

SEN Support and Educational Health and Care Plans

Special Educational Needs Support



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1. What is Special Educational Needs (SEN)?

The term Special Educational Needs, often shortened to SEN, refers to a child or young person who has a learning difficulty or disability that makes it harder for them to learn than most others of the same age.

SEN can affect a child's ability to:

- Learn at the same pace as their peers
- Understand or process information
- Communicate with others
- Manage their emotions or behaviour
- Cope with sensory input, like sounds, light or touch
- Move around or carry out everyday physical tasks

Children with SEN might need extra help or different support from that given to other children. This support can be offered in any setting – a nursery, school, college, or even at home.

Is SEN the Same as a Disability?

Not always – but there can be overlap. Under the Equality Act 2010, a disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a long-term, substantial impact on daily life. Some children may be considered disabled even if they don't have SEN, and vice versa.

You Are Not Alone

Around 1 in 5 children in England are identified as having SEN. Support is available, and the law is there to help ensure your child gets the right help to learn and thrive.



The Four Broad Areas of SEN

When identifying and supporting a child with Special Educational Needs, professionals often refer to four broad areas. These help schools and families understand the type of difficulty a child may be experiencing, so the right support can be put in place.

Communication and Interaction

This includes children who have difficulty speaking, understanding language, or interacting socially.

Examples:

- A child who struggles to follow instructions
- A child with unclear speech or limited vocabulary
- Children on the autism spectrum who find social rules and communication challenging

Cognition and Learning

This covers difficulties with thinking, learning, and understanding. Children may learn at a slower pace or need tasks broken down into smaller steps.

Examples:

- A child with dyslexia who finds reading and writing difficult
- A child with a learning disability who needs support to understand new concepts
- Children with working memory issues who forget what they've just heard or read

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

These needs affect a child's ability to regulate emotions, manage behaviour, or cope with social situations.

Examples:

- A child who experiences anxiety or depression
- A child who finds it difficult to build friendships
- A child who shows challenging behaviour as a response to stress or frustration

Sensory and/or Physical Needs

This includes children with a disability or medical condition that affects how they access education. It also includes difficulties with sensory processing.

Examples:

- A child with visual or hearing impairment
- A child with mobility challenges who uses a wheelchair
- A child who is overwhelmed by bright lights, loud noises or certain textures



2. The Legal Framework: Children's and Families Act 2014

Understanding your rights – and your child's – can make a huge difference when navigating the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system. The Children and Families Act 2014 is the main law that sets out how support should be provided for children and young people with SEN or disabilities in England.

This law introduced some important changes to how education, health and social care services work together, and it's designed to put **children, young people, and their families at the heart of the process.**

Key Principles of the Act

The Act is built around several important ideas:

- Early identification and support: Children's needs should be picked up early and support should be put in place as soon as possible.
- Involving children and families: Families and young people must be involved in decisions that affect them – this is known as co-production.
- Working together: Education, health and social care services should work in partnership, not separately.
- Better outcomes: Support should focus on helping children and young people achieve the best outcomes in learning, independence, and wellbeing.

What Did the Act Change?

Before 2014, children with more complex needs might have had a Statement of SEN. These were replaced by Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which bring together all the support a child or young person needs in one legal document.

The Act also introduced:

- The Local Offer – a published guide to services and support available in your local area
- Personal Budgets – allowing families some choice and control over how some support is provided
- SEN Support – a clearer process for identifying and meeting needs in mainstream settings without the need for an EHCP

Who Does the Act Apply To?

- Children and young people aged 0 to 25 who have special educational needs or disabilities
 - Parents and carers
 - Schools, nurseries, colleges, and local authorities
 - Health and social care providers
-

What This Means for You

- Your child has a legal right to have their needs identified and supported and not just diagnosed needs.
- You should be involved in decisions about your child's education and support at every stage.
- If your child has complex needs, they may be entitled to an EHCP, which brings education, health and care support together in one plan.
- Your local authority must publish a Local Offer – a guide to the services and support available in your area.
- Support is available from birth to age 25, and services must work together to help your child achieve their best.



