



# Understanding SEN Support

## (Without an EHCP)

*For parents and carers navigating Special Educational Needs support in England*

### A Parents Guide to SEND Support in Mainstream Education

Finding out your child may need additional support in education can feel confusing and overwhelming. Many parents are left trying to understand unfamiliar terms, unclear processes, and what support schools are actually supposed to provide.

SEN Support is the first level of additional support available for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) in mainstream educational settings. This support should help children access learning, make progress, and feel included within school life.

This guide explains:

- ➔ What SEN Support is
- ➔ What schools are legally expected to do
- ➔ What support may look like in practice
- ➔ Your rights as a parent
- ➔ What steps to take if support is not working

### What Are Special Educational Needs (SEN)?

A child or young person may have Special Educational Needs (SEN) if they experience greater difficulty learning or accessing education compared to most others of the same age.

Some children may need support with:

- Communication
- Learning
- Emotional regulation
- Social interaction
- Sensory needs
- Physical needs
- Attention and concentration
- Independence skills

SEN can affect children very differently. Some children may struggle academically, while others may appear to cope in school but experience significant anxiety, distress, masking, exhaustion, or dysregulation outside of school.

A child does not need a diagnosis to receive SEN Support.

Schools should not delay support while families wait for:

- Outcomes from assessments
- CAMHS involvement
- Therapy referrals
- Medical investigations

## **The Four Broad areas of need**

The SEND Code of Practice groups SEN into four broad areas.

### **Communication and Interaction**

Children may experience difficulties with:

- Understanding Language
- Expressing themselves
- Social communication
- Speech and Language development
- Interaction with peers and adults

### **Cognition and Learning**

Some children may find learning more difficult than their peers and may need support with:

- Reading
- Writing
- Maths
- Memory
- Processing information
- Organisation
- Retaining new skills

This can include children with dyslexia, dyscalculia or learning difficulties.

### **Social, emotional and Mental Health**

Some children may struggle with:

- Anxiety
- Emotional Regulation
- Self-esteem
- Behaviour
- Social relationships
- EBSA
- Attention and impulsivity

## **Sensory and/or Physical Needs**

Some children may require support because of:

- Hearing or visual impairments
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Physical disabilities
- Medical conditions affecting education
- Mobility difficulties

## **What is SEN Support?**

SEN Support is the help and provision that schools, nurseries, and colleges put in place for children and young people who are finding it harder to access education than others of the same age. This support is designed to identify barriers to learning and put strategies, interventions, and adjustments in place to help a child make progress, access education more successfully, and feel included within school life.

SEN Support is usually the first level of additional support available within mainstream education. Many children and young people receive SEN Support without needing an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Schools are expected to use their own resources, staffing, and expertise to support children with SEND before an EHCP is considered.

SEN Support should always be individual to the child. No two children with SEN are the same, even where they may share a diagnosis or similar difficulties. Support should be based on the child's specific strengths, needs, difficulties, and presentation within education. What works well for one child may not work for another.

A child does not need a formal diagnosis to receive SEN Support. Schools should not delay putting support in place while waiting for referrals, assessments, or diagnoses such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or speech and language difficulties. If a child is showing signs that they are struggling to access education, the school should begin identifying needs and providing support as early as possible.

SEN Support can help children with a wide range of difficulties. Some children may struggle academically and others may struggle more with communication, emotional regulation, anxiety, sensory processing, behaviour, or coping within the school environment. Some children may appear to cope during the school day but become overwhelmed, distressed, exhausted, or dysregulated once they return home. Difficulties do not have to be purely academic for support to be needed.

*The law says that schools must use their “best endeavours” to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN. This means they should do everything that could reasonably be expected of them to identify needs, remove barriers to learning, and provide appropriate support. Schools also have duties under the SEND Code of Practice 2015 and the Equality Act 2010 to support children with SEND and make reasonable adjustments*

## Unsure whether your child is on SEN Support?

A child receiving SEN Support might:

- Have a SEN Support Plan, IEP, or Learning Passport
- Receive extra help in class (e.g., adult support, visual aids, targeted interventions)
- Be working with external professionals (e.g., speech therapist, educational psychologist)
- Have regular SEN review meetings with the SENCO

If you're unsure, ask the school:

*“Is my child currently on SEN Support, and what does that include?”*

## What Does “Best Endeavours” mean?

Schools have a legal duty to do everything they reasonably can to support a child or young person with SEN. This may include:

- Adapting teaching methods
- Changing the learning environment
- Providing interventions
- Adjusting behaviour approaches
- Implementing sensory strategies
- Seeking advice from specialists
- Monitoring progress closely
- Supporting emotional wellbeing

A lack of resources does not remove a school's legal duties.

