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Education: The Local Offer – England

Introduction

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduces changes the arrangements for support that children and young people with special educational needs will receive at nursery, school and college.

Here we look at the information local authorities must publish about the provision they expect to be available in their area for children and young people up to the age of 25 who have special educational needs.

What is the Local Offer?

When the Children and Families Act comes into force on 1 September 2014, local authorities will be required to develop a 'local offer' in order to give information about provision both in and outside the local area that is likely to be used by children and young people with special educational needs (SEN). In developing the local offer, the local authority should involve children and young people with SEN, parents and carers, and service providers.

The local offer should:

- Be clear, comprehensive, accessible and transparent
- Engage local interested parties in its development and review

Local authorities must:

- make their local offer widely available and accessible and it must be on a website
- publish arrangements for those without access to the internet about how they can get the information
- make sure that it is accessible for different groups, including disabled people and those with different types of SEN.

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Content of the Local Offer

The local offer should set out, in one place, information about provision the local authority expects to be available for children and young people with SEN living in their area. There is certain information that the local offer must contain. This includes:

- Education, health and care provision for children and young people with SEN
- Arrangements for identifying and assessing SEN, including arrangements for requesting an education, health and care needs assessment, which is a detailed multi-disciplinary assessment undertaken for children who have significant and complex SEN
- Other education provision outside of schools and colleges (for example, sports or arts provision)
- Training provision including Apprenticeships
- Arrangements for travel to and from schools, colleges and early years providers
- Support for children and young people moving between phases of education and to prepare for adulthood
- Sources of information, advice and support in the area in relation to SEN (for example, an impartial Information, Advice and Support (IAS) service, such as the Parent Partnership Service, forums for parents and carers, support groups, childcare and leisure activities)
- Arrangements for dispute resolution, mediation, complaints and the right of appeal against a local authority decision to the First-tier Tribunal.

Education, Health and Care Provision

Education provision should include provision available in mainstream and special schools, and include details of independent or non-maintained special schools. It should outline information about local support services that are available to mainstream schools and other settings (for example, educational psychology, autism advisory services). It should also include information about local arrangements for partnership working between schools to support children and young people with SEN, and arrangements for providing additional funding for children and young people with high levels of need.

Health provision should include information about health care provision for children and young people with SEN, (such as, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services) and mental health services. It should also include health and care provision that might commonly be needed by children and young people with SEN, such as wheelchair services and community equipment. Portage, continence services, physiotherapy and provision for those with complex health needs should also be included.

Social care provision should include support for children and young people moving between social care services (from children to adult services), assistance to support independent living

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and details of the short breaks for disabled children, young people and their families, which local authorities have a duty to provide.

Identifying and assessing SEN

The local offer should clearly set out arrangements in school for:

- Identifying the particular learning needs of a child or young person
- Modifying teaching methods and the provision of additional aids
- Involving parents and carers in decisions about meeting their child's SEN
- Securing additional services, professional advice, equipment and facilities needed

The local offer should make it clear where information provided by schools can be found. Schools have a duty to inform parents of any special educational provision being made for their child.

Information about Education, Health and Care needs assessments

As well as providing information about the support that is available from within the schools own resources, the local offer should include information about:

- How an education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment can be requested
- How the local authority will consider a request for an assessment and inform parents of their decision
- How parents will be involved in the assessment process
- Any support available to help families during the assessment process
- The assessment timescales
- The process for preparing a Education, Health and Care plan
- The option of a personal budget (funding to buy the services or support the Education, Health and Care plan says is needed), who is eligible and how to ask for one
- Arrangements for mediation, dispute resolution and appeals.

Training and apprenticeships

The local offer must identify training opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and Supported Internships available to young people in the area, to provide a smooth transition from education into employment. The information that local authorities publish should identify providers who have particular expertise relevant to young people with SEN. It must include information on how young people can apply for these opportunities, or make it clear where this information can be found. The information should include any entry requirements, including age limits and educational attainment.

Preparing for adulthood

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The support available to help young people with SEN move into adulthood should include information about:

- Preparing for and finding employment
- Finding somewhere to live
- Participating in the community

Advice and support

One of the key pieces of information that must be included in the local offer is where to get advice, information and support. All local authorities must have an impartial advice information and support (IAS) service and should make sure that advice and guidance for young people is tailored appropriately for them. The advice should be made available through a single service or place that will direct parents, carers and young people to the appropriate local authority voluntary or community sector SEN support services. It should provide factual information on rights, legal requirements and what to do if things go wrong.

Parent Partnership Services provide impartial advice, information and support to parents in relation to SEN and provision. In addition, the government has released funding to recruit and train 'independent supporters' to help families of children with SEN with the new SEN processes. Independent supporters will be able to spend time with families to offer the independent help and advice they need.

Dispute resolution, mediation, complaints and right to appeal

Details of the dispute resolution arrangements must be set out in the local offer. These must be made known to parents, as well as heads, governing bodies, proprietors and principals of schools and post-16 institutions.

The local offer must also set out the arrangements the local authority has made for parents to access mediation information services. If parents or young people want to appeal to the First-tier Tribunal against a local authority's decision about SEN, they must first contact a mediation service, so the local offer must explain how to do this.

Reviewing the Local Offer

Local authorities should make sure that the special educational and social care provision available in their area and outside their area for children and young people with SEN is kept under review. This should be done in consultation with parents and young people in the area.

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Local authorities must from time to time publish comments received about its local offer from parents of children with SEN. Local authorities should also publish the response to those comments, including any action the local authority intends to take.

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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