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Education: SEN support in Schools (England)

Introduction

The Children and Families Act introduces changes to the arrangements for support that children and young people with special educational needs will receive at nursery, school and college.

Here we look at how children and young people might receive support under the new system, which will come into force from 1 September 2014, and suggest how parents can approach a school or nursery if they have concerns about a child.

Special educational needs code of practice

A special educational needs (SEN) code of practice published in June 2014 gives guidance and practical advice on how the new law should be applied. The SEN code of practice explains how local authorities and others should identify, assess and provide for children and young people with SEN.

All local authority maintained mainstream schools and nurseries, academies, pupil referral units and further education providers must have regard to the code of practice. Independent and non-maintained schools can choose to follow its advice, but may use a different system of supporting and monitoring students with SEN.

The code of practice describes the level of support offered to children with SEN. In a child's classroom, all work should be differentiated (that is, set at an appropriate level for each child) but if an early education setting, school or college believes that a child has SEN, they will need to put in place extra support which is different from that needed by other children. This is called SEN Support. It involves a greater level of support and might include the use of professional services from outside the early years setting, school or college.

For those children whose special educational needs are more significant and complex and can't be met through school resources, the local authority will need to make an assessment of their

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education, health and care needs and probably draw up an Education, Health and Care Plan (often referred to simply as 'a plan')¹.

Some children will be given support through school resources before they are offered an assessment. Others may be offered an assessment without having received support in school, depending on their level of need.

Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)

The SENCO is the teacher in a child's school or nursery with day-to-day responsibility for SEN. All maintained mainstream schools, maintained nursery schools and academy schools (including free schools) are required to have a SENCO.

SENCOs are responsible for-

- speaking to parents and professionals,
- helping the class or subject teacher to assess children's strengths and weaknesses,
- making sure that any child with SEN has their needs identified and met
- managing learning support assistants (LSAs), sometimes known as teaching assistants (TAs), who work as support staff for teachers and pupils in the classroom and around the school
- organising or contributing to in-service training of staff
- overseeing the school's SEN policy
- ensuring the records of all pupils with SEN are kept up to date

In secondary schools, SENCOs may also manage the SEN teaching team and they must liaise with the local authority about the transition of a young person with SEN to adult life.

Early years settings

Early education is part of the foundation stage of education. Early years practitioners must review the progress of all children between the ages of two and three. If a child is identified as having SEN, a graduated approach of assessment, planning and reviewing their progress should be adopted which is described later. All early education settings must have regard to the code of practice, have a written SEN policy and nominate a member of staff to act as their SENCO.

SEN Support in Schools

Most children and young people with SEN will have their needs met in mainstream education. All state maintained nurseries, mainstream schools, academies & free schools that are not special schools, Pupil referral units, 16-19 & alternative provision academies and further education institutions must do their utmost to make sure that the necessary provision is made for any pupil on roll, who has SEN.

Before a child is identified as needing SEN support in school, the class teacher and SENCO should make an analysis of their needs, using the teacher's assessment and experience and evidence of their progress, attainment and behaviour. Parents' views and the child's views should also be taken into account. Parents should always be consulted and kept informed of the action taken to help a child and of the outcome of this action.

Areas of Need

There are four broad areas of need:

1. **Communication and interaction** – difficulties with speech, language and communication. Children and young people may have difficulty taking part in conversations, either because they find it hard to understand what others are saying or meaning, or because they have problems with fluency of speech and sound production. Children and young people on the autism spectrum have difficulty making sense of the world and may be easily distracted by certain stimuli, such as noise, bright lights or strong smells. They will often have problems with changes to their usual routine.
2. **Cognition and learning** – difficulties in gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills or understanding concepts. Children and young people may need more practical activities, tasks set out in smaller steps, or specific programmes to support development of literacy and numeracy skills.
3. **Social, mental and emotional health** – difficulties with emotional and social development, immature social skills and difficulty making and sustaining good relationships. Children and young people may become withdrawn and isolated, or display challenging or disruptive behaviour. Some children on the autism spectrum may have additional diagnoses of attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), together with ASD.
4. **Sensory and/or physical needs** – these needs can be wide ranging and may require adaptations to the curriculum, study programme or physical environment. Many children and young people on the spectrum may also have sensory and/or physical needs. For example, they may be hypo (under) or hyper (over) sensitive to noise, sight, smell and touch. They may also have fine and/or gross motor skill difficulties, such as difficulties with pencil grip, balance and awareness of personal space.