## **The Graduated Approach: Assess, Plan, Do, Review**

Schools should use a process called the graduated approach to identify, support, and review the needs of children and young people with SEN. This is a continuous cycle designed to ensure support is regularly monitored and adapted as a child's needs change over time. The SEND Code of Practice refers to this as the "Assess, Plan, Do, Review" cycle, often shortened to APDR.

### **Assess:**

The first stage of the graduated approach is "Assess". During this stage, the school should gather information to build a clear understanding of the child's needs, strengths, and barriers to learning. This may include teacher observations, assessments, attendance, behaviour patterns, parental views, and information from professionals involved with the child.

Parents should be involved throughout this stage, as they may notice difficulties at home that are not always visible in school. Some children may also mask difficulties during the school day.

### **Plan:**

Once needs have been identified, the school should decide what support, strategies, and adjustments will be put in place. The school should also identify what outcomes they are working towards and how progress will be measured.

Support should usually be recorded in writing through documents such as SEN Support Plans, IEPs, or Learning Plans. Parents and, where appropriate, the child or young person should be involved in planning support.

### **Do:**

The agreed support should then be implemented consistently across the school day. This may include classroom adjustments, targeted interventions, emotional support, sensory strategies, or additional adult support depending on the child's needs.

### **Review:**

Support should be reviewed regularly to consider whether it is helping the child make progress and access education more successfully. Reviews should normally take place at least three times each year.

Parents should be involved in review discussions and given opportunities to share concerns and observations. If support is not effective, schools should adapt strategies and consider whether further support or specialist involvement is needed.

## How can Educational settings support your child?

Schools, nurseries, and colleges should have clear systems in place for identifying and supporting children and young people with SEN. Mainstream schools are required to publish information about the support they provide for pupils with SEND within their SEN Information Report, which is usually available on the school's website.

Support should begin with high quality teaching that is adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils. However, some children may require additional support, interventions, or specialist involvement to help them access education successfully.

## What might SEN Support look like?

Support should be individual to the child. Examples may include:

### **Classroom Support**

### Involvement from Professionals

In some cases, schools may seek advice or involvement from outside professionals to better understand a child's needs and identify appropriate strategies or interventions.

#### **Professionals involved may include:**

- Educational Psychologists (EP)
- Speech and Language Therapists (SALT)
- Occupational Therapists (OT)
- CAMHS
- Physiotherapists
- Specialist teachers
- Autism outreach services
- Hearing or vision impairment teams
- Emotional wellbeing or mental health support services

These professionals may assess a child, provide recommendations, suggest interventions, or advise school staff on how best to support the child within education.

- visual timetables
- chunked instructions
- movement breaks
- sensory adjustments
- additional processing time
- adapted resources
- flexible seating arrangements
- Pre-warning of transitions or changes to routine
- Alternative ways of recording work
- Adapted worksheets
- Laptops or writing slopes,

### **Emotional Support**

- Access to safe spaces
- Emotional regulation support
- Anxiety support strategies
- Gradual reintegration support for attendance difficulties
- Pastoral support sessions

### **Sensory Support**

- Movement breaks
- Sensory circuits
- Ear defenders
- Fidget toys or sensory tools
- Wobble cushions
- Calm or low-stimulation space
- Time out cards
- Adjustments to lightening or noise levels

### **Targeted interventions**

- Literacy interventions
- Fine motor skill programmes
- Social skills interventions
- Small group work
- 1:1 interventions
- Phonics programmes

Please note: this is a list of examples and not a full list of SEN support adjustments which can be made. It should be personalised to your child's needs — not a one-size-fits-all approach.

