

What is SEN support?

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All children with special educational needs should get support to help them manage in school and make progress. This is called **SEN Support**. You'll probably hear and see the word provision used a lot too. That's another word for support.

If your child or young person has both a learning difficulty or disability **and** they need extra or different support from others of their age, then they have a special educational need. SEN support is the core support that these children and young people get to help them achieve their best. This support happens whether they have an EHC plan or not. If your child does have an EHC plan, then they will have core SEN support as well as the extra support that's listed in their plan.

SEN support in nurseries, schools and colleges is based around the specific needs of each child or young person. It's support that your child gets that is different from, or extra to, what other children their age normally get.

These are the main things to know about SEN support for your child.

- Because every child is different, and has different needs, the support your child gets may be quite different from what another child gets. So, two children of the same age with autism, for example, may have very different support.
- Schools may arrange the support in different ways too. So, it may not look the same in every school, but staff should be able to tell you why they're doing what they're doing and how it will help.

- SEN support will change as your child grows and their needs change. What they need when they are six may be very different to what they need at age 11.
- There are four main areas of special educational need. Nurseries, schools and colleges can provide support in all of these areas.
- It's important for your child or young person to have their say in their support. Look for ways to get them involved and help them to share their views.
- As a parent or carer, you have an important part to play in helping SEN support to work well too. You know your child best and you know what they're good at and what they find difficult. Share your views with the professionals and make sure you stay involved in the decisions that are made.
- SEN support is there to help your child achieve and be the best that they can be. It should be ambitious and have targets that will stretch your child.
- Support for children in school is needs led, not diagnosis led. That means the needs of the child (not the school) are the most important factor in deciding what support they get, not any diagnosis if there is one.
- SEN support is about getting the amount of support just right and too much help isn't good in the long run. Children need just the right amount of help to get involved with their learning. They need to see themselves as able to do the work and to problem solve.

What does the law say about SEN support?

The SEND Code of Practice is the main legal guidance for organisations that work with and support children and young people with SEND. That includes local authorities, NHS and social care organisations and education providers.

As a core principle it says:

“All children and young people are entitled to an appropriate education, one that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards and the fulfilment of potential.

This should enable them to:

- achieve their best
- become confident individuals living fulfilling lives, and
- make a successful transition into adulthood, whether into employment, further or higher education or training”

The guidance also says....

Every school is required to identify and address the SEN of the pupils that they support. Mainstream schools, including academies, alternative provision academies and Pupil Referral Units, must:

- do everything they can to meet a child and young person’s special educational needs – this is called ‘using their best endeavours’
- make sure that children, parents and young people are actively involved in decision-making throughout
- make sure that children and young people with SEN can take part in activities at school alongside children who don’t have SEN
- tell you if they are giving your child SEN support
- have a teacher who is responsible for co-ordinating SEN support – an SEN co-ordinator, or ‘SENCO/SENDSCO’
- make sure that all teachers and support staff who work with your child know about their needs, the support that is being given and any teaching strategies or approaches that are needed
- prepare an SEN report – this is a report about how they support and plan for the education of children with SEN or disabilities

These are some of the other important things to know.

- Your child doesn’t need to have a diagnosis to get SEN support in school.
- Your child’s teachers are the people responsible and accountable for their progress and

development. That includes where they have support from teaching assistants or specialist staff.

- A mainstream school can’t refuse to admit your child if they have SEN, or if they don’t have an EHC plan.
- If your child doesn’t have an EHC plan, they must go to a mainstream school. A child or young person can’t go to a special school if they are only getting SEN support, and they don’t have an EHC plan. There are a few exceptions to this - you can find out more on page 26 of the SEND Code of Practice.



You can find out more about the law and SEN support in Chapter six of the SEND Code of Practice (pages 91- 110). IPSEA (Independent Providers of Special Education Advice) also have lots of information about SEND law.

What is a SENCO and what do they do?

SENCO stands for Special Educational Needs Coordinator. You can also see it written as SENDCO, which means Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator.

Each school must have a SENCO. If your child is in a small school there may be a SENCO supporting children across a group of schools, not just your child’s. That means they may not be available all the time and may have a specific day when they’re at your child’s school.

SENCOs are trained teachers who have also done a National Award in Special Educational Needs Coordination or are working towards one. They are often part of the school’s leadership team and work with governors and headteachers to develop the school’s SEN policy.

