

SEN Support: What this means and what you need to know

What is SEN Support?

SEN Support is the support a child or young person with [special educational needs](#) (SEN) receives from the nursery, school or college they attend, from its own resources.

What the setting needs to do is set out in statutory guidance, the [SEND Code of Practice 2015](#) (the Code). Chapter 5 details what SEN Support looks like for those in the early years. Chapter 6 sets out SEN Support for those in school, and chapter 7 relates to SEN Support for those in college. The Code outlines 4 broad areas of need for all age groups:

1. communication and interaction
2. cognition and learning
3. social, emotional and mental health difficulties, and
4. sensory and/ or physical needs.

For all age groups, SEN Support is a 4-stage process (sometimes described as a graduated response), a cycle through which earlier decisions are considered, refined and revised as needs and required support become better understood:

1. **Assess:** The SENCo (or someone acting in a similar capacity in college) should work with the class teacher and parents (or young person) to assess the SEN of the pupil, considering the broad areas of need (as well as any other areas of need) and what support is required. Specialists can also be involved.
2. **Plan:** A plan of interventions needs to be drawn up with parents, and the young person, and a record kept of it. Review dates and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) aspirational targets should be recorded on the plan.
3. **Do:** The plan needs to be put in place.
4. **Review:** The impact of the interventions will be evaluated with parents or the young person against the proposed SMART targets. The cycle then starts again.

The duty to put in place and deliver SEN Support is underpinned by a legal requirement in [section 66](#) of the Children and Families Act 2014. This says the:

- governing body of a maintained school (or nursery) or [institution within the FE sector](#)
- proprietor of an Academy, or

- management committee of a pupil referral unit

must to use its best endeavours to make sure that the [special educational provision](#) called for by the pupil's SEN is made. This means those bodies must proactively make sure the setting is doing all that it can to meet the SEN of its pupils. If it is not, you can [complain](#).

I think my child has SEN. What can I do? What should their setting do?

The Code is clear that the early identification of SEN is critical. Schools should take seriously any concerns raised by a parent (paragraph 6.45) and at college, young people's concerns should be listened to too (paragraph 7.13 of the Code).

If you are concerned your child or young person may have SEN, arrange to speak with the SENCo and their teacher as the first step. You can also [ask the setting for information on SEN](#) and what support is available for those with SEN.

For all age groups specialists can, and should, be involved in assessing SEN and identifying provision too (paragraphs 5.48, 6.59, and 7.23 of the Code), so speak to the setting about what internal and external specialist advice is available.

If you remain concerned that your child or young person's needs are not properly understood or being met, you can request an [EHC needs assessment](#) at any time. Settings should also consider requesting EHC needs assessments where, despite having taken relevant and purposeful action, expected progress is not being made (paragraphs 5.49, 6.59, and 7.23) or where significant difficulties have been identified (paragraph 9.3 of the Code).

Myth-busting moment

- Children under 5 can't have SEN or needs assessed until they go to school.

No: Some young children will have SEN and these must be supported.

- A child or young person needs to be academically behind their peers to have SEN.

No: Schools and colleges should not assume that attainment in line with chronological age means that there is no learning difficulty or disability (paragraphs 6.23 and 7.12). Less than expected progress can also include areas other than academic attainment (paragraph 6.18 of the Code).

- SEN Support isn't available once a child leaves school for college.

No: Support should always be available at college to support young people with SEN. Some post-16 settings will also have a legal duty to use their 'best endeavours'.

- Children and young people need to face challenges in all 4 broad areas of need to have SEN or provision put in place.

No: A pupil may have needs in one or more areas of need, or maybe needs in something else (such as gaining skills in independence). All these needs must be supported.

Further resources and support

[What are special educational needs?](#)

[How should your nursery, school or college help?](#)

[The 'best endeavours' duty](#)

[Template letter: asking for an EHC needs assessment](#)

[IPSEA helplines and services](#)

[Find your local IAS service](#)