

Five important SEND terms and what they mean

There are some main SEND terms and words that you'll probably hear said and discussed often. They crop up in meetings and in conversations with professionals and you'll see them written on your child's paperwork and plans too.

These five terms are key to understanding the support your child gets and how it's going to work. They are:

- Aspirations
- Needs
- Outcomes
- Provision
- Golden Thread

Every child or young person with SEND should have a written plan of some kind. This could be a plan that is made and used by nursery, school or college staff or an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan. Schools and colleges use all kinds of plans, so your child's plan may look different from one for a child from a different school.

Whatever type of plan it is, it's important that it's used, kept up to date and reviewed regularly. It should change as your child's needs change.

The foundations of any good plan are your child's **aspirations**. That means the plan should start with what your child (and you) want for their future. Once you and the professionals know that, you can work out what their needs are, how they are going to achieve their goals and what support they need.

Your child's plan should explain:

- what their special educational needs are (**needs**)
- what support they need (**provision**)

- the difference that support should make (**outcomes**)

These aspirations, needs, outcomes and provision together make up something called '**the golden thread**'.

The Council for Disabled Children has published two documents about examples of good practice in EHC plans. These include examples of how aspirations, needs, outcomes and provision can be written down so that they are clear and easily understood. You can see details of where to find this at the end of the factsheet.

Aspirations



Aspirations are hopes or ambitions for the future.

They should be the starting point for SEN support and for all the plans made for a child or young person. Keeping aspirations at the centre of discussions between parents, children and professionals helps to create strong and effective support which makes a real difference.

The most effective support for children and young people with SEND happens when their aspirations are linked to their needs, and then to outcomes and support (provision). This forms The Golden Thread – you can find out more about that below.

When your child is very young, you'll have hopes and dreams for what you'd like them to achieve. As their parent, you'll be the one with

the aspirations.

As your child grows older, they will start to have and share their own aspirations. These might be about what they want to be when they grow up, what's important in their lives and what they want to achieve.

As your young person grows towards adulthood, their aspirations will probably focus more on becoming as independent as they can be. They might be about the work they would like to do, and on their hopes and dreams for their life as an adult.

The aspirations that children and young people have are often very different from those their parents or the professionals may choose. They're usually broad and focus on whole life (holistic) ambitions, rather than just education. Here are a few examples of the kind of aspirations children and young people have. To

- be happy
- have friends
- lead a normal life
- live in a house with friends
- be fit and healthy
- get a job or go to university

The SEND Code of Practice is the legal guidance for organisations that support children and young people with SEND. It mentions aspirations 47 times!

The guidance says that professionals are expected to have, and encourage, high aspirations and expectations for all children and young people with SEND. It also says that 'support and interventions provided should be selected to meet the student's aspirations'.

How you can help

As a parent or carer, you can help your child or young person by doing the following.

- Encouraging them to develop hopes and ambitions for the future that are their own, and not a reflection of someone else's. You can help them look past what others may want for them.
- Showing them how they can share those aspirations with others – there are lots of ideas on our webpages to help you do that.

- Making sure their aspirations stay at the heart of the planning and review process for their support.
- Talking about what's possible outside their immediate experience. The aspirations of children and young people with SEND are often limited by what they see - help them think big!
- Digging a little deeper. The aspiration might seem unrealistic, such as "I want to be a formula one racing driver" for example. But underneath that, there are likely to be hopes and ambitions. Ask your young person **why** that's what they want. You might uncover all kinds of aspirations – from wanting to be in charge, to loving everything about cars or being able to win at something.

Needs



Your child's needs are essentially the things that they have difficulty doing, or find challenging, compared to other children their age.

A child has a special educational need if **both** these things are true for them:

1. They have a learning difficulty or disability. This means:
 - they have 'significantly greater difficulty' in learning than most of the other children in their age group or class
 - or**
 - they have a disability which prevents them making use of what's on offer in a mainstream school
2. Their learning difficulty or disability means they need educational or training support that is additional to, or different from, that made generally for other children or young people of the same age.

So, in other words, if your child or young person has a learning difficulty or disability **and** they need extra or

different support from others of their age, then they have a special educational need.

Special educational needs affect different children in different ways. For example, your child may find it hard to:

- understand things
- make friends and manage relationships
- concentrate and settle down to learn
- talk to others or make themselves understood
- read, write or understand maths
- emotionally regulate themselves and 'behave' in school

You'll also see the term SEND. This stands for Special Educational Needs and Disability.

