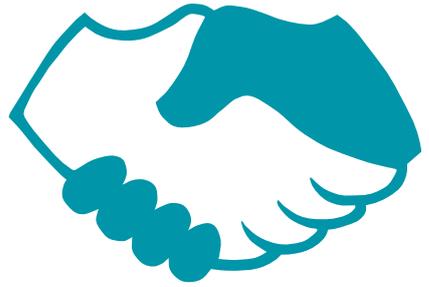


WIAS&S



Wandsworth Information, Advice & Support Service

Providing an Impartial Service to Children and Young People (aged 0-25)
with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities and their Parents or Carers



Impartiality Policy

**CONFIDENTIAL
IMPARTIAL
FREE**

**Information,
Advice & Support
Services Network**
for SEND



Wandsworth Information, Advice & Support Service (WASS) provides a confidential, impartial, information, advice, and support service to children and young people(0-25) with Special Educational Needs and Disability(SEND) and their parents/carers. A young person in this case is defined as an individual over compulsory school age (16) and under 25. WASS is part of the national Information, Advice and Support Services Network (IASSN for SEND).

The role of WASS is to ensure parents/carers, children and young people have access to confidential and impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to SEND.

WASS staff and volunteer independent parental supporters (IPSs) remain impartial by:

- Being clear with parents/carers that the role of WASS is to help them participate in their child's education and advise them on their rights rather than giving their own views about what is best for a child/young person.
- Being clear with young people that the role of WASS is to help them to be able to make decisions about their Education, Health and Social Care and to advise them on their rights rather than giving their own views.
- Respecting parents'/carers' decisions without making a judgement.
- Providing factual information and advice based on the law and guidelines.

What is Impartiality?

Impartiality is defined as being objective, neutral and free from undue bias or preconceived opinions.

Relationship with the Local Authority

All local authorities must provide an information, advice and support service (see The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0-25, 2015). The SEND Code of Practice (2015) states that an information, advice and support service should be impartial and provided at "arm's length" from the local authority and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs).

Wandsworth Information, Advice & Support Service (WASS) is funded by Wandsworth Council (local authority) and based in the Department of

Education and Social services. The service is managed by the manager of WASS.

It is made clear to officers of the local authority, CCG and voluntary organisations that WASS staff provide parents/carers, children and young people with impartial information about their rights and responsibilities based on national legislation and guidance. The LA does not influence or edit the information given to parents/carers and young people by WASS.

Please see the 'WASS arm's length policy' for further information about how WASS remains at "arm's length" from the local authority.

WASS Advisory Group (WASS-AG)

The main role of the WASS-AG is to provide independent support to WASS staff and to keep an oversight of the service and its development



including, ensuring impartiality of all service activities. The WIASS-AG is responsible for reviewing the impartiality policy on an annual basis.

To ensure that membership is representative of service users, at least 50 per cent of WIASS-AG members are parents/carers of children and young people with SEND, volunteer IPSs and voluntary sector representatives.

Location

WIASS is based in Wandsworth Town Hall with a separate office base used only by WIASS staff and volunteer IPSs and it is located in a different building from other education and social services teams.

- All confidential electronic files are available only to WIASS staff and are stored securely (password protected).
- There is a dedicated phone line for parents/carers, children and young people, with voicemail facilities.
- There is a dedicated email facility.

There are private meeting rooms based at Wandsworth Town Hall that WIASS staff and volunteer Independent Parental Supporters (IPSs) can meet parents/carers, children and young people in. Other neutral venues outside the town hall can also be used, as well as home visits in exceptional circumstances.

Training

To ensure staff are kept up to date with national SEND law and guidance, WIASS staff receive annual Information, Advice & Support Services Network legal training delivered by the

Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA). IPSEA is an independent organisation. WIASS staff then deliver this training to volunteer IPSs.

Other sources of external training include the Council for Disabled Children.

Children, young people and parents/carers

As a service we try to ensure that there are no barriers to accessing the services that WIASS offers and we achieve this in a number of ways, for example, using interpreters, joint work with family support workers or making home visits. We prioritise parents/carers, children and young people who cannot easily access WIASS for information, advice and support, for example, those parents/carers with limited understanding of spoken or written English or those who have their own additional needs.

Ensuring Impartiality of Staff

Staff within the service are very clear that WIASS do not offer advocacy and generally do not tell parents/carers, children or young people what they think they should do (exceptions may include if there are safeguarding issues to be addressed).

WIASS helps parents/carers, children and young people explore their options and make their own decisions, providing relevant information as appropriate. WIASS attempts to work in a way that encourages parents/carers and young people to take responsibility for the decisions they make about education.



Recruitment

WASS ensures that when recruiting new staff and volunteer IPSs advertised information for posts reflects very clearly the impartial work of WASS.

Recognising the Partiality of Other Agencies

WASS understands and recognises that schools/colleges and early year's providers and other services and agencies will have their own priorities, criteria and systems of working which may sometimes conflict with national or local guidance and/or the needs of parents/carers, children and young people. Where appropriate, WASS staff explain and direct services to national law and guidance.

Seeking Feedback from Service Users

Parents/carers are sent a feedback questionnaire when their work with WASS is finished. This asks questions about the parents'/carers', children and young person's experience of using the service, for example, to see if they felt the support or information provided was impartial and consider the impact it has had on their situation.

Service Publicity

WASS ensures that all service publicity clearly reflects the service's guidelines on impartiality. All publicity includes the WASS and national IASS Network logo.

Ensuring the Effectiveness of our Impartiality Policy

- All WASS staff and volunteer IPSs receive training on WASS' impartiality policy.
- WASS' impartiality policy is shared with the local authority and other agencies to make them aware of the impartial nature of our service.
- WASS staff and volunteer IPSs are clear that WASS' ultimate aim is to provide support to parents, children and young people to achieve the best educational outcome and to empower parents and young people to make their own decisions.
- Our impartiality policy is reviewed annually by WASS Advisory Group.

This policy was last updated in March 2017.

How to contact us:

 **Advice line: 020 8871 5237** (school term time only)
Monday: 10am -1pm, Wednesday: 1.30-4.30pm, Friday: 10am-1pm.

 **Call back service: 020 8871 8065**
(24 hour answer machine)

 **Email: wass@wandsworth.gov.uk**

 **Web: www.wandsworth.gov.uk/wass**

