

## Information for parents

When your child has special educational needs – England

**contact a family**  
for families with disabled children



National Network of Parent Carer Forums  
'Our Strength is our Shared Experience'

# Extra support in mainstream school – SEN support

SEN support is the name given for extra help children and young people need to access education, for example at nursery, school or further education. Children who need extra help for any reason, including disabled children, are said to have special educational needs (SEN).

This help is additional to, or different from, the help normally given in class to children of the same age. Some, but not all children with SEN will have a diagnosis. Most disabled children and young people and those with SEN will attend mainstream schools.

## Which children have special educational needs (SEN)?

The law says:

*A child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.*

(Children and Families Act 2014 section 20.1)

A child with special educational needs (SEN) may need more help, or a different kind of help, from that normally given to children of the same age.

They might have difficulty with:

- communication and interaction – for example, where children and young people have difficulty making sense of language or understanding how to talk and listen to others
- cognition and learning – for example, a slower pace of learning, difficulties with organisation and memory skills, or a particular difficulty with reading or numbers
- social, emotional and mental health – for example, difficulty in managing relationships with other people, or behaviour that affects their health and wellbeing, or prevents them from learning
- sensory and/or physical skills – for example, visual or hearing impairments, or a physical need that requires additional support and equipment.

Guidance to schools on their legal duties towards pupils with SEN is contained in section 6 of the *Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice 2015*. The Code applies to all schools which receive government funding, including local authority schools and academies. Schools must consider this guidance and should follow it unless there is a very good reason not to.

The Code says that schools must:

*Use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEN gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet children and young people's SEN.*

(SEND Code of Practice section 6.2)

Schools must have a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) who is responsible for arranging and coordinating extra help for pupils with SEN. In a small school the SENCO may be the head teacher or deputy head teacher. The SENCO works with class and subject teachers to plan and deliver support.

In addition, under the Equality Act 2010 schools must have an inclusion policy and accessibility plan setting out how they support disabled pupils to be included in all the activities of the school.

## Need advice?

Call our freephone helpline

**0808 808 3555**

**helpline@cafamily.org.uk**

**Open Monday to Friday, 9.30am–5pm**



## How will I know what support my child's school can provide?

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Every school must publish an SEN Information Report (SEND Code of Practice section 6.79). This must include:

- arrangements for consulting parents of children with SEN and involving them in their child's education
- arrangements for assessing and reviewing children's progress towards outcomes
- arrangements for children and young people moving between phases of education and in preparing for adulthood
- approach to teaching, the expertise and training of school staff and how specialist expertise will be available
- support for improving emotional and social development, including listening to the views of children with SEN and measures to prevent bullying
- how children with SEN are supported to access activities in the school that are available to pupils without SEN
- how the school involves health, social care and local authorities to provide support for families
- arrangements for handling complaints from parents of children with SEN.

Your child's school must tell you if your child is receiving special educational provision through SEN support.

## How will I know what help my child is getting?

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The school should draw up an SEN support plan, involving you and your child, focusing on the outcomes your child needs and wants to achieve and detailing how the school will help them to achieve these.

The school should give you clear information about the extra help your child is getting. School should meet with you at least three times a year to review how your child is progressing and what the next steps will be. This should be in addition to scheduled parents' evening meetings. The school must provide a report at least once a year on your child's progress.

The SEND Code of Practice says that schools should use a 'graduated approach', or four-part cycle (Assess, Plan, Do and Review) to support your child with SEN. This means that the SENCO and teaching staff should:

- analyse your child's difficulties
- identify the extra support your child needs
- put the support in place, and
- regularly check how well it is working so that they can change the amount or kind of support if they need to.

The school can ask specialist support services, for example, educational psychology, behaviour support or speech and language therapy to carry out assessments and provide further advice and support if necessary.

*Schools should involve specialists if your child continues to make little progress or work at substantially lower levels than expected.*

(SEND Code of Practice section 6:58)

## People and services who can help your child

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There are different kinds of help available for children with SEN. Some of this extra support may be provided within the school, from specialist services based in the local authority, or the health service. Some of them are listed here.

### **Behaviour support teams**

Can be based in schools or the local authority. They provide advice to school staff and parents on how to support pupils who have behavioural difficulties and who may be at risk of exclusion. They may also work with individual children and with small groups to help them learn skills and strategies to help them in class and/or during playtimes.

### **CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)**

Supports children and young people who have emotional and mental health difficulties, for example, children who are anxious or depressed. Specialists within CAMHS include counsellors, therapists and psychiatrists. They work closely with parents, schools and other services to provide diagnosis and strategies to address children and young people's needs.

### **Educational psychologists**

Advise schools, parents, and education authorities about how best to support children with SEN to learn and develop socially at school. They may assess children through observing them in the classroom, by carrying out individual tests and by talking to teachers and parents about the child.

### **Education welfare officers**

Work closely with schools and families to ensure children are attending school regularly. They can support parents who are having particular difficulties in getting their children to school and can provide strategies to improve attendance.





## Occupational therapists

Work with parents, schools and others to assess where a child has difficulties with the practical and social skills necessary for everyday life. The therapist will aim to help the child be as physically, psychologically and socially independent as possible.

## School counsellors/therapists

Work directly with children and young people individually or in groups to assess and support their emotional wellbeing. The approaches that are often used are 'talking' therapies, or art, drama, music and play therapy.