There are four main areas of special educational need:

- cognition and learning
- communication and interaction
- physical and sensory
- social, emotional and mental health

In your child's school or college plan, or their EHC plan, each of their special educational needs must be included. That means any health or social care needs that affect their education too.

Here are examples of needs:

- Jo plays well on her own, but she finds it very difficult to talk to or play with other children or to make friends with her peers.
- Thomas can concentrate for up to 10 minutes at a time. However, this can change depending on how tired he is, his mood, what the activity is and who is supporting him. He can get upset and anxious if he is asked to do something he hasn't chosen or which he doesn't like.
- Casey finds it very difficult to discuss her emotions. She is reluctant to engage in conversations about her feelings, which can lead to volatile and physical behaviour.
- Maisie can find situations with lots of sensory-stimuli uncomfortable or anxiety-provoking (such as noisy or busy environments). Maisie finds lunchtimes difficult because it is loud and there are a lot of people around.

- Ashley communicates mainly through physical actions or becoming upset. He doesn't yet say recognisable words.
- Jemma likes living with her family but would like to live with friends when she is an adult. She cannot travel independently or manage money.

Outcomes



Each special educational need your child has should have an outcome that goes with it. The outcome should say clearly what your child will be able to do **because of** the support they will get for that particular need. You might want to think of them as targets or goals for your child to aim for, which help them to reach their longer-term aspirations. Or think of them as like stepping-stones on their journey towards being as independent as they can be.

It's important when the outcomes for your child are set, that they're written from your child's perspective rather than from the professional's or local authority's perspective.

Outcomes can be short, medium or long-term. There are two types of outcomes which are often written together:

- What is important **to** your child. These are usually big outcomes from your child's perspective - such as being happy or confident, having friends or being independent. All services and professionals can usually play a part in helping to achieve these.
- What is important **for** your child. These are outcomes that can be measured and are valued by other people, including educational achievement, literacy, and numeracy or good health.

So, as an example, thinking about a child's speech and language needs - what is important **to** them may be that they want to be able to talk to their friends and join in their games at playtime. What is important **for** them is that their behaviour improves because they no longer get frustrated at not being understood.



Outcomes should be written so that they are 'SMART'. This means they should be

- **S**pecific – clear and easily understood
- **M**easurable – so everyone will know that the outcome has been achieved
- **A**chievable – linked to yours or your child's aspirations so it can be achieved
- **R**ealistic – your child should have the skills and abilities, with the resources and time available, to be able to achieve the outcome
- **T**ime bound – this says when the outcome should be achieved - this is usually at the end of a key stage or stage of education but can be shorter term as well.

Here are some examples:

- By the end of KS3 Katie will be able to go into an unfamiliar shop and buy something she wants and walk to familiar shops for small errands every day.
- By the time he finishes college, Mohammed will be able to manage his money from day-to-day. This includes planning for what he spends each day, such as lunch and travel costs.
- Chris will work independently for at least half of each lesson, by the end of KS2.
- By the end of the academic year, Ivy will be able to look after her assistance dog Sapphire, by feeding and walking her twice a day and brushing her once a week.
- By the end of KS4 John will have the language skills needed to listen to and understand instructions, questions and directions that relate to independent living skills and employment in the area of his choice.

Provision



Provision is another word for support.

It's the things that the nursery, school or college do or provide that help your child to achieve and make progress. This is support that is different from, or extra to, what other children in their age group are getting.

If your child's nursery, school or college is giving them support for a special educational need, they must tell you. That support should be written in your child's plan and set out so that it's clear what need it's meeting.