## What Should the School Provide You With?

- A clear record of your child's needs and the support in place (e.g. an Individual Support Plan or SEN Support Plan)
- Updates on progress and next steps
- Opportunities to meet with the SENCo and discuss concerns
- Information about referrals or assessments being considered

You have the **right to be fully involved** in decisions about your child's support.

*Tip: Ask to see the written support plan and request regular review meetings if they're not already happening. You can also request to keep a copy of the plan at each review, to keep for your own records.*

## Common Concerns Raised by Parents

Many parents report hearing statements such as:

*"They're fine in school"* – Some children mask difficulties in school and release their distress at home.

*"They don't qualify because they're academically able"* – Children can still have SEN even if they are achieving academically.

*"We need a diagnosis first"* – Support must not be delayed whilst waiting for assessments.

## When SEN support may not be enough

Sometimes, despite support being in place, a child may continue to struggle significantly.

Signs may include:

- ➔ Persistent distress around school

- ➔ Emotional based school avoidance
- ➔ Repeated suspensions
- ➔ Increasing anxiety
- ➔ Little or no progress
- ➔ Inability to access learning
- ➔ Frequent dysregulation
- ➔ Attendance difficulties
- ➔ Support plans repeatedly staying the same without improvement

*Where needs are significant or long-term, it may be appropriate to request an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). You can find our full guide to EHC needs assessments on our website – [www.send-empowerment.co.uk](http://www.send-empowerment.co.uk)*

## Your rights as a Parent

As a parent or carer, you have the right to be involved in decisions about your child's SEN Support. Schools should listen to your views, involve you in planning and reviewing support, and work collaboratively with you to understand your child's needs. If your child has been identified as having SEN, the school should inform you and explain what support is being put in place.

Schools should follow the graduated approach of Assess, Plan, Do, Review and regularly review whether support is effective. You should be involved in review discussions and kept informed about your child's progress, outcomes, and any changes to support.

### **You have the right to:**

- ➔ Be informed if your child is receiving SEN Support
- ➔ Be involved in decisions about your child's support and provision
- ➔ Receive information about the support and interventions in place
- ➔ Request copies of SEN Support plans or review records
- ➔ Attend review meetings and share your views and concerns
- ➔ Ask how progress is being monitored and measured
- ➔ Request reasonable adjustments where your child is disabled
- ➔ Request an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA)

If your child is continuing to struggle despite SEN Support being in place, schools should consider whether further support or specialist advice is needed. This may

involve seeking input from professionals such as Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, CAMHS, or specialist teachers.

If you are concerned that your child's needs are not being appropriately supported, it can help to:

- ➔ Request a meeting with the SENCO
- ➔ Ask how the school is following the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle
- ➔ Keep copies of emails, reports, and meeting notes
- ➔ Record patterns you are seeing at home, including anxiety, dysregulation, or attendance difficulties
- ➔ Ask what support is currently being implemented and how often
- ➔ Request clarification if support appears unclear or inconsistent

## Reasonable adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools also have duties to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and ensure they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to their peers.

Reasonable adjustments are changes or adaptations that help a child access education more successfully. Adjustments should be based on the child's individual needs and should aim to reduce barriers within the school environment.

Schools should not wait for a diagnosis before considering reasonable adjustments. If a child is experiencing barriers because of a disability or suspected disability, schools should consider what support and adjustments may help.

Reasonable adjustments should be proactive rather than reactive. The aim should be to help children feel safe, included, understood, and able to access education successfully, rather than only responding once difficulties escalate.

If you feel your child may require reasonable adjustments, you can ask the school:

- ➔ What adjustments are currently in place?
- ➔ How are staff supporting my child's needs daily?
- ➔ Are behaviour policies being adjusted appropriately?
- ➔ What changes could reduce barriers for my child?
- ➔ How is the school meeting its duties under the Equality Act 2010?

Every child's needs are different, and reasonable adjustments should always be tailored to the individual child.

## Need Help or Advice?

You're not alone. As an independent SEND Advocacy, we offer **free, confidential support** to help you understand your child's rights and options.

[info@send-empowerment.co.uk](mailto:info@send-empowerment.co.uk)

[www.send-empowerment.co.uk](http://www.send-empowerment.co.uk)