

Understanding SEN Support and EHC Needs Assessment Requests

A concise guide for families, schools, colleges and professionals

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Introduction

This guide explains how we work with families, schools, settings and professionals to identify and support children and young people with special educational needs. It describes how SEN Support should be planned, delivered and reviewed through the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle, and what information can help us decide whether an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment may be needed. In doing this, we will consider what a child or young person needs, what support has been tried, what difference that support has made, and whether further assessment may be required.

The guide is intended to support early help, clear evidence, person-centred conversations and lawful, individual decision-making. It should not be used as a rigid checklist or as a higher threshold than the legal test. Every request will be considered on its own evidence and circumstances.

Who this guide is for

This guide is for parents and carers, young people, schools, settings and professionals who are working together to understand special educational needs, plan SEN Support or think about whether an EHC Needs Assessment may be needed.

- Parents, carers and young people can use it to understand what support should look like, how their views should be included, and what happens when an EHC Needs Assessment is requested.
- Schools and settings can use it to support good SEN Support, evidence gathering and clear review of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle.
- Professionals and decision makers can use it to support consistent, lawful and person-centred consideration of requests.

What is Special Educational Need?

Special educational needs are not always visible, and they can affect children and young people in different ways. A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability that means they need special educational provision. This means support that is additional to, or different from, what is usually available for children and young people of the same age.

When we think about SEN, we look at the whole child or young person, including how they learn, communicate, take part, manage the school or setting environment, build relationships and make progress over time.

Needs may include:

- **communication and interaction** — such as speech, language, communication, social understanding, attention or interaction with others;
- **cognition and learning** — such as learning progress, attainment, memory, processing, literacy, numeracy, curriculum access or independence;

- **social, emotional and mental health** — such as emotional regulation, anxiety, relationships, attendance, engagement, behaviour as communication or the impact on learning;
- **sensory and/or physical needs** — such as hearing, vision, sensory processing, mobility, motor skills, health care needs, equipment or environmental access.

These areas can overlap. A child or young person does not need to fit neatly into one category. What matters is understanding their individual strengths, needs, barriers and the support that will help them.

Legal Context

We will consider requests for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment in line with the Children and Families Act 2014. The legal test is whether the child or young person has, or may have, special educational needs, and whether it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan.

In applying this test, we will consider each request on its own evidence and circumstances. The SEND Code of Practice is statutory guidance and must be taken into account by local authorities, schools and settings. It emphasises early identification of needs, high quality teaching, family involvement and the graduated approach. The Equality Act 2010 also requires schools and settings to consider reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people, so they are not put at a substantial disadvantage.

Good SEN Support: Assess, Plan, Do, Review

This section sets out what good SEN Support should usually involve. It is mainly intended to help schools and settings plan, deliver and review support well, but it may also help families understand what should be happening when a child or young person has special educational needs.

Assess, Plan, Do, Review is important because it helps families, schools, settings and professionals build a shared understanding of a child or young person's strengths, needs and barriers to learning. It supports clear planning, helps everyone check whether support is making a difference, and provides a way to decide what should happen next.

Information from Assess, Plan, Do, Review can also help us understand what has been tried and what impact that support has had when an EHC Needs Assessment is requested. However, it is not an additional legal test or a hurdle that families must clear. We will still consider each request on its own evidence and apply the statutory test in the individual case.

The cycle should be revisited and updated over time. It is not a one-off activity.

Assess

Build a shared understanding of strengths, needs, barriers and progress.

- use attainment and progress information;
- include teacher assessment, observations and work samples;
- listen to the child or young person and their family;
- consider health, social care and specialist advice where relevant;
- record what has already been tried and its impact.

Plan

Agree outcomes, provision and how success will be measured.

- set clear and measurable outcomes;
- identify the support, intervention or reasonable adjustment required;
- record frequency, duration, staffing and group size where known;

- agree who is responsible for delivery;
- set a review date and share the plan with family and staff.

Do

Deliver the support consistently and keep the child at the centre.

- make sure class and subject teachers remain responsible for progress;
- match support to assessed needs;
- ensure teaching assistants and specialists are clear about their role;
- use strategies consistently across relevant parts of the day;
- record what was actually delivered.

Review

Evaluate impact and decide what should happen next.

- review progress towards outcomes;
- discuss what worked, what did not and why;
- include parent, carer and child or young person views;
- adapt support if progress is limited or needs change;
- use the review to inform the next Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle.

How SEN Support links to the EHC Needs Assessment process

SEN Support and the statutory EHC Needs Assessment process are connected, but they are not the same thing. SEN Support is the support that schools and settings put in place through high quality teaching, ordinarily available provision, reasonable adjustments and additional or different support. An EHC Needs Assessment is a statutory process where we consider whether we need to gather advice to better understand a child or young person's education, health and care needs, and decide whether an EHC plan may be needed.

