

# SENDIAS Annual Report

April 2024 to March 2025



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## About the Service

Doncaster SENDIAS service provides free, impartial and confidential information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people and their parents/carers on matters relating to special educational needs and/or disability (SEND). The primary aim of the service is to promote independence and self-advocacy for children, young people, and parents/carers.

This annual report gives an overview of Doncaster SENDIAS service between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 including data around the families we have supported, and feedback received from families.

The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide free impartial, confidential, information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people and their parents relating to special educational needs and disability. [The SEND Code of Practice 2015](#) details the legal requirements and describes the expectations of the service. We also adhere to [National Minimum Standards](#) for SENDIAS services developed by the [Information, Advice and Support Services \(IASS\) Network](#) in partnership with the Department for Education.

### Staff Resource

The team consists of:

- Team manager (0.8 FTE)
- Three full-time officers (one term-time only)

### Professional Development and Training for Staff

All staff are qualified to level 6 in a range of subjects including Early Years and Childcare; Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs, and one staff member who holds qualified teacher status. Additionally, all staff have successfully completed 3 levels of online IPSEA legal Training. Staff update their skills through ongoing training; they also have opportunities to engage in weekly case supervision to ensure that families are receiving appropriate information, advice and support.

### Who can use the service?

- Any parent or carer of a child or young person up to age 25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Children and young people with SEND
- Professionals who are working with families who have children or young people with SEND

### What do we do?

Doncaster SENDIAS helps children, young people and families:

- by providing information, which enables our service users to make informed decisions about issues affecting the education and learning of their children
- feel confident to express their views and participate in decision making processes
- understand legal processes, such as Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments and timescales

- understand local policy including the graduated approach and the planning which educational settings carry out to support children and young people with special educational needs (often referred to as assess, plan do review)
- complete practical tasks, such as dealing with paperwork, preparing for and attending meetings, writing letters, and understanding reports
- develop good working relationships with staff at nursery, school or college, or with other professionals involved in their children's education, health and care
- Support the mediation process when complaints or disagreements arise, such as SEND Tribunals.

### **How can we be contacted?**

- Direct phone/ advice line 01302 736920, which is available Monday to Friday 9am-5pm
- Email: [sendias@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:sendias@doncaster.gov.uk)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/DoncasterSENDIAS](https://www.facebook.com/DoncasterSENDIAS)
- Online referral form: [SENDIAS - Request Support](#)

Service users can also speak to us when we attend outreach events in local communities.

The service operates 51 weeks a year, during normal office hours and our base is Doncaster Civic Office, which is in the centre of Doncaster. The central location allows us to be physically accessible to families via good transport links. We also undertake community outreach events promoted on our social media pages and through Family Hubs to ensure accessibility. Additionally, we are highly flexible in our contact time as we often have working parents/carers who wish to contact the service, before 9am or after 5.30pm. In such circumstances, we schedule a telephone appointment to call them at their most convenient time, which can be outside of normal office hours. We also work closely with the local Parent Carer Forum ([Doncaster Parent's Voice](#)), regularly attending their online coffee evening which takes place 8pm – 9pm.

### **Social Media**

We use Facebook to communicate with families and proactively share key messages. Families occasionally message us directly through Facebook for support, but overall, the preference to access the service is by telephone. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, we have had 2,297 page followers and an increase of 10% (234 followers) from the previous year.

### **SENDIAS Website**

The [SENDIAS website](#) is hosted as part of Doncaster Council. In the reporting period April 2024 to March 2025, our website had 9,432 page views, a 2% decrease from the previous year. The decrease was anticipated as we have worked with the City of Doncaster Council to increase traffic to the refreshed [Local Offer website](#), which contains updated information about the new neurodiversity pathways, and the newly launched SEND Parents Handbook which provides parents with important information about the graduated approach.

## Partnership Working

### Joint Commissioning and Governance Arrangement

Doncaster SENDIAS is an in-house service commissioned and funded by the City Council with an additional contribution from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) through a joint commissioning arrangement in place from March 2024 to fund one full-time (term-time) officer.


### Doncaster Parent Carer Forum

A key partner is the local [Parent Carer Forum \(Doncaster Parents Voice\)](#) who acts as independent chair for our steering group. We also attend their monthly online parent's evenings and coffee mornings, which means that parents can access SENDIAS directly.

### Partnership Working with Other Local Services

In partnership with parents and carers, we liaise with a range of other agencies to help achieve positive outcomes for their child. The list below is not exhaustive, but it provides an overview of teams with whom we have the most contact.


Doncaster  
SEN Team



Educational  
Psychology



Parenting  
& Family  
Support  
Service  
(PAFSS)



Behaviour  
Outreach  
Support  
Service  
(BOSS)

Schools &  
Early Years  
Providers



Social Care &  
Family Hubs

Early Years  
Inclusion  
Team  
(EYIT)



Autism Social  
Communication  
Education  
Training Service  
(ASCETS)