In your child's plan, the support they are getting should be written so that it is:

- **detailed and specific** – you should know what type of support is being given, who will be giving it and what expertise (if any) that person may need in order to give it
- **quantified** – you should know when the support will be given, how long it will last and how often they will have it

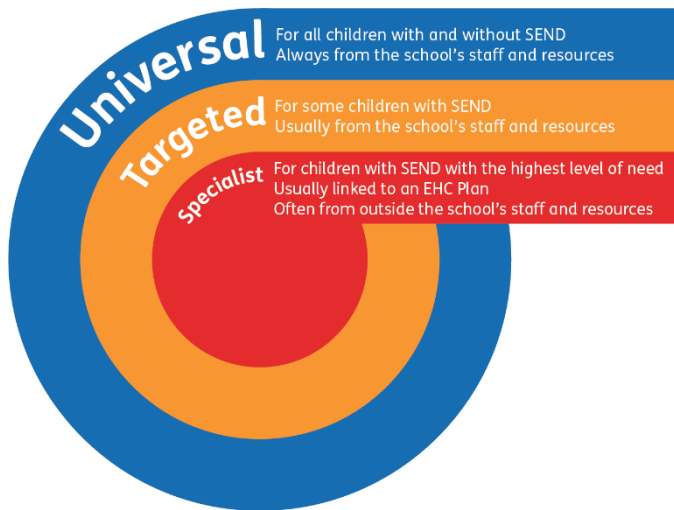
SEN support in nurseries, schools and colleges is based around the specific needs of each child or young person. The staff, equipment, resources and support that help your child are decided using something called the **graduated response**. This is an 'assess, plan, do, and review' cycle.

That means if your child has special educational needs, the school or college should:

- assess what support they need
- plan the support
- do the support set out in the plan and then
- review how well it's working

What kind of support is available?

The support your child gets will depend on their individual needs. There are three types of support – universal, targeted and specialist.



Universal provision

This is support that is given in all schools, in every classroom, by every teacher and for all children. The funding for it and the expertise to do it all come from the schools resources.

It's focused around differentiated learning. That means the level at which your child is learning may be different to that of other children in their class, so work is changed to meet their needs. Teachers do this routinely for every lesson. It also includes things that all children can expect to get, such as:

- a buddy system for breaks and lunchtimes
- visual support and timetables
- breaking down work into small chunks
- good preparation for change
- the teaching of social understanding
- using alternative ways of recording work

Targeted Provision

This is support that can be given in all schools, in every classroom, by every teacher, and for some children. It's extra to, or different from, universal provision. There is funding and expertise in school for most of the children who need targeted support. A child will have a school-based plan which sets out this kind of support. The staff at school may also need to get professional advice for some areas of support.

Targeted support includes things like:

- use of IT resources to support reading and writing, including touch typing
- social skills groups
- forest school sessions
- counselling
- study skills support
- access to a quiet time out or distraction free area

Specialist Provision

This is support that's available in all schools and some classrooms, but for a small number of children. The funding and expertise may need to come from outside the school's resources. If your child needs specialist provision, school staff will usually need to get specialist advice. This kind of support is usually given to children and young people with long term complex needs and/or disabilities, often with an EHC plan. It's the type of support often given in special schools, though it's also given in mainstream schools.

Specialist support includes things like:

- access to sensory breaks and food breaks
- using a picture exchange system for communication
- individual mentoring
- an identified key adult and personalised curriculum
- one to one support for children with multi-sensory impairment

The 'Golden Thread'

Your aspirations and your child's should be the starting point for discussions about support. Once you know what your child's aspirations are, you can link those to the things they need in school or college and the support that will help them. These are all linked to outcomes too, which are like stepping-stones towards your child's long-term goals.

All these things together form something called The Golden Thread.

Here is an example of a golden thread for an Education, Health and Care plan. It starts with Sarah's goal to have more friends and takes a long-term approach to meeting that goal.

Sarah's school should have a plan they use with some short-term goals as well. For children without EHC plans, the golden thread should also be used to plan and give their support in school or college.

Aspiration: Sarah wants to have friends.

Needs: Sarah has a language delay and it affects her learning and social interaction with other children her age. It is also affecting her confidence and self-esteem which means that she can be socially vulnerable.

Outcome: By the age of 16 Sarah will have a small group of friends and is able to travel independently so she can meet with them. She will meet friends outside home and school and have and use a social network.

Support (provision): Sarah will have travel training which will include buddy support. Sarah will have a mentor who meets her weekly for three hours to explore her interests. Her mentor will help her develop friendship opportunities and support her to take part in social and leisure activities. Sarah will take part in twice weekly social skills group at school with a Teaching Assistant.

Need more information?

SEND Code of Practice 2015

Legal guidance around special educational needs
www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

Council for Disabled Children

EHC plans – examples of good practice
councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/

Devon SEND Local Offer

SEND services and support available in Devon
www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send-local-offer

Updated: May 2023
Review date: May 2025