## School mentors

Work closely with pupils, school staff, parents and external agencies to provide pastoral care and help overcome barriers to children's learning. This can include individual support, group work, addressing any behaviour difficulties and in some cases monitoring attendance.

## School nursing services

Promote good health within schools and are involved with immunisation, health checks and screening, such as hearing and vision tests. School nurses can help to draw up an individual care plan for a child who needs individual support in school for a medical condition, and organise training for school staff.

## Specialist advisory services

Help schools to support pupils with particular needs. They include specialist teachers in hearing or visual impairment,

autism, speech, language and communication, physical impairment, or specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. They contribute to assessments, provide advice, support and training to schools and parents, and sometimes work directly with individual children.

## Speech and language therapists

Work closely with parents, schools and others to assess if a child has difficulties with speaking, understanding language, communication or eating and drinking. The therapist decides on a programme to support the child to communicate as well as they can. The therapist can work directly with children and devise programmes for school staff and parents to follow.

## Teaching assistants (TA) or Learning support assistants (LSA)

Are trained to support children who need extra help with learning. The TA works closely with teachers to support groups of children or individual children depending on the needs and strategies identified in their SEN support plan or EHC plan. Support might include helping a child with their reading or number skills, or carrying out a therapy programme.

If you're not sure about any aspect of your disabled child's education, and would like to talk to someone, please call the friendly parent advisers on our helpline.



0808 808 3555



helpline@cafamily.org.uk

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## Q&A

### What if I have questions about the help my child is getting?

It's important for you and the school to communicate regularly with each other. Your views about your child are important. Many day-to-day difficulties can be resolved when problems arise by talking to school staff who teach your child. Sometimes a quick discussion at the school gate is enough, but bear in mind that staff are busy and it may be better to make a longer appointment to discuss things in more detail. For younger children there may be a home/school book to help you communicate with the teacher on a daily basis.

If your child has had recent assessments or a diagnosis it is important to share this information with the SENCO so that the school can better understand how to help your child at school.

### What if I'm worried about my child in school?

You may have talked to your child's teachers, but have concerns which persist. As a parent you know your child best, so you may notice any changes in mood, behaviour, health, attitude to school, or level of achievement. These may suggest that your child is not doing as well in school as you think they should be. You might notice that your child:

- appears to behave differently at home to school
- is achieving well in some subjects but has 'hidden' difficulties, such as following instructions, managing their emotions or behaviour, making friends, planning and carrying out a task, or organising their belongings
- appears anxious or tired, or displays challenging behaviour at home
- doesn't want to go to school in the morning, or refuses to go





- often says they can't understand the work, or won't do their homework
- gets a lot of detentions, or has been excluded from school.

Ask for a meeting with the school SENCO. You might want to ask someone who teaches your child and knows them well, such as the class teacher, form tutor or head of year, to attend the meeting as well.

### Before the meeting

Look at the school's policies on SEN, equality and behaviour to see how pupils with SEN and disabilities are supported in the school. Collect your own evidence to show your child's difficulties. For example:

- examples of schoolwork and homework, school reports, test results
- individual education plans, SEN support plans, behaviour support plan
- letters you have written to the school, home/school book entries
- any professional reports, or if school may already have them
- information about support they had in a previous school.

Write a list of your concerns. Mention:

- progress, schoolwork, concentration, physical skills, relationships
- behaviour at school
- behaviour and mood at home
- how your child feels about school
- other issues such as bullying, and any action taken so far.

### At the meeting

It is a good idea to start the meeting on a positive note if possible. Say what is working well about your child's support and whether you have noticed some progress. Even if the situation is difficult, give praise to the school where you can.

### Questions to ask

- Is my child on SEN support?
- Can I see my child's individual support plan?

- What assessments have the school done to find out about my child's difficulties?
- Does my child get extra help from a teacher or another adult? What do they help him/her with?
- Is the help given in a group or individually? Is it every day? How long is that for?
- How do you measure my child's progress? Is he/she making the progress you would expect?
- Have the school referred my child to specialist services – for example, Educational Psychology?
- What can I do at home to help my child?
- What will the next steps be if my child needs more help?
- Will the school request an EHC needs assessment, or will they support me to make a parental request?

At the end of the meeting say what you would like to happen and check that you and school staff understand and agree what action will be taken next. Ask for this to be summarised in writing for you. Agree a future date for another meeting to see if anything has changed. It's helpful to end the meeting on a positive note by emphasising that you hope that you and the school can work together to support your child.

### What if a child needs more help than the school can give?

A small number of pupils may need more help than the school can normally give at the level of SEN support. Such pupils will need an Education, Health and Care needs assessment to decide what help they need. This assessment is coordinated by the child's local authority and can lead to an Education, Health and Care plan (EHC plan). This is a legal document which describes a child's SEN and the extra help they will get.



This is one of a series of free factsheets for parents about extra help in education. Others include:

- *Education, Health and Care needs assessments*
- *Education, Health and Care plans.*

Please see our website for more in the series, or contact our freephone helpline for a free copy.

 [www.cafamily.org.uk/the-sen-process](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/the-sen-process)

**Find out how you can have a say about services in your area by joining your local parent carer forum.**

**Contact the National Network of Parent Carer Forums:**

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