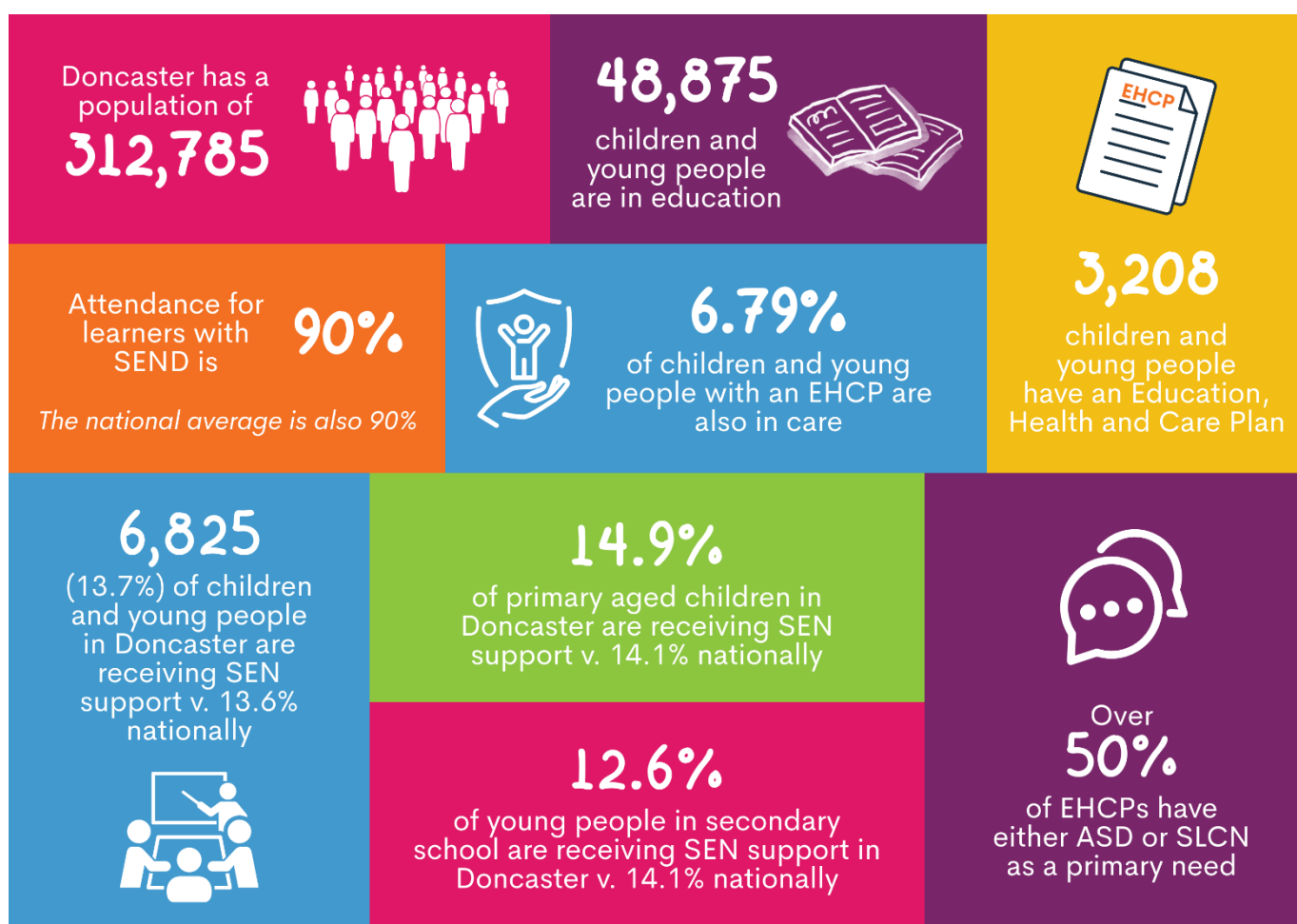


Health  
Colleagues

## City of Doncaster Council Demographics

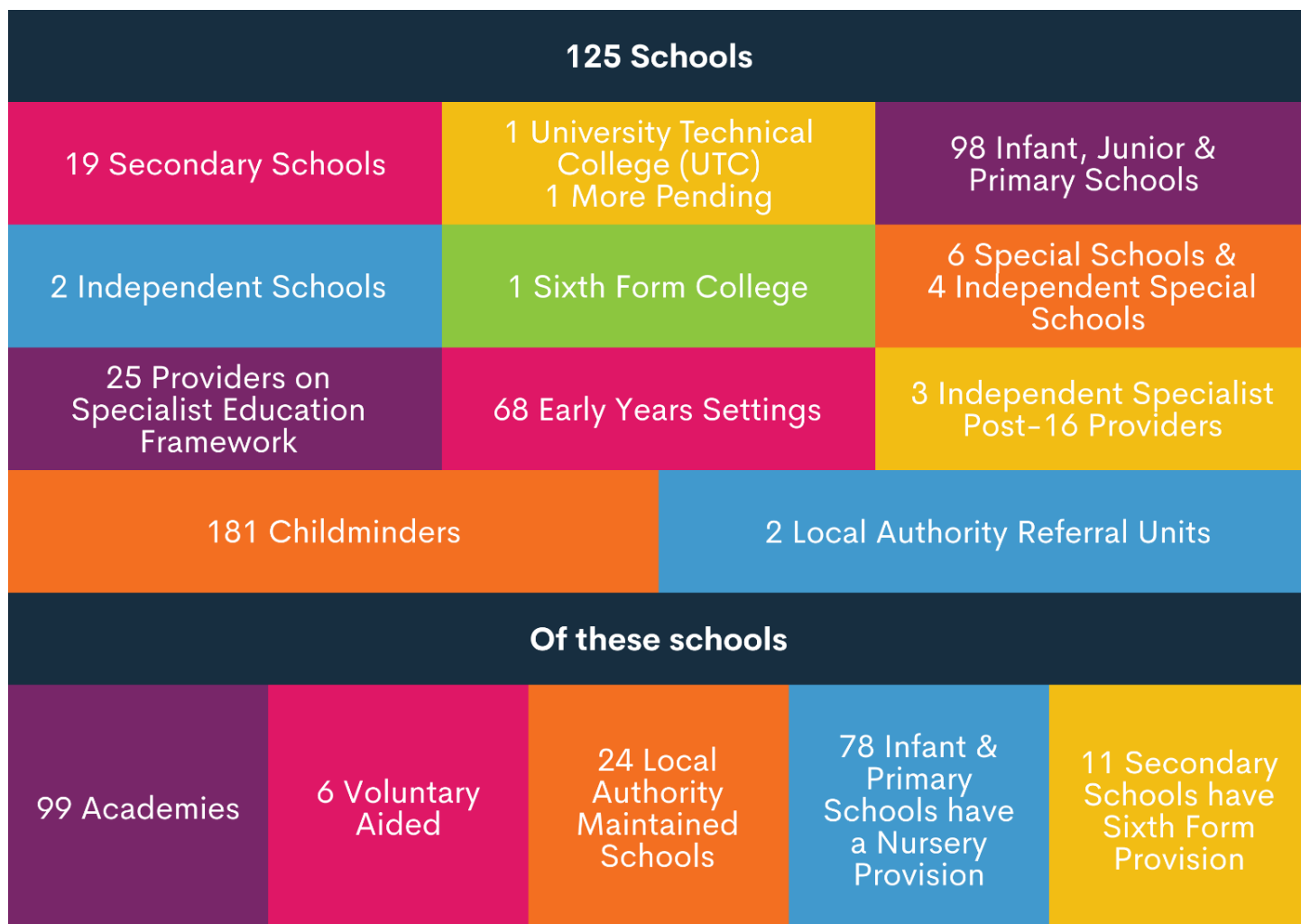
Doncaster has a population of 312,785 people, of whom 69,000 (22%) are aged between 5 and 24 years old. The percentage of children and young people receiving SEN support has increased year-on-year in line with national statistics. As of March 2025, there were 3,208 children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) EHCPs. This is a percentage increase of 17% on the previous reporting year when there were 2,763. Likewise, the percentage of children and young people receiving SEN support has increased year-on-year. In 2022-23 it was 13.1% increasing to 13.7% in 2023-24. This is slightly above the national average.

The profile of primary need types within Doncaster has changed over the last five years, with a decline in levels of moderate or severe learning difficulties and an increase in autism spectrum, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). The level of need is also rising in the early years sector, with the biggest rise being for SLCN.