The SENCO is responsible for making sure that children with SEND get the right support, including those children who have an EHC plan. They also give advice and support to teachers and work with other professionals. They can arrange assessments, get advice from specialists and work with teachers to decide on the best support for your child.

As a parent, you're likely to have an ongoing relationship with the SENCO at your child's school. You may meet with them regularly and that could be once a term. At these meetings you can go through your child's school or EHC plan to talk about how they're getting on and whether any support needs to change. Some schools have assistant SENCOs and you may also meet with them.

The SENCO is likely to be your first point of contact if your child is having difficulties or you think they may need more or different support.

We have more information about day-to-day communications and building a good relationship with your child's SENCO.

How do I get help early on?

Getting help early is important for every family, but especially for those who have a child with special educational needs.

The longer you sit on a problem or worry, the more difficult and stressful it's likely to get. Without help, challenges will become bigger than they need to be and harder to 'fix'.

Whatever age your child is, or whatever stage you're at in your journey, the sooner you get the right help the better. Your child is much more likely to have positive experiences and reach their goals.

Getting help is about having the right conversation, at the right time, with the right people. That almost always starts with you connecting with a professional and having a chat. Often, it's with someone who knows your child well, such as their nursery worker, a teacher or a SENCO. But it could be anyone.

The important thing is that the conversation happens. You should be able to talk about the difficulties your child is having, as well as how that's affecting you and your family. Having a child with additional needs usually has a much wider impact than just on your child and their life at school. The chances are it's affecting the whole family.

In Devon, any education, health or care professional should be part of what's called 'Early Help'. This is an approach to making sure families get the support they

need at an early stage, before small issues become bigger.

Any professional should be able to have a conversation with you about any difficulties you're having and help you connect to the right support – whether that's a local support or play group, training, other professionals or wider support services.

So, if you haven't done it already, talk to a professional you trust.

What kind of support is available in school?

The support your child gets will depend on their individual needs. Every child is different and will respond to support in a different way.

The kind of support that's available in school is very broad - from simple things like leaving class five minutes before the end of a lesson to avoid busy, noisy corridors, to movement breaks and social skills groups, or to more specialised IT support and speech and language therapy for example.

The approach to support is often a step-by-step one. So, support may start at quite a simple level, to see what works and what doesn't. Depending on how your child responds to the support will help to decide the next step. If it works well, it will stay in place and carry on. If it works a bit or not at all, then more or different support may be added or tried. It's often a trial-and-error process to get the right fit for your child.

This whole process of assessing, planning, doing and then reviewing support is called the **graduated approach** and it should happen in an ongoing way in every school.

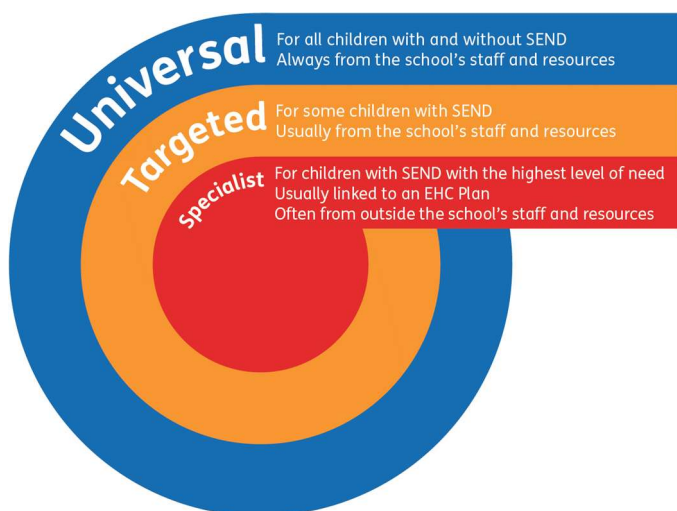
Many schools are flexible and very creative about the support they give individual children. Often SEN support works well when relationships are good - those between a child or young person and the staff and those between staff and parents. In fact, relationships are often the key, whoever they're with. The right words, at the right times or the right approach when things go wrong can make a huge difference to a child.

Sometimes it's all about mindset. Seeing a child positively, knowing them well and being prepared to be flexible will help. It's worth remembering that lots of support for children with SEND costs little or nothing – such as making sure they sit in the place where they are most comfortable in class or giving them small tasks to do to build their self-esteem. These changes to the way that staff and schools do things are sometimes called reasonable adjustments.