3. The Graduated Approach and SEN Support in School

Not every child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will need an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). In fact, most children with SEN are supported effectively in their mainstream school or setting through what's called SEN Support.

What is SEN Support?

SEN Support is the help and adjustments a school or setting puts in place to help a child learn and make progress. It may include:

- Small group work or one-to-one support
- Extra teaching sessions to fill gaps in learning
- Changes to the classroom environment
- Use of visual aids or assistive technology
- Emotional or behavioural support

Your child does not need a diagnosis to get SEN Support.

The Graduated Approach: “Assess, Plan, Do, Review”

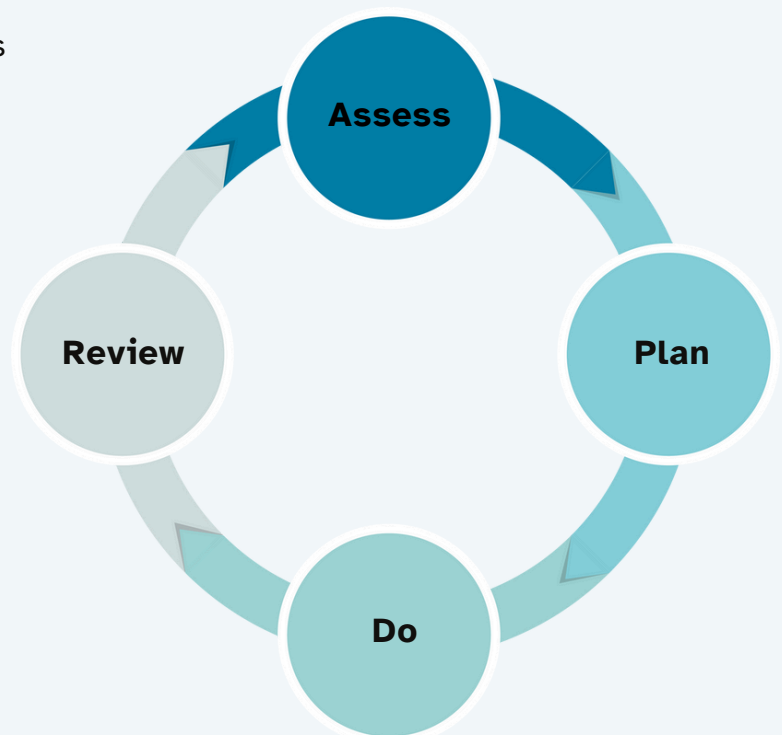
Schools follow a four-step cycle to support children with SEN. This is known as the Graduated Approach

Assess – The teacher and SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) assess your child's needs, using observations, assessments and any outside reports.

Plan – A plan is made for how to support your child. This could include setting specific learning targets and deciding on the support needed. You should be involved in this planning.

Do – The support is put into action. This could include specialist teaching, resources, or changes in the way your child is taught.

Review – The school checks how well the support is working. Progress is reviewed with you and changes are made if needed. This cycle should happen regularly (at least three times a year).



Who's Involved?

- **Class teachers** – are responsible for your child's progress every day
- **SENCO** – coordinates SEN support in the school and works closely with families and staff
- **You** – as a parent or carer, your views and knowledge of your child are vital

What Might SEN Support Look Like?

Here are some examples:

- A child with dyslexia might get coloured overlays for reading, and phonics-based support
 - A child with autism might have a visual timetable and access to a quiet area
 - A child with speech difficulties might get help from a teaching assistant trained in speech strategies
-

Why Early Support Matters

The earlier a child's needs are recognised and supported, the better their chances of making progress and feeling confident in school. SEN Support is designed to be flexible and responsive, adapting to your child's changing needs. It works best when there is open communication between school and home, so don't be afraid to ask questions, share concerns, or celebrate progress. You are a key part of the team helping your child succeed.





4. When SEN Support Isn't Enough: Considering an EHCP

While many children make good progress with SEN Support, some have more complex or long-term needs that require a higher level of help. In these cases, it may be appropriate to consider applying for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

What is an EHCP?