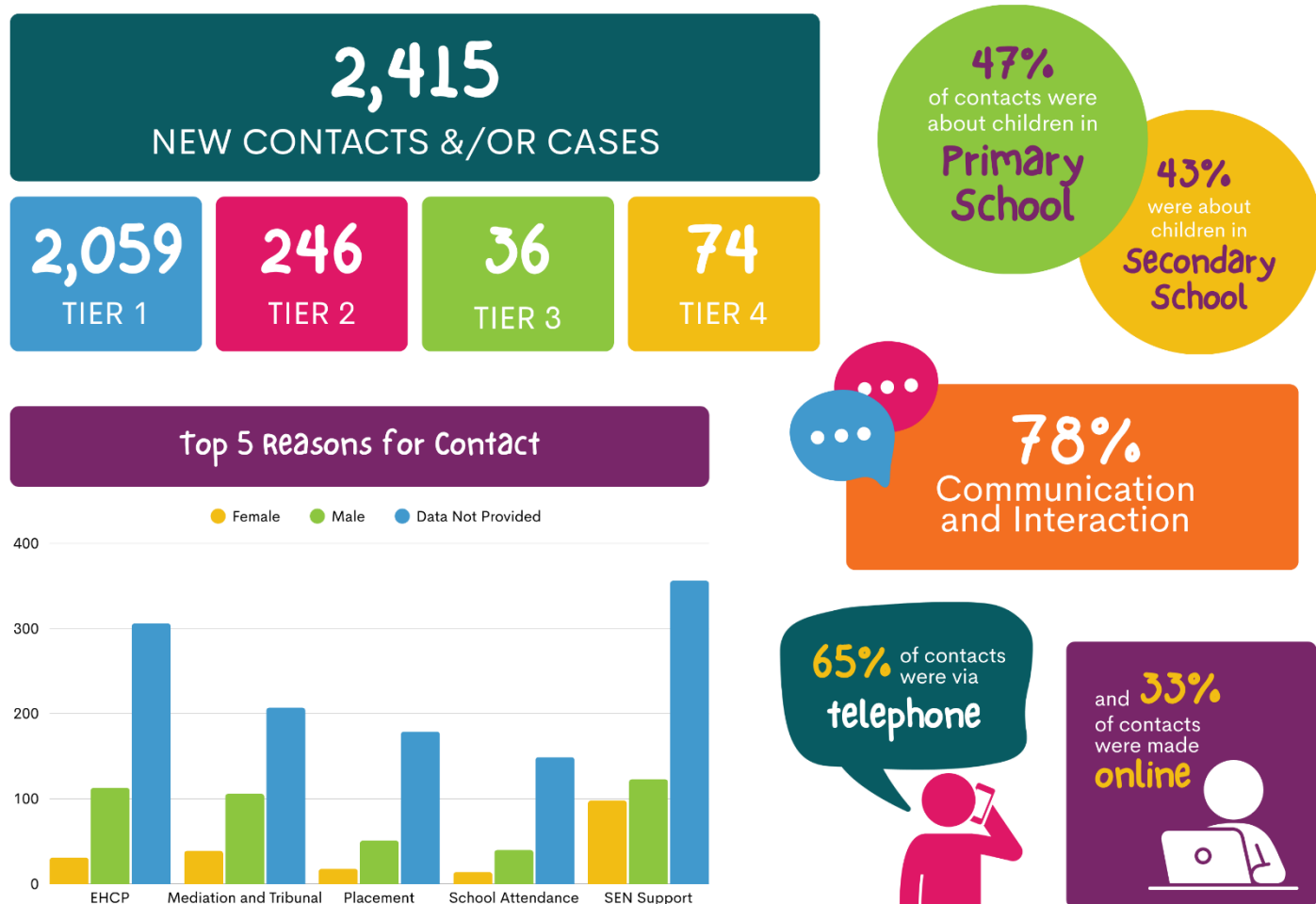


## Doncaster Educational Provision

Doncaster City has a range of educational establishments and childcare facilities which children and young people can attend.



## SENDIAS Headline Data 2024-25



In 2024-25, the number of referrals into the service increased from 1,939 to 2,415; an increase of 24% from the previous reporting year. Most service users are local families who have not used the service before; however, we also have returning service users, who need support on a range of different issues.

There are numerous ways in which service users can contact SENDIAS. This year 33% of service users contacted us via online methods such as email, social media and our automated referral form. However, 65% of services users prefer to contact us directly by telephone and good use is made of our voicemail facility, which is checked consistently throughout the day. Most voicemails are responded to within 24 hours.

Over the last 12 months we have dealt with approximately 8,000 telephone calls (incoming and outgoing), attended 373 meetings supporting families directly, and completed 43 outreach sessions.

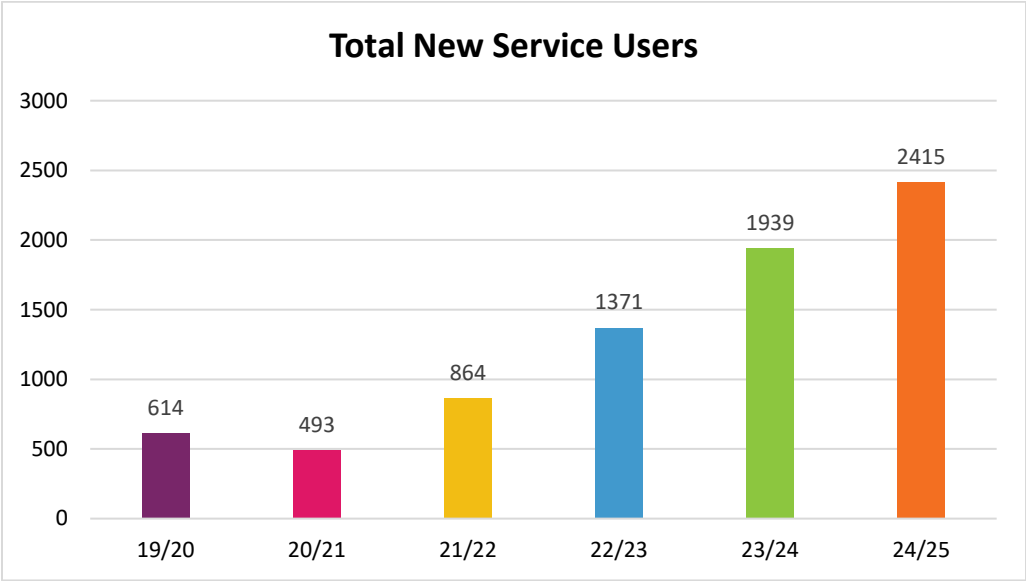
We have received slightly more contact from families who have children in mainstream primary schools (47%) as opposed to those who are in mainstream secondary provision (43%). The highest presenting special educational need identified by callers is communication and interaction, which includes neurodevelopmental diagnosis, such as autism and ADHD.