You can find out more about what services and support are available in Devon, and what you can expect schools to be doing, on the SEND Local Offer website. There is a section on the website about SEN support in schools.

Universal, targeted and specialist support

Schools use three main levels of support – universal, targeted and specialist. All children with SEN get universal support and most will get targeted support. Those children and young people with more complex or severe needs will also have specialist support.



Universal support (provision)

This is support that is given in all schools, in every classroom, by every teacher and **for all children** – those with and without SEN. The funding and the expertise for universal support come from the school's resources and is part of quality first teaching.

Universal support is focused on differentiated learning. The level at which your child, and others, are learning may be different to that of other children in their class. So, the teacher will change the

work to meet their needs within class. This is differentiation and teachers do this routinely for every lesson.

Universal support 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
- extra time to finish tasks that need long periods of reading or listening
- good preparation for change
- the teaching of social understanding
- using alternative ways of recording work

Targeted support (provision)

This is support that can be given in all schools, in every classroom and by every teacher, and is **for some children**.

It's extra to, or different from, universal provision. There is funding and expertise available in schools for 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 a distraction free area

Specialist support (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:

- 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
- individual speech or language therapy
- reduced time spent on difficult activities and increased time spent on your young person's strengths in the curriculum
- changes to the social environment to avoid triggers and reduce stress
- school-based counselling

What is Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP)?

Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision is a relatively new term you might hear a professional use. It comes from a 2023 Department for Education publication about SEND where it's called ordinarily available provision. In Devon it's been developed as Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision.

It's the support that all children and young people get in early years education, at school or in college from within that setting's own resources. That means things like support, equipment and approaches to teaching and learning that come from the nursery, school or college's own funding and staffing.

In Devon, OAIP frameworks will set out the support that helps all children (universal) and those with SEND (targeted). These frameworks will contain information about what is expected of education settings and the support that should help every child feel included. This often includes simple, every-day and low-cost things that schools and teachers can do to support all children in the classroom and wider school. It also includes some more targeted help for children with SEND.

The frameworks have been developed with parent carers and young people as well as professionals. They set out the core principles of support for children and young people. These include things like the importance of trusted relationships, working with parents and families and helping children feel like they are valued and belong.

Support for different areas of SEN

Support is also focused on specific aspects of each area of SEND. So, for example, there are lots of different types of need within the SEN area of communication and interaction – including social communication difficulties, speech difficulties and developmental language disorder. And within this, support could be given to improve social and interpersonal skills, focus and attention, speech and language skills or sensory difficulties.

Your child may find one or more areas within communication and language (or any of the other areas of SEN) challenging, so their support will focus on their specific needs. The kind of support your child will get will not only vary depending on their needs and abilities, but also their age and which key stage they are in.

You can find out more about the specific support that's available in Devon on the Local Offer website.

What's your role and your child's role?

You and your child have an important part to play in making sure SEN support works in school. Your views and those of your child should be an essential part of the decision-making process - working out what your child's needs are, what support they need and what is working or not working. Positive relationships with staff and good day to day communications are the foundation for making sure this happens. By staying in touch and passing on information when you need to, you can help to make sure things go as smoothly as possible.

Every child or young person should have a school plan which sets out in writing their needs, their targets and the support they are getting. It's used to look at whether your child is making good progress and to change the support if not.

You and your child (if they want to and are able to) should meet regularly with staff to talk about how things are going and to look at the plan.

These meetings are your main chance to have your say. You know your child well and that puts you in a unique position to understand their strengths and challenges. You can, and should, take part as an equal in discussions. You can find out more about your role in meetings, and your child's, on our website.