An Education, Health and Care Plan is a legal document for children and young people aged 0 to 25 who need more support than a school or setting can provide through SEN Support alone. It sets out:

- The child's needs
- The outcomes they are working towards
- The education, health, and social care provision they require to achieve those outcomes

EHCPs offer a more coordinated approach, bringing together support from different services in one plan.

Signs Your Child May Need an EHCP

Your child might need an EHCP if:

- They are not making expected progress, even with extra support in place
- They have multiple or complex needs (e.g., autism, physical disability, significant learning difficulties)
- They need specialist provision, such as a place at a special school or more therapy input than the school can offer

They require regular input from health or social care professionals alongside education

Why Apply for an EHCP?

An EHCP can:

- Make sure your child gets the right support, at the right time, in the right setting
- Open access to specialist services or schools that may not be available through SEN Support alone
- Give you as a parent or carer greater legal rights to appeal decisions or request changes
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It's important to remember that an EHCP is not about giving a child a label – it's about making sure they get the tailored support they need to reach their potential.

The Educational, Health and Social Care Plan (EHCP) pathway should take no more than 20 weeks to complete from requesting a Needs assessment.

Steps 1 - 3 Should Take No more than 6 weeks

Step 1

Request for an EHC Plan /Assessment received by the Assessment Panel

Step 2

EHC panel consider request

Step 3

Application accepted for an EHC assessment or Application declined (criteria for EHC not met)



Steps 4 -7 should take no more than 8 weeks (assessment planning)

Step 4 (if application accepted)

Contact visit arranged with child/young person and family, gaps identified in information

Step 5

Further information is requested if there is not enough information

Step 6

Proposed EHC prepared

Step 7

Proposed EHC approved by panel, and resources allocated



Steps 8-10 should take 6 weeks

Step 8

Contact visit arranged with child/Proposed EHC presented to family, child /young person and family, gaps identified in information

Step 9

Final EHC approved by panel

Step 10

Final EHC sent to family



5. Applying for an EHCP Needs Assessment

If your child needs more help than their school or setting can provide through SEN Support, the first step towards getting an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is to request an **Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment**.

This assessment looks in detail at your child's needs and decides whether they require an EHCP.

Who Can Ask for an EHCP Needs Assessment?

- Parents or carers
- Young people over the age of 16
- Schools, nurseries or colleges
- You don't need anyone's permission to request an assessment – you can apply directly to your local authority.

How to Make a Request

Write to your local authority's SEND department asking for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment. Include:

- Your child's name, date of birth, and school
- A brief explanation of their needs and how they affect them
- Details of any support already in place
- Any reports or letters from professionals (if available)

The request does not need to be complicated or long, and you can ask your local SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service) for help writing it.

What Happens Next?

The local authority has six weeks to decide whether to carry out a full assessment. To make this decision, they will consider:

- Your views and your child's views
- Information from the school or setting
- Any reports or evidence submitted
- Whether your child may have needs that require support beyond what the school can reasonably provide

You will receive a letter to say whether or not the assessment will go ahead.

What is the Criteria for an EHC Needs Assessment?

The local authority **must carry out an assessment** if:

1. The child or young person has or may have Special Educational Needs, and
2. It may be necessary for special educational provision to be made through an EHCP

This means your child **does not have to already have a diagnosis** or be formally recognised as having SEN — the local authority just needs to believe there might be SEN, and that an EHCP might be needed.

They must look at:

- Whether your child is making progress with the support already in place
- Whether their needs go beyond what the school can usually provide through SEN Support
- Evidence from school, professionals, and parents

You do not need to wait until your child has fallen far behind or failed – the law encourages early identification and support.

The legal criteria for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment are set out in the **Children and Families Act 2014, specifically in Section 36(8)**.

6. The EHCP Needs Assessment Process

Once the local authority agrees to carry out an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment, the process of gathering information begins. This is a detailed look at your child's strengths, difficulties, and the support they need across education, health and care.