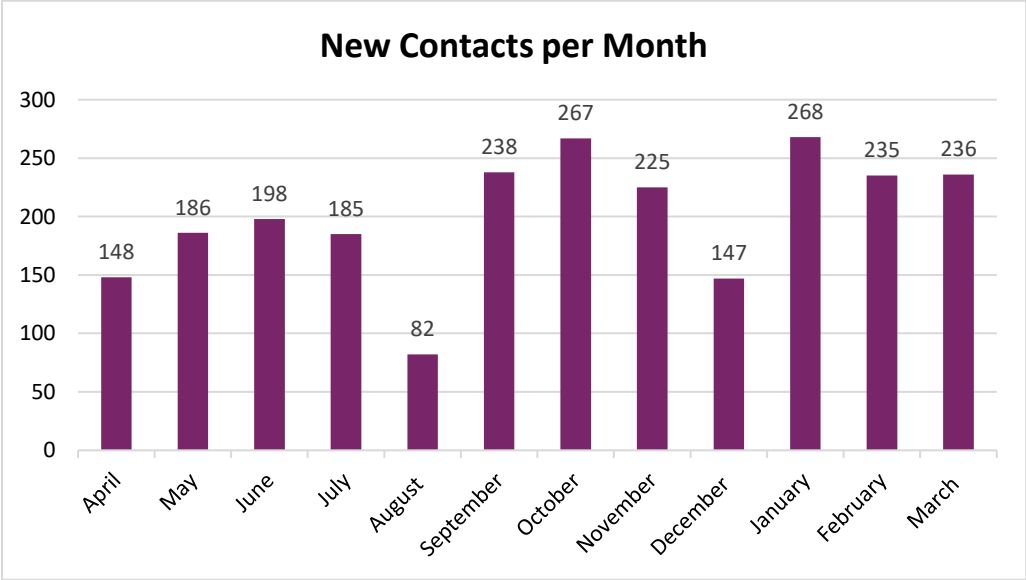
The main reason for contacted is to obtain information, advice and support in relation to SEN support in schools. Primarily, these calls were from service users who wanted to discuss issues relating to the quality of SEN support and their children’s SEN support plans. We record gender when service users offer this information, but we intend to improve this recording in the data for 2025-26.

Doncaster, like most local areas, has seen an increase in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) requests and is reflected in our data with questions and queries about Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) being the second highest reason for contact. Most services users sought advice about needs assessment or the EHCP annual review process. However, the reason for requesting support is often multifaceted with the family's needs more complex, requiring liaison with a range of partner agencies.

\*SENDIAS report by financial year to align with the City of Doncaster Council’s business cycle so our reports begin in April and end in the following March.



We traditionally tend to have more calls in the spring term between January and March, reflected in the data 2024-25, and linked to school admissions and transition into the next education key stage.



## Helpline Data

**2,059**  
TIER 1, HELPLINE CALLS

**1,335**  
CALLS

**694**  
ONLINE

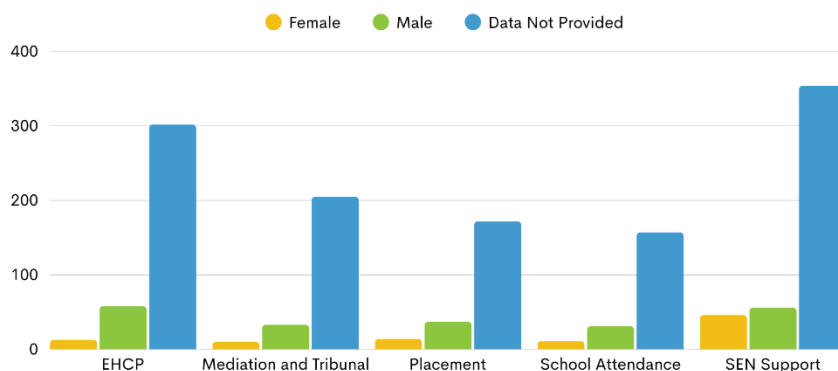
**JANUARY**  
was our **busiest**  
month with  
**232** contacts

*Q4 was our busiest  
quarter overall*

**88%** of contacts  
came from  
**parents**

Most contacts were  
about children in  
**Primary  
School**

### Top 5 Reasons for Contact



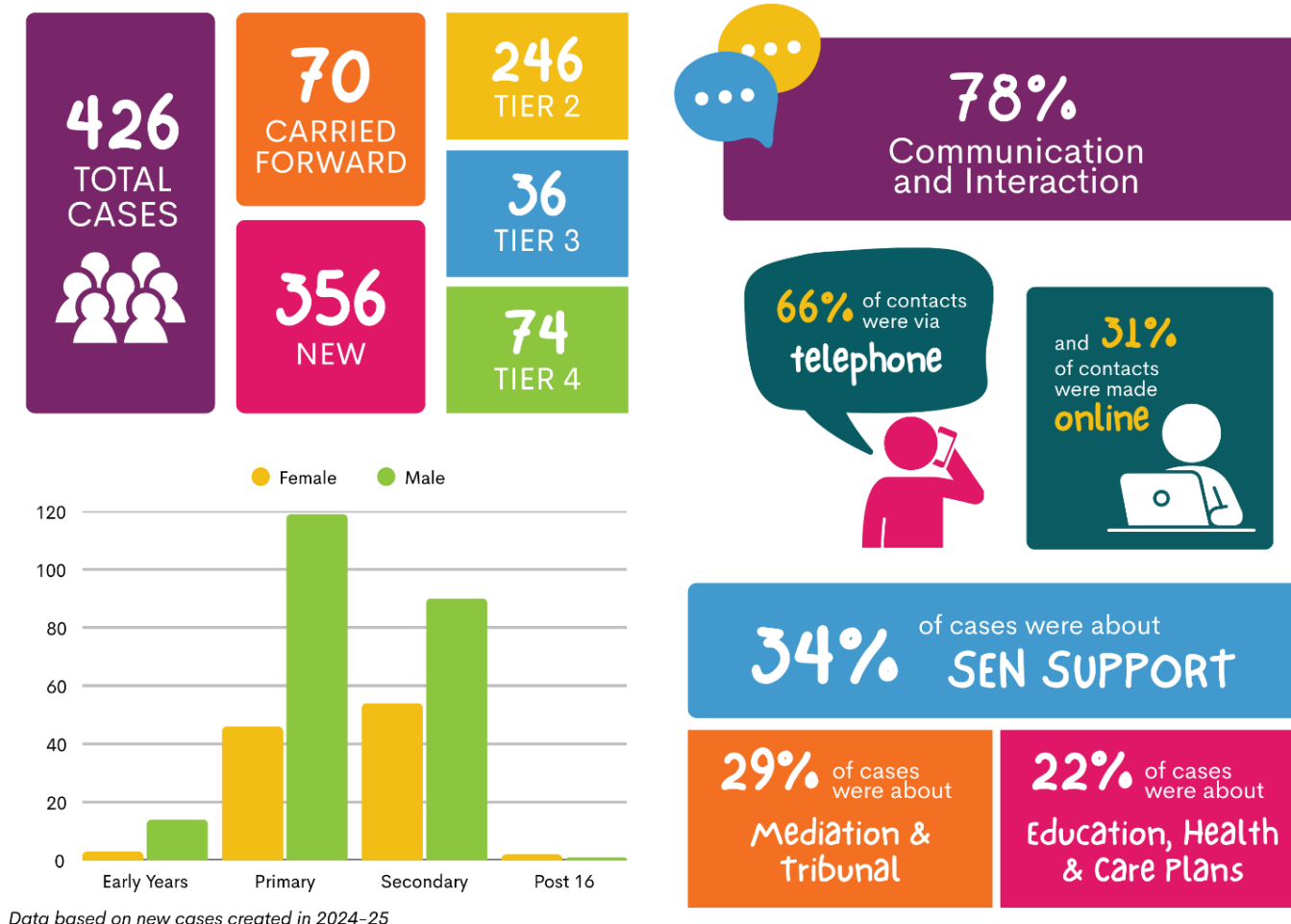
### Helpline Data Summary

As in previous years, most contacts from parents are in connection with SEN support and EHCPs. We have spent a lot of time talking to families about the importance of ensuring that schools are inclusive and follow Doncaster's graduated approach. Most families tend not to be familiar with the graduated approach; once time is taken to explain how schools assess, monitor and support children this often reassures parents. Parents frequently tell us that following our support they feel more empowered to have discussions with school staff and ask pertinent questions about their practice, provision, and assessment of children's needs.

