Department of Education
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The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Glossary



SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

GLOSSARY

Key definitions

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a learning difficulty and/or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made.

A child or young person has a ***learning difficulty*** if they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children or young people their age and/or has a disability which either prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities generally provided for children or young people of their age in mainstream school.

Special educational provision is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children or young people of the same age in mainstream schools.

Specialist Provisions are dedicated classes within mainstream schools that provided tailored support and are designed to meet the needs of children or young people with statements of SEN. They provide smaller, adapted learning environments while allowing pupils to benefit from inclusion with their peers in mainstream schools.

Whole- School Educational Provision refers to the approaches and supports that a school puts in place to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with SEN. This includes differentiation, reasonable adjustments and learning provisions.



Key Organisations/People

The ***Education Authority (EA)*** is the regional body with legal responsibility for the provision and delivery of education and youth services.

An ***Educational Psychologist*** works collaboratively with teachers, school staff, parents and other professionals to help understand and address barriers to learning, social & emotional



development and wellbeing. Central to their role is consultation, using psychological theory, to support schools in developing their own capacity to identify needs, support schools in planning effective interventions and create nurturing, inclusive environments. Through this consultative approach, they help staff build confidence and skills in problem solving, early intervention and evidence based practice. Educational Psychologists also carry out assessments when needed, drawing on observations, discussions and psychometric tools to develop a clear understanding of a child or young person's strengths and needs. They support schools in monitoring progress and adapting strategies, and they provide professional advice when a Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs is being progressed. Overall, their work aims to empower educational settings, promote wellbeing, and ensure that all learners have the opportunity to thrive.

A ***Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC)*** will be the new name for the ***SEN Co-ordinator (SENCo)*** when the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 is commenced. Like SENCos, they will be responsible for co-ordinating support for pupils with SEN, including the preparation and implementation of PLPs for children and young people who require SEN provision.



A ***Named SEN Link Officer*** works in the EA and liaises with parents over the arrangements relating to statutory assessment and the making of a Statement, where appropriate. The EA informs parents of the identity of the Named SEN Link Officer when they issue a notice of a proposal to make a statutory assessment of a child or young person's educational needs.

GLOSSARY

SEN Local IMPACT Teams (LITs) work with schools to support children and young people, bringing together eight previously separate SEN pupil support services into a single coordinated and multi-specialism service which wraps around the needs of the child or young person. IMPACT stands for Integrated Multi-Specialist Professionals Actively Collaborating Together. Each Team includes specialists in areas such as Cognition and Learning, Autism, Language and Communication and Social, Behavioural, Emotional and Wellbeing Needs. The Teams provide tailored support to pupils and their schools regardless of the type of needs presenting, at the earliest possible point in their educational journey.

The SEN Local IMPACT Teams came into operation in September 2025 are made up of 20 school age and 8 early years teams spread across Northern Ireland and aligned to existing Health Trust boundaries.



Key Documents/ Systems

A ***Personal Learning Plan (PLP)*** will replace the ***Individual Education Plan, (IEP)*** (when the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 is commenced) and is a document which describes what difficulties/barriers to learning a child or young person is experiencing, targets for learning and what the school is doing to support them and help them make progress. The PLP will be a statutory requirement for every child or young person on the SEN Register. It will outline the type of provision planned and what it will look like, who will be involved and what special equipment or resources will be used.

The ***SEN Code of Practice (CoP)*** sets out how the identification, assessment and provision of support is made for all children or young people who have or may have SEN at some time in their school careers, or even earlier. There are 3 stages of the new ***Code of Practice***, focusing on the level of intensity of the special educational provision needed for each child or young person to improve their individual



outcomes. Stage 1 is school-delivered Special Educational Provision. Stage 2 is School-delivered Special Educational Provision plus external provision (LIT's) and Stage 3 is the issuing of the Statement of SEN.

The SEN Register is the official record kept by each child's school of children identified as having SEN. It records the type of need/s, the current stage the child or young person is at on the CoP and the movement between stages over time. In consultation with parents/ carers (and children and young people, as appropriate), the school decides if the child's name is placed on the register and every child on the Register should have a ***Personal Learning Plan (PLP)*** created, maintained and reviewed for them. This will become mandatory under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 when commenced.

The ***SEN Policy Statement*** seeks to provide clarity on the Department's SEN policy position, the legislation that underpins it and provides an overview of the key players and their relative responsibilities.

A ***Statement of SEN*** is a legal document which sets out the child or young person's SEN, describes the provision and supports to help meet those needs and the educational setting they should attend.

Key Processes

The ***Annual Review*** is the review of the Statement of SEN which the school must undertake every year. The purpose of the review is to ensure your child's needs are being met and the setting and the provision contained in the statement are still appropriate.

Statutory Assessment (SA) is a full assessment of a child or young person's educational needs which is carried out by the EA during stage 2 of the Code of Practice. Legal timeframes can take up to 26 weeks from beginning to end, but can take longer if there are delays in gathering certain types of evidence such as, for example health advice.



Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

Rathgael House
Balloo Road,
Rathgill, Bangor
BT19 7PR

T 028 9127 9279
E DE.DEWebMail@education-ni.gov.uk