Children and young people on the autism spectrum may have difficulties in one or more of these broad areas of need.

Support for children with SEN

Once a child has been identified as having SEN, the school should take action to put effective support in place. Parents must be told about any special educational provision put in place for a child. Four main actions form part of a cycle known as the graduated approach

Step 1 – Assess

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There should be a clear analysis of a child's needs based on the teacher's assessment and experience of a child as well as information about their progress, attainment and behaviour. The assessment should be regularly reviewed. In some cases, outside professionals who may already know a child will liaise with the school to help inform the assessments.

Step 2 – Plan

Parents must be notified if it is decided that a child needs SEN support. Parents should also be consulted about the interventions and support to be put into place for a child, as well as the expected impact on their progress and when this will be reviewed. All staff working with a child should be aware of the approach and teaching strategies being used and of any additional support being provided. This should also be recorded on the school's information system.

Step 3 – Do

The class or subject teacher remains responsible for a child's progress on a daily basis, working closely with any teaching assistants or specialist staff involved to plan and continually assess the impact of the support/interventions being put into place. In turn, the SENCO should support the class or subject teacher in further assessments, problem solving and advising on effective implementation of the support.

Step 4 – Review

There should be a clear agreed date to review the effectiveness of the interventions and support put into place and the impact it has had on a child's progress. Parents and a child, (where appropriate), should be given the opportunity to present their views. The class, or subject teacher, working with the SENCO and any other professionals from outside of the school who may be involved with a child, should revise the support in the light of a child's development and progress made.

Involving Specialists

If a child makes little or no progress following interventions and support put into place at school, they should consider involving specialists from outside agencies. This might be, for example, an educational psychologist, an autism outreach specialist or a speech and language therapist, who can give advice and provide more specialist assessments. Parents should be consulted if a professional from outside the school is to be involved with a child's education. Any involvement of outside specialists should be discussed and agreed with parents and the support a child will receive should be recorded and shared with parents. A date should be set for when progress will be reviewed.

Keeping records – school

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The code of practice says that it is up to schools to decide how to keep records of the SEN Support being made for a child, but makes it clear that the provision made must be accurately recorded and kept up to date. These records should form part of regular discussions school staff will have with parents about a child's progress, outcomes and planned next steps. It is suggested that parents also keep their own notes and records.

Discussing a child's progress

Schools will be required to provide an annual report for parents about a child's progress and should meet parents at least termly to:

- set clear goals,
- discuss the programmes and support that will help a child,
- review progress and clarify roles and responsibilities.

These meetings should be led by a teacher who has a good knowledge and understanding of a child, their needs and attainments. This will usually be the class or form tutor, supported by the SENCO.

Parents should be given the opportunity at the meeting to share concerns and agree aspirations for the child. The code of practice says that these meetings will need to allow sufficient time to explore parent's views and, where appropriate, the child's views. This could be achieved by a child attending all or part of the meeting, or by gathering their views beforehand.

After the meeting, the teacher will need to inform all appropriate school staff of the outcomes and agreed targets and should also update the child's record.

SEN Support in further education

From September 2014, further education (FE) colleges and sixth form colleges must have regard to the SEN code of practice and must ensure that young people with SEN have access to a wide range of study programmes and support.

Where available, colleges should use information from the young person's previous school about their SEN. Colleges may also want to undertake their own assessments of the young person's needs, and curriculum staff should work with specialist support to identify where they may be struggling due to their SEN. Colleges should involve the young person and, where they judge it appropriate, parents, in discussing what additional support is required.

Colleges should have access to specialist skills to support the learning of SEN students when required, either through partnerships, or by employing practitioners to help students with SEN to progress. There is no legal duty on colleges to have a SENCO, but colleges should ensure there is a named person in the college with responsibility oversight of SEN provision to ensure co-ordination of support.

Keeping records – college

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As with schools, colleges can decide their own approach to record keeping, but the code of practice says that they should record details of additional or different provision being made to meet the young person's SEN and their progress towards achieving specified outcomes. This information should be used as part of the regular discussion with the young person, and in many cases parents, about their progress, the expected outcomes from the support provided, and the planned next steps. Colleges should ensure that they have accurate information to show the SEN support that has been provided over the young person's time in college, and the impact it had.

Further information

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the local offer in your area, you can post them on the SEN code changes group:

You can also find a wealth of information on the National Autistic Society website:
www.autism.org.uk

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