We receive most calls in relation to children aged 10 and 11 years of age. Families often present themselves as anxious with the upcoming transition from primary to secondary school. Often, families feel that children will be unable to manage in a larger environment, and they want to ensure that transition is well planned; some also want to begin the process of applying for an EHCP. Many families contact us to discuss school attendance difficulties; and most calls relate to suspension and permanent exclusions. We also receive calls about the use of part-time timetables, managed moves to other schools and 'direction off school site'.

Our busiest month was January, which correlates with the local authority naming secondary school placements for children with an EHCP. It is this time of year when we also see an increase in requests for SEND Tribunal support.

## Case Data



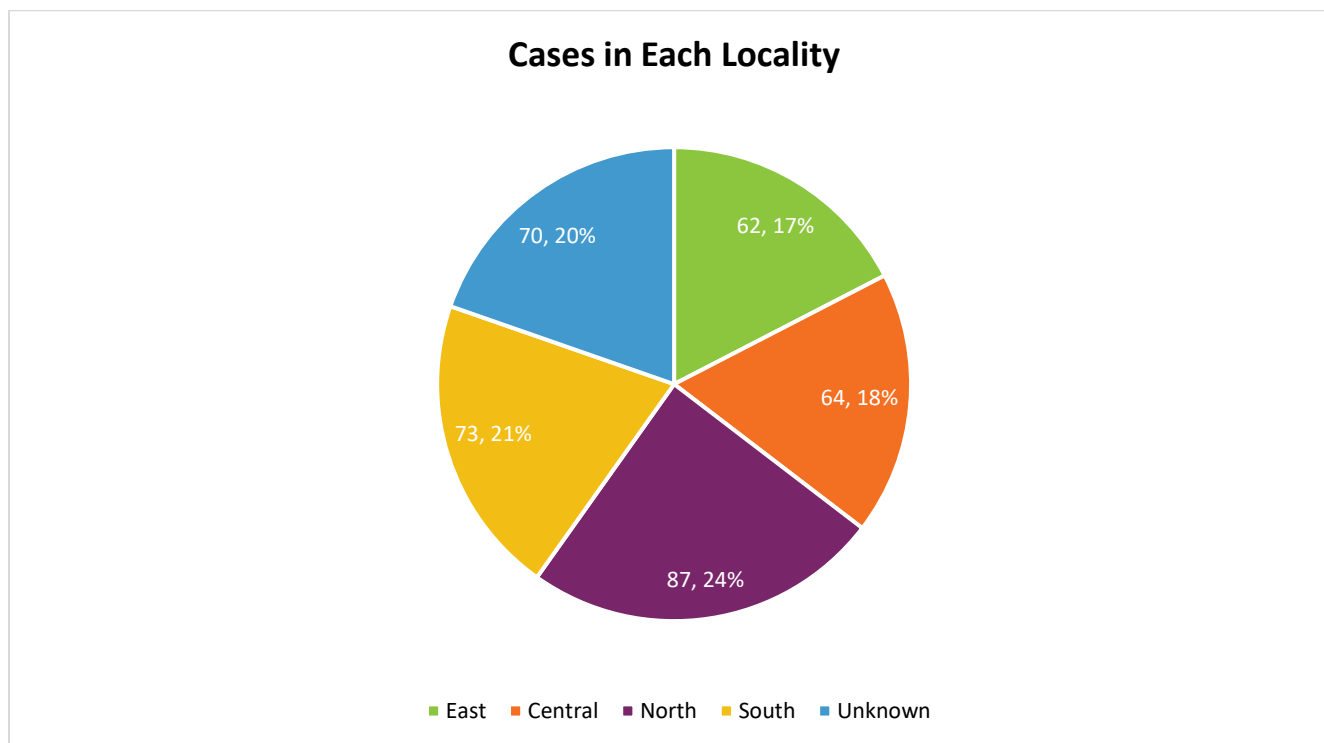
## Case Data Summary

During 2024-25, we managed 426 cases which required ongoing support due to there being high levels of need and/or high levels of complexity. Of these, 356 cases were newly opened in the 2024-25 reporting period and 70 were carried forward from 2023-24. This means that we opened 106 more new cases than the previous reporting a year (42% increase).

The vast majority of new cases (246 or 69%) are Tier 2, which means they take between 4 and 5 hours of SENDIAS officer time and have moderate levels of need and complexity. Further to this, we dealt with 36 Tier 3 cases which each required more than 5 hours of officer support and have moderate levels of need and complexity and 74 Tier 4 cases (20%) which require ongoing support and have a high level of need and/or complexity.

Most case work undertaken was in relation to helping families who raised concerns that SEN support in school was not sufficiently robust, and they needed support to ensure that the SEN plan was reviewed and good quality. Of the case work completed in relation to EHCPs, 52% involved the annual review process. Most of our case work involved supporting parents through SEND Tribunal, mostly in relation to appeals about placements.

Most casework was completed with primary aged children (50%) closely followed by referrals for children at secondary school (44%). The remaining referrals were for early years children (5%) and young people aged 17-25 years (1%).



## Dispute Resolution

### Mediation

We have given advice and support to 161 service users in relation to the mediation process; we spend a significant amount of time helping parents to prepare for mediation, although attend less than 10% of mediation sessions due to service capacity. We always attend a Mediation with parents who require a higher level of support than the information, advice and preparation support we otherwise provide.

### Tribunal

Using the latest national data available (2023-24), there were 21,000 registered SEN related appeals. Of these, 27% were against 'refusal to secure an EHC assessment', while a total of 59% were in relation to the content of EHC plans.

In Doncaster, we had 2,920 decisions made which were eligible to be appealed. This includes:

- Refusal to conduct an EHC (Education, Health and Care) needs assessment or reassessment.

- Refusal to create an EHC plan after assessment or reassessment.
- Refusal to amend or change specific sections of an existing EHC plan that relate to education (sections B, F, and I).
- Decisions that a child or young person no longer requires an EHC plan.

Of the 2,920 decisions made 49 (1.7%) were appealed to the SEN Tribunal.

The increase in appeals registered is attributed to:

- The growth in the number of families seeking EHC plan assessments
- Families appealing the placement named in the EHC plan
- The national increase in successful parental appeals (in the last 12 months 95% of cases were in favour of the family).

In the reporting period April 2024 to March 2025, we provided information and advice to 181 callers about the appeals process and supported 86 families to initiate the SEND Tribunal. We continued to work with 56 families from the reporting period April 2023 to March 2024 because tribunal cases tend to be open for longer periods as it takes around 12 months to obtain a court date.

