

Bolton Information and Advisory Service, SEND Impartiality Policy

Bolton IAS is a statutory service 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. We are expected to meet certain quality standards as prescribed by the National Network of Information Advice and Support Services and the DfE.

The Quality Standards for services providing information advice and support, states that we should ensure; "Parents, children and young people are (provided with) high quality, impartial and accessible information, advice and support that are appropriate to their needs, extends their knowledge and maximises their involvement in decision making". To ensure parents carers, children and young people have confidence in the service, it is important that staff and volunteers are able to operate impartially.

Bolton's Impartiality Statement

The Information, advice and support offered should be impartial and provided at arms-length from the Local Authority and CCG (SEND CoP 2015, 2.8). Here at Bolton IAS, we have offices, staff, phone lines and website that are for IAS use only- we are part of the COG family, a registered charity, and as such, our ties to the LA are through funding only. As a statutory service, LA's must commission and IAS service in every area.

Aim

Bolton IAS aims to secure 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 IAS will also act strategically alongside Bolton Parent Carer Forum to ensure the families we support are heard and their experiences shared with the right people to influence change.

Relationship with the Local Authority

Bolton IAS is an "out sourced" service. This means that the service is funded by the Local Authority but service staff are IAS/COG 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 and COG trustees 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 carers and young people. The Service has a delegated budget and independent recording systems. The service occupies its own office space with access to private meeting rooms within COG nursery, and offers training and events at spaces secured by the parent carer forum. 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 law and allow them to make informed decisions for themselves.

IAS 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. We may, with consent, put forward the views and wishes of parents, carers, children and young people either during meetings or telephone calls whilst, at the same time, ascertaining the views of professionals involved with the family. We will inform the Manager of any conflict of interest in relation to individual families e.g. The family are relatives of an IAS officer. These cases will be referred to other team members. We will signpost parents, carers, children and young people to other agencies that enable them to verify the impartiality of the information and advice provided e.g. IPSEA , CONTACT. Furthermore, we will maintain a professional relationship with parents, carers children and young people we support.

Liaising with Other Professionals and Organisations

IAS Staff (and volunteers): may have parental/carer/young person's consent to act as an intermediary by relaying their perspective to school or Local Authority/ other services. This does not indicate bias in favour of the parent/young person, nor does it represent the views of IAS staff unless underpinned by law and legislation. We 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 IAS agenda. We will maintain an impartial stance whilst collaborating and engaging with parents and carers, relevant organisations and networks. Where a dialogue that we are included in with anyone, becomes negative, unkind, or abusive to the other party, we will immediately withdraw from that specific conversation and make our reasons for doing so, known.

Publications

Bolton IAS has its own identity including service logo which is distinct from other services and the LA. The IAS has responsibility for the content and maintenance of its own website as it is entirely separate from the LA website (although we are on the Local Offer too). Our website includes relevant internal / external links and

downloadable documents, a blog, workshop and survey offers, feedback opportunities and other useful information. The IASS writes much of its own materials with input from parents, children, young people and professionals. We also share some publications with the parent carer forum, and appear on nearly all of their literature.

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 IAS are conducted with parent carers co-delivering from the parent carer forum to show impartiality. We also send all our workshops and training session material to the LA and CCG and are open to requests for attendance from professionals. This helps ensure a consistent message and accurate, non biased information is delivered to all.

Management committee

Bolton IAS sit under the COG umbrella, and, as a registered charity, COG are governed by independent trustees. Our trustees come from a variety of backgrounds, but non work within the LA or CCG. They also hold an AGM every year which is open to members of the public or any other interested party.

Policy effectiveness

This policy is available to anyone who should ask for it, and is clearly displayed in our offices.

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 IAS survey will act as a reflection of service satisfaction. Parents and Members of the COG management committee will periodically be asked to monitor the impartiality of the information developed / provided by the IAS.

The Policy will be reviewed every year. Policy approved by Cheryl Wyatt Dec 2021