The assessment usually takes up to 16 weeks in total.

What Does the Assessment Involve?

The local authority will gather advice and reports from a range of people who know your child, including:

- You (the parent or carer) – your views and experiences are essential
- Your child or young person – their views, wishes and feelings
- Educational setting – such as their school, nursery or college
- An educational psychologist
- Health professionals – such as speech and language therapists, paediatricians, or mental health workers
- Social care – if relevant or if your child is known to social services

All professionals are expected to respond within six weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The assessment looks at:

- What your child can and cannot do
- What support they already receive and how well it's working
- What outcomes your child is working towards
- Whether your child's needs can still be met through SEN Support or if they require an EHCP



Do I Need to Do Anything?

Yes – your input is vital. You'll usually be asked to complete a parent views form or submit a letter about your child. This is your opportunity to explain:

- What daily life is like for your child
- How their needs affect learning and wellbeing
- What support has (or hasn't) worked in the past
- What your hopes are for the future

You can also submit evidence, such as:

- School reports or support plans
- Letters from professionals
- Medical or therapy reports

SENDIASS or local support groups can help you write this if needed.

What Happens After the Assessment?

At the end of the assessment, the local authority will decide whether to:

- Issue an EHCP, or
- Not issue an EHCP

You'll be told in writing and given reasons for the decision. If they agree to issue an EHCP, they will begin drafting it (see Section 7). If they refuse, you have the right to appeal.

7. What Happens if an EHCP is Issued?

If the local authority decides, after completing the needs assessment, that your child does require an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), they will begin drafting the plan. This is a **legal document** that outlines your child's needs and the support **they must receive**.

What's in the EHCP?

An EHCP is divided into sections, each with a specific focus:

Section	What it contains
Section A	Your child's views, interests and aspirations
Section B	A detailed description of their special educational needs
Section C	Health needs related to their SEN (e.g. speech therapy needs)
Section D	Social care needs (if relevant)
Section E	Outcomes your child is working towards
Section F	The special educational provision (support) they need
Section G	Any health provision required
Section H	Social care provision
Section i	The name and type of school or setting
Section J	Details of any personal budget
Section K	Supporting evidence and reports

It's important that the EHCP is **specific, detailed and personalised** – vague wording like “access to support” or “regular help” should be challenged.

The Draft Plan

You will receive a draft EHCP first. At this stage:

- You have 15 days to comment on the content
- You can request a particular school or type of provision
- You can suggest amendments if anything is missing or unclear
-

The local authority must consider your feedback before finalising the plan.

The Final EHCP

Once finalised, the EHCP becomes a legal document. The local authority must ensure the support in Section F is delivered – the school or setting is legally bound to provide it.

You will receive a copy of the final EHCP, along with information about:

- When the plan will be reviewed
- How to appeal if you're unhappy with the contents or placement

How Long Does It Last?

EHCPs are for children and young people aged 0 to 25, as long as they remain in education or training.

The plan is reviewed at least once a year through an Annual Review (covered in the next section).



8. If an EHCP is Not Issued: What Next?

Sometimes, after completing the EHC needs assessment, the local authority may decide not to issue an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This can be disappointing, but it doesn't mean your child doesn't have needs – it simply means the local authority believes those needs can be met without an EHCP, usually through SEN Support.

What Happens if the EHCP is Refused?

You'll receive a letter from the local authority explaining:

- Why the plan was not issued
- What support they expect the school or setting to provide instead
- Your right to appeal the decision

What Can You Do Next?

1. Talk to the School or Setting

- Meet with the SENCO to discuss how your child will continue to be supported
- Ask whether the support plan in place is working and whether changes are needed
- Ensure they continue using the graduated approach (Assess, Plan, Do, Review)

2. Request Mediation

Before appealing, you must contact a mediation adviser. This gives you the chance to resolve disagreements with the local authority without going to tribunal. Mediation is voluntary, free, and often helpful.

3. Appeal to the SEND Tribunal

You have the legal right to appeal the decision through the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability), often called the SEND Tribunal.

