

If your child is struggling in school and their support doesn't seem to be working, it's natural to ask yourself whether they might need an Education Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment.

Only a few children have an EHC needs assessment and plan. For every four children in England with special educational needs or a disability (SEND), one will need an EHC plan and three won't.

What support is available in nurseries, schools and colleges?

Most children and young people with SEND go to a mainstream nursery, school or college and are supported by their staff, resources and funds. Teachers and other professionals regularly review how a child or young person is getting on and support them to learn, develop and feel safe. This is called special educational needs support or SEN support.

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
- review how well it's working and, if it is needed, change the support so that the right level of support is given.

Information about your child's needs, support and goals should be written down in a plan, which is used by staff and updated regularly.

Schools and colleges use all kinds of plans and have different names for them. So, your child's plan may look different from one for a child from a different school. What's important is that your child has a clearly written plan which lists all their needs, support and goals. For most children and young people with SEND, the support the school gives works, and they make progress.

But sometimes the support for a child isn't enough or isn't right. Your child may not make the progress that's expected and start to fall behind other children their age. Or their difficulties in school get worse not better, and their behaviour at school or home becomes more challenging.

If things aren't going well for your child and they're not making progress, your first step is to ask for a meeting to review their nursery, school or college plan. At the meeting you can talk about the support they're getting, what may need to change and how you'll know if any new support is working.

It's also important to talk to your child and find out how they feel about school, including what is working and what is not and what could help to make things better. There are lots of ideas and tools on our website to help you have those conversations.

If reviewing the plan and making changes to the support doesn't make a difference, you can ask whether a needs assessment for an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan should be the next step.

You can find out more about the support that's available in schools on the Devon SEND Local Offer pages. There is more information on our website too.



Does my child need an EHC plan to get support or funding at school?

No. All schools and all school and academy sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education colleges and 16-19 academies have funding for children with SEND. Early years settings such as nurseries can also get extra money to support a child with SEND.

Your child doesn't need an EHC plan to get funding and support in nursery, school or college. You can find out more about funding for children and young people with SEND on our website or by contacting us for a factsheet.

What is an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan?

EHC plans are for children or young people aged up to 25 with special educational needs (SEN) who need more support than can be given through SEN support in their mainstream nursery, school or college.

An EHC plan is a legal document that describes your child or young person's

- special educational needs
- health needs (in terms of how these affect their education)
- social care needs (in terms of how these affect their education)

It explains

- the extra help your child will be given to meet their needs
- how that support will make a difference to them
- how their support can help them to achieve what they want in life

EHC plans are made by a local authority after an EHC needs assessment. A plan can include your child's health or social care needs as well as their educational needs, but they won't get a plan if they only have health or social care needs that don't affect their

education. Your local authority (LA) must make sure that your child or young person gets the educational support and any social care support that's in their plan. The local Integrated Care Board is responsible for any health support in it.

One of the main aims of an EHC plan is to give a child or young person support that helps them achieve the best possible results in their journey towards adulthood. It may seem like a long way off, but even from early years the support set out in a plan should challenge a child to become as independent as possible. This means taking small regular steps towards developing the skills they'll need for adult life.

What goes into an EHC plan?

An EHC plan is made up of information given to the local authority by

- you
- your child or young person
- the people who support your child or those who have assessed their needs

The plan should

- describe positively what your child can do and what they've already achieved
- set out your views, your child's views and their goals for the future
- clearly and specifically list what your child's needs are and the support they will have
- say what difference the support will make to them (outcomes) – these should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

The SEND Code of Practice is the legal guidance about special educational needs and disability (SEND) support for local authorities to follow. It gives a detailed list of what should be in an EHC plan. The Council for Disabled Children also has a guide to good examples for the different parts of an EHC plan.

What if staff at school or college think my child doesn't need an EHC needs assessment or a plan?

Parents are sometimes told by professionals that they don't think their child needs an EHC needs assessment,

or that an assessment would show they don't need a plan. This can feel uncomfortable, as ideally it makes sense for everyone to support the application for an EHC needs assessment.

If your child's teacher or the SENCO don't want to support an application for assessment, ask if you can meet to talk about it, to see whether you can come to any agreement.

If that's not possible and you want to go ahead and apply, you can ask for a needs assessment yourself without the support of nursery, school or college. You can also contact us for advice and information.

The local authority must carry out a needs assessment if they:

- believe your child has, or may have, special educational needs, and
- they may need special educational support to be made through an EHC plan.

In other words, if they think that your child may need an EHC plan to help them achieve their best, they must do an EHC needs assessment.

Having an EHC needs assessment doesn't always lead to getting an EHC plan though. The information that's collected as part of an assessment may show ways that the school, college or other provider can meet your child's needs without an EHC plan.

Need more information?

Devon SEND Local Offer

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

Reviewed and updated: October 2024
 Review date: October 2026



DiAS information

We have more information about:

- SEN Support in schools
- Getting more help
- EHC needs assessments
- EHC Plans