*Q1 user survey*) **exceeding** the target of 90%.

**98%** of service users found the service helpful (3\*) or very helpful to them, (*Q2 user survey*) **exceeding** the target of 90%.

**99%** of Parents had support at meetings when requested, **exceeding** the target of 90%.

## Information, Advice and Support Kent Annual comparison of service provision over the past five years

There has been a major change in the way that IASK has been delivering services over the past year, we have adapted to the change and engaged with our service users and provided the same level of service. Parents were extremely busy supporting their families during the first lockdown, IASK were there for those who were needing support or just a listening ear and we were able to give them as much time as they needed during that difficult and stressful time. Although the figures for enquires lower than the previous year, we know that some some enquiries in the previous year should have been recorded as a case. The total number of enquiries and new case referrals for this year are slightly more than we had during 2017-2018. Emails to and from the service have increased at a rate of between 11 and 16% over the past four years and this year the percentage increase has more than doubled at 34%.

	April 2016 - March 2017	April 2017 - March 2018	April 2018 - March 2019	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2020 – March 2021	Percentage Increase/ Decrease from previous year
Enquiries	606	548	939	1392	734	- 47%
New Cases/referrals	827	794	790	554	640	15%
Total telephone calls	3219	3028	3828	4255	2900	- 32%
Total emails	2603	2924	3402	3763	5032	34%
Helpline emails/tel. calls	3066	3300	3806	4749	3251	-31%
Face to Face meetings	812	545	794	746	3	Due to pandemic
Virtual meetings – video or conference call					394	



## **IASK Mission Statement**

**Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK)** believes children and young people thrive and achieve their potential when all partners (parents, children, young people and professionals) work together to plan appropriate interventions and educational, health and social care provision.

Our purpose is to provide legally based information, advice and support to empower parents their children and young people to make informed decisions.

IASK promotes working together based on mutual respect of the views, wishes and feelings of children, young people and their parents. We are committed to providing a flexible and supportive service responsive to individual needs and to enable parents, children and young people to be involved in decisions about education, health and social care as it relates to them.

## **Service Overview**

The Children and Families Act 2014 Part 3, Section 32 states (1) *'A local authority in England must arrange for children and young people for whom it is responsible, and the parents of children for whom it is responsible, to be provided with advice and information about matters relating to the special educational needs of the children or young people concerned'*. (2) *'A local authority in England must arrange for children and young people in its area with a disability, and the parents of children in its area with a disability, to be provided with advice and information about matters relating to the disabilities of the children or young people concerned.'*

Information, Advice and Support Kent (IASK) provide the information, advice and support service for Kent County Council residents. IASK provides confidential and impartial information advice and support and operates at arm's-length from the local authority to ensure parents/children and young people have confidence in the impartiality of the support and information provided by the Service.

The Service focus is on education and health and social care as it relates to the child/young person's special educational needs and disabilities. For health-related queries the service signposts to Local Healthwatch, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and to SEAP for advocacy for health.

The funding for the Independent Supporter for young people finished in August 2018. The service is now receiving funding through the Information, Advice and Support Programme from the Department for Education (DfE) to support meeting the National Minimum Standards for Information, Advice and Support Services.

IASK has a steering management group which meets three times a year to monitor service operations. The Service Coordinator formally thanks the Steering Group for their time and commitment to attending meetings and supporting the management of the service.

## Information, Advice and Support Kent Steering Group

Steering Group members:

George Whitney, Young Person from East Kent – Co-Chair

Jan Gray, Parent from South Kent and Steering Group Co-Chair

Dana Aris, Parent from West Kent

Karen Ponte, Parent from West Kent

Sharon King, Parent from East Kent

Jan Smith Representative from the Weald Parent Support Group

Fiona Pender, Representative of Space 2 Be Me Telephone: 01622 764566 Email: [info@space2beme.org.uk](mailto:info@space2beme.org.uk)  
Website: [www.space2beme.org.uk/](http://www.space2beme.org.uk/)

Sarah Selby-Bird, Representative of SNAAP Telephone: 01227 367555 Email: [info@snaap.org.uk](mailto:info@snaap.org.uk) Website: [www.snaap.org.uk/](http://www.snaap.org.uk/)

Tiffany Elliot, Commissioning Officer for Social Care for Kent County Council

Louise Hickman Head of SEN A&P (commissioning from Education)

Kerry Miles, Service Co-ordinator for Information, Advice and Support Kent Email: [iask@kent.gov.uk](mailto:iask@kent.gov.uk) Website [www.kent.gov.uk/iask](http://www.kent.gov.uk/iask)

## Feedback from Information, Advice and Support Kent User Survey 2020-2021

For cases were closed between the period of 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021 a total of **212** parents and young people were contacted. We sought feedback from families who received more than 2 hours support during this period who are identified as receiving an intervention level 2,3 or 4. **59** responses were received resulting in a **28%** return rate.