You can appeal:

- The refusal to carry out an assessment
- The decision not to issue an EHCP
- The contents of the final plan (if issued)

You don't need a solicitor to appeal, but organisations like SENDIASS or IPSEA can guide you through the process.

4. Continue Gathering Evidence

If you choose to reapply later, continue collecting reports, assessments, and observations that show:

- The support already in place
 - How your child is still struggling or not progressing
 - Any new or escalating needs
-

Remember

Even without an EHCP, your child is still entitled to appropriate support in school under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Equality Act 2010. Schools must make reasonable adjustments to help children with additional needs learn and thrive.

Stay Informed and Empowered

It's natural to feel frustrated or disheartened if an EHCP is not issued—but this is not the end of the road. Many children make excellent progress with the right support through SEN Support alone. The key is to stay actively involved, keep records of meetings and progress, and continue to communicate regularly with your child's school or setting. Your knowledge and persistence can make a big difference. Support is out there—you don't have to go through it alone.



9. Transitions and EHCPs

Transitions are the moments when children and young people move from one stage of education or life to another—like starting school, moving from primary to secondary, or preparing for adulthood. For children and young people with SEN, these transitions can be challenging, so it's vital that planning is done early and thoroughly.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the local authority and school must ensure that transitions are well supported and that your child's needs continue to be met.

Key Transition Points

Nursery to Primary School

- Planning should begin the year before the move
- SENCOs from both settings should meet to share information
- The EHCP should be reviewed to ensure the new school can meet your child's needs
- Visits and transition activities can help ease the change

Primary to Secondary School

- Often a big step socially and academically
- The Year 5 or early Year 6 Annual Review is especially important—this is when the EHCP should be updated to reflect the move
- You can express a preference for a particular secondary school
- Extra transition support (e.g. visits, visual timetables, buddy systems) may be offered

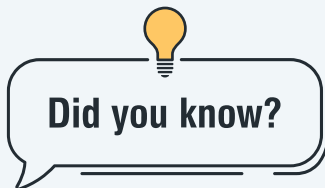
Post-16 Education

- Young people with an EHCP can stay in education or training until the age of 25 if needed
- Planning for life beyond school should begin from Year 9 onwards and is called preparation for adulthood
- The EHCP should focus on outcomes around education, employment, independent living, and community inclusion
- Colleges, training providers, or supported internships may be part of the next step

Your Role in the Transition Process

As a parent or carer, you should:

- Be involved in Annual Reviews and transition planning meetings
- Work closely with professionals to ensure the new setting understands your child's needs
- Help your child prepare emotionally and practically for the change



Local authorities must ensure that transition planning is person-centred—focusing on your child's interests, strengths, and aspirations—not just their difficulties.

Transition timelines: What should be considered at each step

Nursery to Primary School



Age 3-4:

- SEN Support in place if needed
- Early years setting works with professionals



Age 4:

- Transition planning begins
- SENCOs from both settings meet
- EHCP reviewed if in place

Primary to Secondary School



Year 5 (Age 9-10):

- Begin thinking about suitable secondary schools
- Request EHCP Annual Review in Summer or Autumn Term



Year 6 (Age 10-11):

- Finalise secondary school placement by 15 February
- Share EHCP with new school
- Arrange extra transition visits

Preparing for Adulthood



Year 9 (Age 13-14):

- EHCP Annual Review must start focusing on:
 - ✓ Education and training
 - ✓ Employment
 - ✓ Independent living
 - ✓ Community participation



Year 10-11:

- Explore post-16 options: college, apprenticeships, supported internships



Year 11+:

- Final EHCP review before moving into further education or training
- Ensure support is in place for the next setting

Post-16 and Beyond Ages 16-25:

- EHCP continues if the young person stays in education or training
- Annual Reviews check progress and adjust support
- Plan for long-term goals (e.g. work, housing, independence)



10. Working Together: Your Role as a Parent or Carer

As a parent or carer, you are not just a supporter—you are a vital part of your child's team. You know your child best, and your insights, experiences and observations can help shape the support they receive.