Most tribunals were appeals involving disputes about placement (95%); the majority resolved prior to Tribunal through partnership working with parents and Doncaster SEN Team. SENDIAS attended 5 SEND Tribunals within the 2024-25 reporting period.

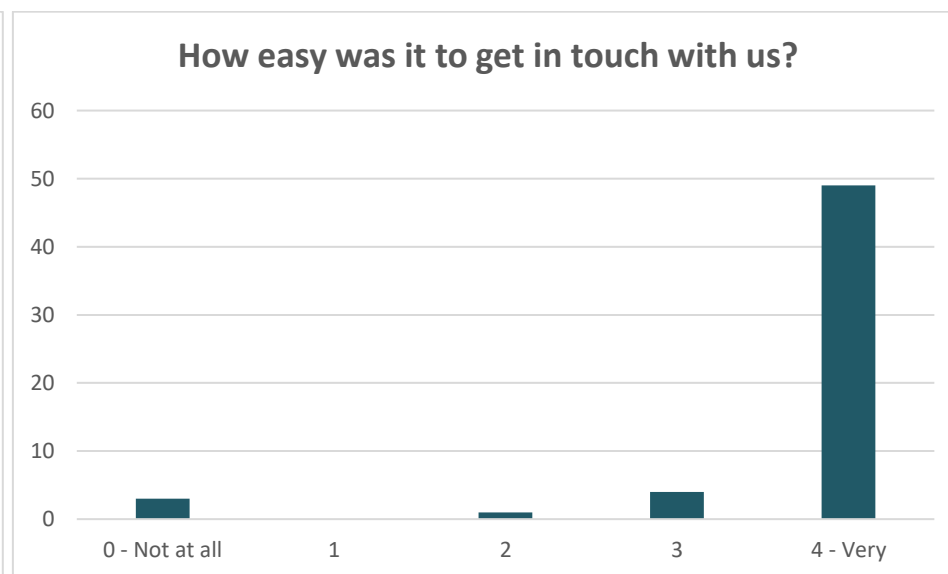
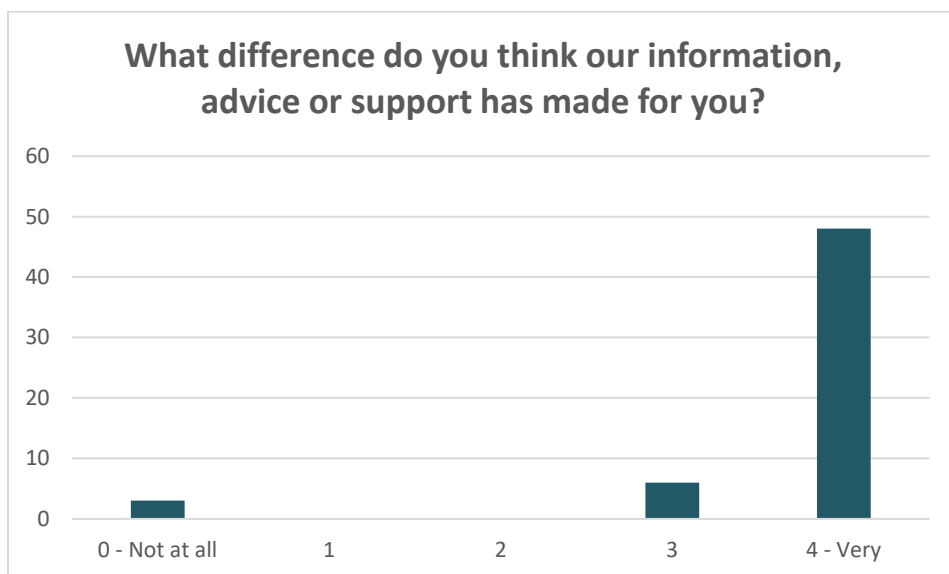
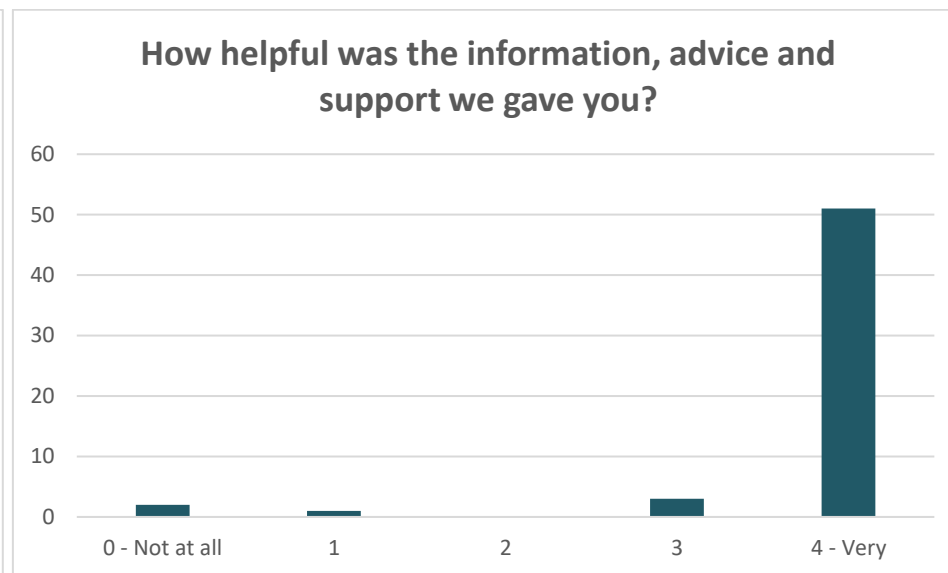
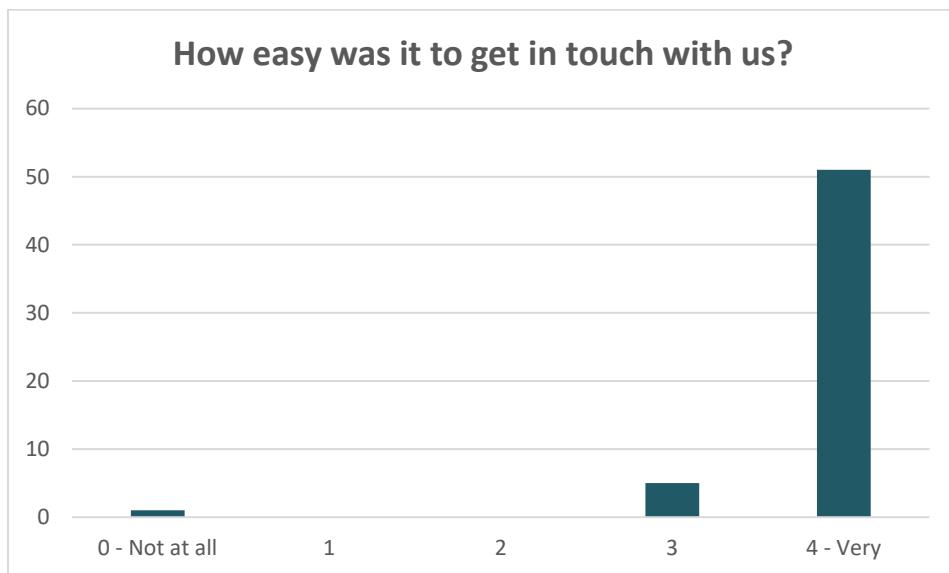
## Feedback