**98%** of responses recorded satisfied (3\*) or very satisfied with the service

**97%** of respondents were likely (3\*) or very likely to recommend the service to others

**92%** of respondents rated IASK as good (3\*) or very good at being neutral, fair and unbiased

**98%** of respondents found it easy (3\*) or very easy to get in touch with us

**98%** of respondents felt that we understood their questions concerns well (3\*) or very well

**95%** of respondents felt IASK listened to their view

**95%** felt IASK provide a confidential service

**93%** felt the information and advice provided met their needs

**81%** of respondents felt that the information advice and support provided has made a **great** deal of difference

### Examples of the difference made:

**61%** have a greater understanding of the SEND Code of Practice and the arrangements that should be made for children/young people with SEN

**70%** feel more confident

**59%** of respondents felt their child has benefitted as a result of the service being involved

### Comments about the service:

'The service is fantastic and their staff are all compassionate, intelligent and professional. I'm thankful for the support I received'.

'Made the school listen to me and understand my child more'.

'Stopping me from having a breakdown, G was brilliant and I have recommended her service to friends and family'.

'Exceptional advice amazing support professional knowledge empathetic staff. A wonderful service with brilliant support really beneficial for parents Carer's and young people requiring support guidance and advice . IASK staff have been a life-line for myself and child I recommend the service to all who are in need of support and guidance. Amazing !!!'

'I couldn't have done it without the support of T. It is a pity your service could not be a representative because that was the role of legal aid. Happy with the support at tribunal and all the effort the service went to about with printing off the documents'.

'It's a godsend a lifeline and I'd be completely out of my depth without the help'.

'Service has been great. The service is supportive, very nurturing and empowering. You are always my first point of call. Thank you'.

'The service helped my son get into the school he's in now. I have trouble reading and writing, IASK really helped me understand the law'.

'Mentoring support. 'X' was an amazing support in breaking things down to a smaller scale with her expertise. She gave amazing support with understanding things. She took pressure off, listened to my child and empowered me'.

'Signposting is very good and service has made me feel more confident.

Face to face support has been invaluable'.

'Parent feels that the service has made her feel stronger and it was ever harder because of COVID and the tribunal was via video link. Had it not been for COVID parent feels it would have made a more of a difference'.

'Wonderful service especially 'Z' who was very informative and easy to understand'. I didn't understand anything, but 'Z' took the time to explain everything and even when I called numerous times, I wasn't made to feel pushed aside and was given the utmost support. I didn't feel like I was on my own doing it. When I went to meet the council I felt knowledgeable and understood everything that was being said. Grandparents feel if I had not contacted us I would not have understood anything'

### Suggestions to improve the service:

'Not a lot of people know about you. We have told people about your service'.

'Be more on the side of the parent. Would like IASK to be less neutral'.

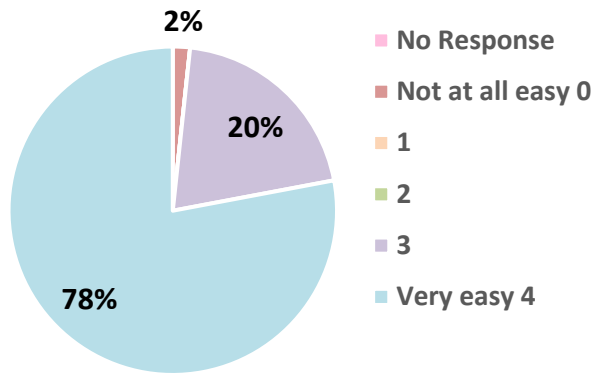
'Schools should promote the service more – found out about IASK online'

'The only thing that I would recommend would be to advertise your services more, parents do not seem to know that you exist and I'm not sure that many professional bodies do either. Maybe advertise in schools, clinics, doctors etc. Very helpful though when I have telephoned for advice. Thank you'.