Here are some tips for ways you can take part in your child's SEN support:

- Go to regular meetings. It's OK to ask for a meeting if you think you need one and it's a good idea to get meetings in your diary early on.
- Before you go to a meeting, spend time thinking about your child and how they're getting on. Write down what's going well and what's not, plus any ideas you have. We have a meeting form that can help you do that.
- Talk to your child about school, and how things are. We have some tools to help you do that. If your child is very young, non-verbal or has difficulty communicating feelings and thoughts they may not be able to tell you. Watching behaviour or using other methods of communication can help to show you what's going on for them.
- Share how things are at home. Many families find that their child is very different at home compared to school. That can tell you and the professionals a lot about their state of mind and how they are feeling.
- Keep good day to day communications going with school. If your child is starting new support or changing something, it's helpful to know. Likewise, if things happen at home that could affect your child, make sure you tell staff.
- Take part in assessments when you're invited to. Professionals often talk to parents as part of an assessment as it gives a really good insight into their strengths and difficulties. This can mean a phone call, but sometimes there are forms to fill out. These can take time to do and sometimes ask for a lot of information. Ask for help if you need it – perhaps a friend or family member

could help you. Or ask the professional if you could talk by phone instead.

- Share your ideas and the strategies you use at home. If something works well at home, then it may work well in school too. This can be anything, such as a soft toy that your child has for comfort or sharing the signs you see when your child is being triggered or starting to struggle. Remember, you're the expert.

What is the Local Offer?

Every local authority in England has a Local Offer. It's usually a website and it sets out information about the support a local authority expects to be available to families of children in their area who have SEN or are disabled. That includes support for children with and without an EHC plan, across education, health and social care.

The Local Offer should have clear, comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about support and services in each local authority and how to access it.

Devon has a Local Offer website which has information about a wide range of support and services, from community-based family support through to specialist services. It tells you what's out there to support your child and your family and how to access it or be referred to it. It's a good place to start if you need information or if you want to know what's available in your area.

Is support available for children with medical conditions?

By law, schools have to make arrangements to support children and young people with medical conditions, so that they have full access to education. That includes mental or physical health conditions, or both together. You don't need to have a formal diagnosis for the school staff to be providing support to and for your child.

Your child can have a medical condition and not have a special educational need in which case they probably

won't need extra support to manage educationally in school. But if they have a long term or complex health condition, they may have an Individual Healthcare Plan (IHP or IHCP) which sets out clearly the support they should have to meet their medical needs.

Your child's Individual Healthcare Plan may include information about

- medication and any side effects
- any specific care your child needs during the school day
- what to do in an emergency
- who is involved in your child's medical care
- the adjustments and arrangements that need to be made so that your child can take part as fully as possible in school life - that includes things like going on school trips and doing PE

Not all children with a medical condition will need an IHP. But it's a good idea for a school to have one if your child's medical condition may mean:

- different staff or services working together, or
- your child may need emergency treatment

There is no standard format for an IHCP, so schools can draw up their own.

It's worth remembering that many health conditions can have a big impact on quality of life for a child or young person. Hospital appointments and treatment can mean time off and out of school. Health issues can affect your child's self-confidence, self-esteem, their emotional and mental health, wellbeing, social life and friendships.

It's important to work with your child's school to make sure they have access to whatever is needed. That might include work to do at home, support from a hospital school, a part-time timetable or a plan to get back into school after a long time away.

You can find out more about IHCPs and medical conditions on the Contact website.

SEND and medical conditions

If your child has a lifelong medical condition or one that will last a long time, or if they have lots of health problems, it's likely to affect their ability to learn.

If that's the case, then your child will have special educational needs, and these should be considered and supported alongside their health needs. That means health professionals, school or college staff and education specialists should work together to make sure your child gets the right support.

One of the main areas of SEN is social, emotional and mental health. So, if your child has a mental health condition, such as depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder, then they also have a special educational need. In law, some children with medical conditions are also considered to be disabled.

Education Health and Care (EHC) plans and medical conditions

Although EHC plans cover health as well as education and care, they are education driven. That means your child must have a special educational need as well as their medical condition in order to ask for an EHC needs assessment.

It's worth bearing in mind that the definition of special educational need has two parts and includes:

- Children who have significantly greater difficulty in learning than others of their age.
- Children with a disability who can't access educational facilities normally available in mainstream school.

So, some children with medical needs may also fit the disability part of the definition of SEN.

Need more information?

SEND Code of Practice

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

Devon SEND Local Offer

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

Council for Disabled Children

councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

Contact

Information and support for families with disabled children
contact.org.uk

IPSEA (Independent Providers of Special Educational Advice)

Information about the law and SEND
www.ipsea.org.uk

**DiAS information**

We have more information about:

- How SEN support is planned and given.
- Meetings – how to get the most out of them and prepare well.
- Day to day communications with professionals.
- Helping your child or young person share their views.

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