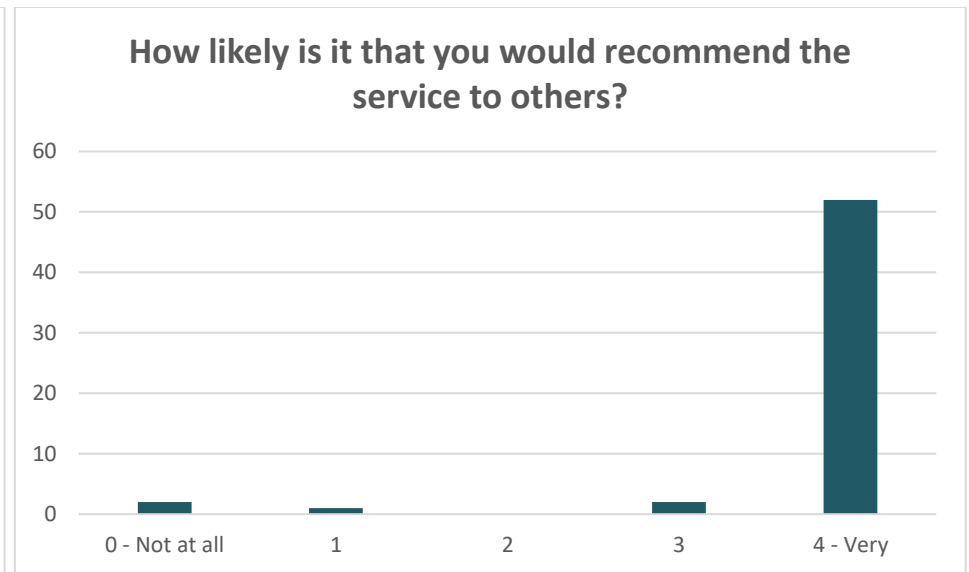
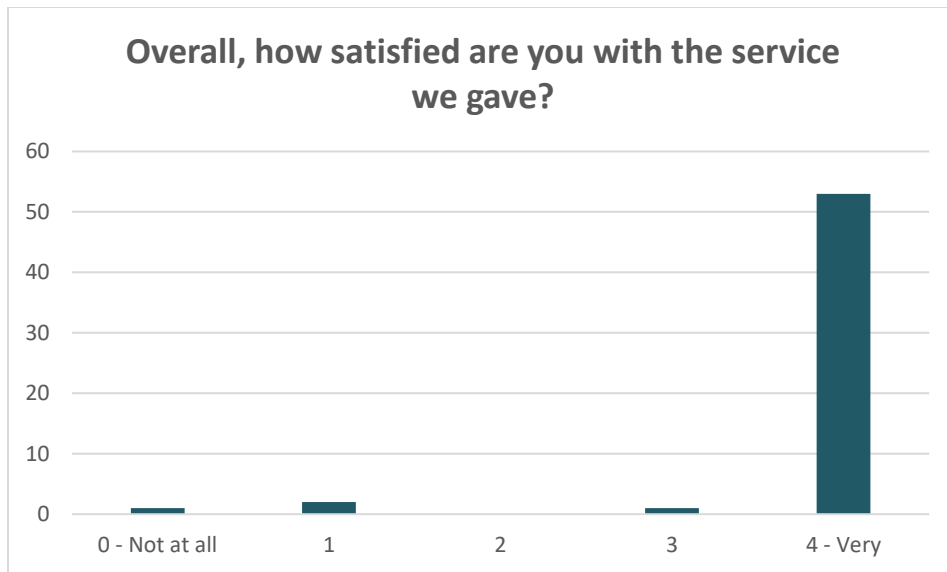
We ask our parents/carers and young people to complete an online feedback form which is entirely voluntary and can be submitted anonymously. Throughout April 2024 to March 2025, we received 57 responses, in comparison to 25 the previous year. Of these, 93% of were provided by parents/carers and the remaining 7% of responses were provided by children and young people aged 16 and under.

All service users are asked:

- How easy was it to get in touch with us?
- How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?
- What difference do you think the information, advice or support has made for you?
- How easy was it to get in touch with us?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with the service we gave?
- How likely is it that you would recommend the service to others?

Most responses were positive (as shown in the charts below), however, if a service user indicated they were unhappy with the service and they chose to provide their contact details so we could follow up with them then we would contact the service user to gain a better insight on their reasons for being dissatisfied with the service, and what steps we could take to improve going forward. This demonstrates our desire to continuously offer a service which meets the needs of Doncaster residents.





We also ask service users “Did Doncaster SENDIAS?”

Did Doncaster SENDIAS:	Yes	No
Return your calls/emails promptly?	100%	0%
Keep in touch?	100%	0%
Explain why decisions were made and what was happening?	100%	0%
Listen to your views?	100%	0%
Treat you with respect?	100%	0%
Explain who they were and what their role was?	100%	0%
Provide a confidential service?	100%	0%
Give you information and advice that met your needs?	100%	0%

## Comments and Feedback

In addition to answering the questions above, parents/carers and young people are also given the opportunity to provide comments about the service they have received on our feedback form. We also regularly receive emails from parents/carers offering thanks for the support they have received. Here's what some of our families said.



"Thanks again Leanne for all your hard work and support to us as a family. It's a very daunting process and very stressful and you have helped us a lot, we appreciate it."



"Thanks to all of the team as I had advice from all of you and big thanks to our worker Carol who supported us a lot."



"The staff are friendly and approachable".



"Your services changed mine and my son's life and we will be forever grateful."



"Couldn't have asked for better support. I'm so grateful for all the help!"



"Naomie was a great help. She explained everything on a level that I could understand, and every step was clear, and I knew what was expected of me and what I should expect back in return."



"Very knowledgeable and supportive."



"Very helpful and professional staff. Good coordination to get strategies to be implemented with school. Very supportive!"



"SENDIAS are amazing, very helpful. Thank you for all the team."



"Fabulous support and advice."



## Informing Local Policy and Practice

SENDIAS attends some local meetings where we represent the views of parents/carers and share our anonymised data to inform decision making. We are part of the following groups:

- Developing Better Value SEND Improvement Planning (Engine room)
- Local Offer Steering Group
- Doncaster Graduated Approach (Parent's handbook)
- Early Help Practice and Performance Sub-Group
- Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (Pins Project)
- Preparation for Adulthood (Planning subgroup)

Our inclusion in such meetings has allowed us to voice the concerns of parents and has resulted in improvements to published information on [Doncaster's Local Offer website](#).