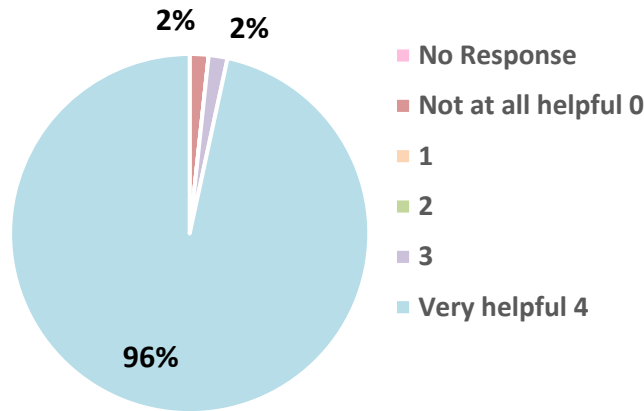
Following feedback from the Information, Advice and Support Kent User Survey 2019-2020 we have made the following changes:

You said	We did
<p>'When the service answers calls they are amazing. Calls should be answered straight away I don't like to leave messages'.</p> <p>'Would be good to be able to talk to someone the day I call or e-mail, but you do always call the next day'.</p>	<p>When staffing permits, calls are triaged to reduce the numbers of people needing to leave messages and these calls will be responded to by a trained member of the team. We have been monitoring our response rates and over the past year 58% of calls and emails are responded to the same day.</p>
<p>'Having a signer would have been better, as son is deaf'.</p>	<p>We will ensure that young people using our service have access to support as required.</p>
<p>Work on reducing the time it takes for you to get back to people with respect to: 1. Requests 2. Speaking to the member of staff that you want to speak to'.</p>	<p>Where capacity allows staff are now responding to families that they are providing on-going support.</p>

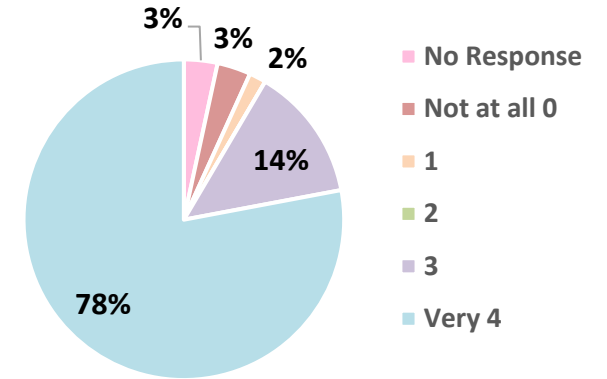
**Q1 How easy was it to get in touch with us?**



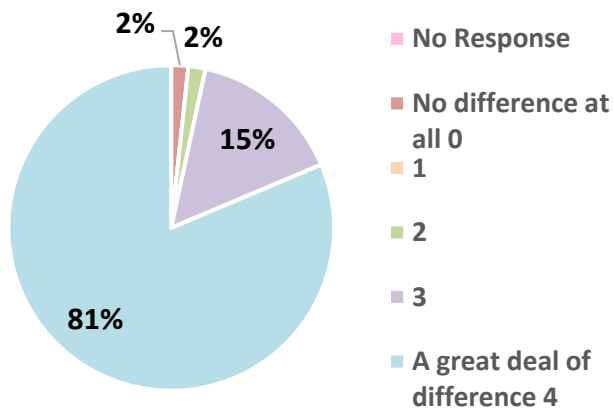
**Q2 How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?**



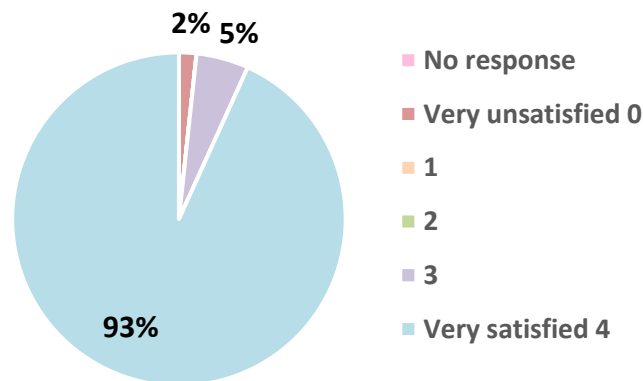
**Q3 How neutral, fair and unbiased do you think we were?**



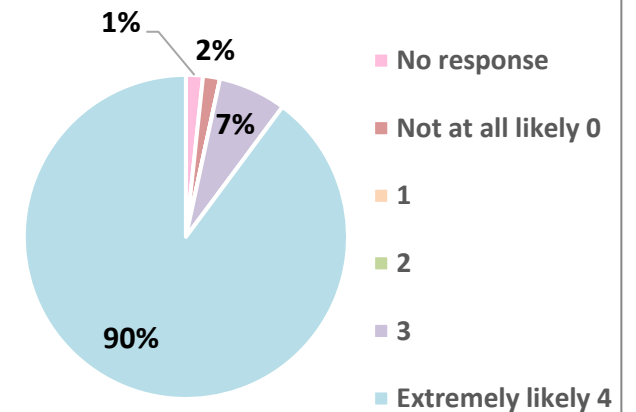
**Q4 What difference do you think our information, advice or support has made for you?**



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



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



**Q4b Can you tell us more about the difference(s) we made for you? (Please tick any that apply)**