The law encourages a **partnership approach**, where families and professionals work together to make decisions and plan for the future.

Why Your Involvement Matters

Research and experience show that when parents and carers are actively involved, children are more likely to:

- Receive support that actually works
- Make progress towards meaningful goals
- Feel understood, included, and confident
- Have better outcomes in education and wellbeing

How You Can Get Involved

- **Attend meetings and reviews** – especially Annual Reviews if your child has an EHCP. Your views count and must be considered.
- **Share information** – including how your child is doing at home, what strategies work, and any changes in needs or behaviour.
- **Ask questions** – if something isn't clear, don't hesitate to speak up. You're entitled to clear explanations.
- **Keep records** – save copies of reports, letters, emails and notes from meetings. These can help if you need to refer back or raise concerns.
- **Encourage your child's voice** – help your child (where possible) to express their views and be involved in decisions that affect them.

Building Positive Relationships

Working with schools, local authorities, and professionals can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially if things aren't going smoothly. But strong relationships based on trust, respect and communication can make a big difference. Try to:

- Focus on shared goals (what's best for your child)
 - Stay calm and solution-focused
 - Raise concerns constructively and clearly
 - Acknowledge what's going well too
-

If Things Aren't Going Well: What You Can Do

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you may feel that your child isn't getting the support they need, or that decisions are being made without your input. Don't worry – there are steps you can take, and support is available.

1. Talk to the School or Setting First

- Arrange a meeting with the class teacher, SENCO, or Headteacher
- Explain your concerns clearly and calmly, and keep a written record
- Ask for a copy of your child's support plan or SEN records

2. Request a Review

- If your child has an EHCP, you can ask for an early Annual Review
- If your child is on SEN Support, you can request a review of the support plan

3. Contact Your Local SENDIASS

- SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service) offers free, confidential advice
- They can help you understand your rights, write letters, and attend meetings

4. Use the Local Authority's Complaint Process

- If you're unhappy with how the local authority is handling your case (e.g. delays, lack of communication), you can submit a formal complaint
- All councils must publish their complaints procedure on their website

5. Mediation and Tribunal

- For disagreements about EHCP decisions, you have the right to mediation and, if necessary, to appeal to the SEND Tribunal
- This includes decisions not to assess, not to issue a plan, or disagreement with EHCP content

You are your child's biggest advocate. Your involvement, persistence and care are powerful tools in helping them get the support they need to thrive.



11. Support and Advice Services

Navigating the world of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) can feel overwhelming, especially when you're doing it for the first time. The good news is — you don't have to do it alone. There are organisations and services that offer free, confidential advice, practical help, and a listening ear.

SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service)

Every local authority in England must provide a SENDIASS service.

They can help you with:

- Understanding SEN support and EHCP processes
- Writing letters or completing forms
- Preparing for meetings or reviews
- Explaining your rights and options
- Supporting you through appeals or complaints
-

You can find your local service by searching "SENDIASS + [your local authority]".

The Local Offer

Your local authority's Local Offer is a website that lists:

- SEN services in your area (schools, therapies, support groups)
- How to get assessments or apply for an EHCP
- Contact details for local professionals and support organisations

Search online for "Local Offer + [your local council]" to access it.

Other Helpful Organisations

IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice)

- Free legal advice, letter templates, and tribunal support
- Website: www.ipsea.org.uk

Contact

- Supports families of disabled children, with advice on benefits, education, and care
- Website: www.contact.org.uk

Council for Disabled Children

- Information on SEN policy and rights, plus resources for families
- Website: www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

National Autistic Society

- Advice and support specifically for autistic children and young people
- Website: www.autism.org.uk



Our Mission

"Empowering autistic individuals and those around them, ASD Helping Hands is dedicated to fostering confidence, independence, and inclusion at every stage of life. We provide guidance, education, and resources to help individuals, families, and professionals navigate autism with knowledge and empowerment.

We champion the rights of autistic people, striving to create a more inclusive society while ensuring our services remain accessible, reliable, and built on trust."

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