## Update on Last Years Priorities

- **Increase our community presence by attending more face-to-face community sessions**

We have attended 43 sessions in the community during 2024-25. Most outreach sessions attended took place in local mainstream primary schools, but we also attended various events, for example we took part in a weekend outreach session at Doncaster Frenchgate Centre, and we attended the Preparing for Adulthood event at Eco-Power Stadium. We have also hosted our own SEND Advice Sessions at local Family Hubs – these have been well received and we plan to continue these into 2025-26. This resulted in us reaching 419 parents and 107 young people.

To aid our ability to converse with a broad range of Doncaster residents; we now have access to translation devices. The electronic devices have over one-hundred languages included in the software, and this has proved very helpful to our engagement with families who have English as an additional language.

- **Provide more training opportunities for parents both virtual and face to face**

We have been holding information sessions for families facing similar issues, e.g. joint information sessions for families who all wish to learn more about the mediation and/or tribunal process. We will continue working towards this priority over the next year.

- **Improve marketing to encourage more young people to access the service**

We have attended multiple Post-16 events to target young people. We have also reached out to our local secondary schools to make sure that SENDIAS information is shared on their website and school information. We have also increased the range of advertising resources to include items that may appeal to young people to encourage further engagement.

- **Improve our range of resources for parents**

We have worked on this priority by creating factsheets and videos for parents. This continues to be a priority for 2025-26.

- **Secure a permanent contract for our part-time officer who is currently on fixed term contract, due to end in November 2023, funded by IASS**

We were successful in achieving this priority in 2025.

- **Provide more information, advice and support in relation to transition**

We attended the Preparing for Adulthood local event at the Eco-Power Stadium and engaged with many young people and families. We are also working with the Local Offer team to update and improve the information available on the Local Offer which we can signpost parents to access. We have also attended multiple Post-16 events in different specialist settings to ensure parents and young people are aware of our service when needing information, advice and support in relation to transition.

- **Look at useful information to share with families around identifying needs in girls to support early identification.**

We have published new links on our webpage to support families in identifying needs in girls. We have also attended multiple community events to raise awareness and speak with individuals about any concerns they may have around identifying needs.

- **To identify the services that signpost to SENDIAS to understand which services may require more information on how SENDIAS can support parents and young people.**

We have adjusted how we collect information on how families find out about our service. This has allowed us to better identify which services are signposting to our service. Parents tell us that local agencies have recommended that they contact us. This includes:

- SEN Team
- Schools
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- Behavior Outreach Support Service (BOSS)
- Educational Psychologists
- Family Hubs
- Parenting and Family Support Service (PAFSS)
- Health Visitors
- Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Team

Following discussions with staff, it's been identified that on some occasions parents are incorrectly signposted to our service from partner agencies. We will use this information to work with partners over the next year to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the SENDIAS remit.

## SENDIAS Priorities for 2025-26

- Joint Commissioning Review of SENDIAS due to increasing demand on the service
- Continue to have an increased presence in the community
- Review our website content
- Achieve Child Friendly Status
- Offer more training opportunities to enhance workforce development and knowledge of SENDIAS and SEND related issues, such as the graduated response.
- Host more information/training sessions for parents. This will include:
  - The graduated approach
  - SEN support in school
  - The EHC application process
  - Reviewing an EHC plan

## Work With Young People

We have engaged 107 young people directly through outreach work and bespoke casework, which parents generally initiate. We have not managed to meet one of our 2024-25 priorities, which was to secure Child Friendly Status and ensure that more young people are aware of the service and how they can contact us; this is due to the increased demand over the 12 months; however, this remains a key target we are committed to completing.

## Conclusion

We have had a very busy year with referrals up 24% on the previous year. This increase in demand has impacted our availability to support families at face-to-face meetings, and we have been unable to complete as much development work as we would like. However, this element of the service remains important to us, and we will look at how we can address these issues over the next 12 months.

We have continued to work with our SENDIAS regional group and SENDIAS Support Services (IASS) Network. This has resulted in the sharing of good practice, and the development of videos in range of languages which will be added to our website.

We will continue to be as responsive to local needs as possible and prioritise our responsiveness to families, who tell us this is greatly appreciated.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

Level 1 (Helpline Calls)	Service User Need	Support	Outcome
Information	Information on specific advice about education health and social care sent systems and processes.	Provision of information which could be via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helpline</li> <li>• e-mail</li> <li>• website</li> </ul>	Parent/YP is empowered to independently manage their situation and make informed decisions
<p>Helpline - Time for individual contact up to 20 mins support – no follow-up required.</p> <p>Level 1 Time for individual contact up to 60 minutes initial contact through one to one support on the helpline and a maximum of 3 hour support thereafter, which might include sending emails, or support in meetings etc. Cases are low level need/ low complexity.</p>			

Level 2 (Helpline Calls)	Service User Need	Support	Outcome
Information and tailored advice	Information on <b>specific</b> advice about education health and social care sent systems and processes.	Provision of information which could be via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone call</li> <li>• Virtual meetings</li> <li>• Exchange of emails</li> </ul> Discussions around more complex/ high level information	<p>Parent/YP is empowered to independently manage their situation and make informed decisions.</p> <p>The services provided tailored advice and support.</p>
<p>Support which may need research and takes between 4 and 5 hours of officer time and has moderate levels of need and complexity.</p> <p>*Some level 2 cases, while not particularly complex, may take a long time to reach a conclusion. In such instances, we record our intervention as ongoing case work.</p>			

Level 3 (Case Work)	Service User Need	Support	Outcome
Support	<p>Information, advice and support about education, health and social care send systems and process is. Inclusive of initial concern up to appeals.</p> <p>The needs of individual service users and/ or the complexity of their/ their children's circumstances significantly impacts on their ability to independently navigate the system.</p> <p>They are a child or young person who need/ wanting information, advice or support separate from that given to their parent/ carer</p>	<p>Support can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocation of a caseworker</li> <li>• Liaising with other education health and social care agencies</li> <li>• Attendance at face to face and virtual meetings</li> <li>• Attendance at multi agency meetings</li> <li>• Support with writing letters, filling in forms, giving views, and preparing appeals</li> </ul>	<p>Parents, child or young person feels have been supported to navigate the system.</p> <p>Parent child or young person feels that they have been able to make informed decisions, exercise their rights and express their views.</p>
	<p>Support which takes officers time more than 5 hours and has moderate levels of need and complexity</p> <p>*Longer term case work is always necessary.</p>		

Level 4 (Case Work)	Service User Need	Support	Outcome
Intensive Support	<p>Information, advice and support about education, health and social care SEND systems and processes. Inclusive of initial concerns up to appeals.</p> <p>The needs of individual service users/ or the complexity of their children's circumstances may mean that they are not able to independently navigate the system and/ or access justice.</p> <p>They are a child or young person who need advocacy/ representation separate from or instead of their parents, this includes children/young people who are looked after.</p>	<p>Can include all of the support detailed in Level 3 but may also involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-going intensive casework/ advocacy.</li> </ul>	<p>Parents, child or young person feels have been supported to navigate the system.</p> <p>Parent child or young person feels that they have been able to make informed decisions, exercise their rights and express their views.</p>
	<p>The case requires ongoing support there is a high level of need and high levels of complexity.</p> <p>*Longer term case work is always necessary.</p>		