Good SEN Support helps everyone understand what a child or young person needs and what support has already been tried. It can also help show whether support is working, whether barriers remain, and whether needs may require a more coordinated statutory assessment. SEN support includes assessment, implementation and review over a period of time to gain a good understanding of the child or young person's additional needs.

Families do not need to complete a set number of Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycles before a request can be considered. We will look at the evidence available at the time and apply the legal test to the individual child or young person. Where information is missing, we will consider whether the available evidence is still enough to make a lawful decision.

A request for an EHC Needs Assessment can be made directly by a parent, young person, school or post-16 institution. Parents and young people do not need the school or setting to agree before making a request. Once a request is received, we will decide whether to carry out an assessment within the statutory timescale.

Understanding needs and deciding whether to assess

This section explains the information that helps us understand a child or young person's needs, and how we use that information when a request for an EHC Needs Assessment is made. It is not intended to create a checklist or an additional threshold. We will consider each request on its own evidence and circumstances.

Information that helps us understand needs

The most useful evidence is often information that already exists through good SEN Support cycles. Schools and settings do not need to create unnecessary paperwork, but they should be able to explain the child or young person's needs, what support has been provided, and what difference that support has made.

Coventry's My Support Plan can help bring this information together because it captures the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle in one place. Other formats can also be used if they clearly explain the child or young person's needs, provision, progress and have been reviewed.

Helpful information may include:

- **the child or young person's views, wishes and feelings** — including what matters to them, what helps, what is difficult and what they want to be different;
- **parent or carer views** — including lived experience, priorities, concerns and what support has or has not helped;
- **a clear description of strengths and needs** — including how needs affect learning, development, communication, relationships, wellbeing, independence or participation;
- **progress over time** — including attainment, developmental progress, attendance, engagement, access to learning and whether progress is sustained;
- **support already provided** — including high quality teaching, reasonable adjustments, ordinarily available provision, targeted interventions and SEN Support;
- **the impact of support** — including what has worked, what has not worked, what has changed and what remains difficult;
- **specialist advice where relevant** — including advice from education, health, therapy, social care or other professionals, and how recommendations have been used;
- **resources and provision used** — including additional adult support, adapted materials, equipment, training, small group or individual work, and how support has been organised;
- **the provision thought to be needed** — including why the child or young person may need support that cannot reasonably be planned, delivered or reviewed through SEN Support alone.

How we decide whether an EHC Needs Assessment is needed

When we receive a request for an EHC Needs Assessment, we will look at the information provided by the person making the request, along with relevant information from the family, child or young person, school or setting, and professionals.

We will apply the legal test. This means we will consider:

- whether the child or young person **has, or may have, special educational needs**; and
- whether it **may be necessary** for special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan.

In making this decision, we will look at the individual evidence available. This may include:

- what the child or young person's needs are;
- how significant, complex, long-term or changing those needs appear to be;
- how needs affect learning, development, independence, wellbeing or participation;
- what support has already been put in place;
- whether support has been matched to assessed needs;
- what difference the support has made;
- whether progress is limited, difficult to sustain or dependent on a high level of support;
- whether advice or support from different agencies may need to be brought together through a statutory assessment;

- the views and lived experience of the child or young person and their parents or carers.

We will tell the parent or young person the decision within the statutory timescale. If we agree to assess, this does not automatically mean an EHC plan will be issued. A separate decision is made after the assessment, using the advice and evidence gathered.

What parents and carers should expect

Parents and carers know their child best. We will listen to what families tell us about their child's strengths, needs, lived experience and the support that has or has not helped. The child or young person's views, wishes and feelings should also be included wherever possible.

- We will consider your views and any evidence you provide as part of the decision.
- We will include your child's views, wishes and feelings wherever possible.
- We will explain what information we looked at and how the decision was made.
- If we decide not to assess, this does not mean your child has no needs or that support should stop.
- If we agree to assess, we will gather advice to better understand your child's education, health and care needs before deciding whether an EHC plan is needed.
- Support in school or setting should continue while a request or assessment is being considered.

Appendix 1 | Quick evidence and reflection checklist

This optional checklist can be used before sending or reviewing a request. It is not a legal checklist, and a request should not be refused because information is shared in a different format or because every box is not complete.

Preparing a clear request

A request does not need to include a large volume of documents. The most helpful requests are usually clear, focused and well organised. Schools and settings should prioritise quality and clarity by explaining the child or young person's needs, what support has been provided, what difference it has made, what barriers remain, and why an EHC Needs Assessment may be necessary. Existing documents can be used where they help tell this story, but unnecessary duplication should be avoided.

Quick check	Yes	Partly	Next action
Child or young person's views, wishes and aspirations are included.	☐	☐	
Parent or carer views, lived experience and priorities are included.	☐	☐	
Strengths, needs, barriers and current progress are clearly described.	☐	☐	
SEN Support, Assess Plan Do Review records or equivalent plans show what has been tried.	☐	☐	
Reasonable adjustments, ordinarily available provision and targeted support are clear.	☐	☐	
Reviews show impact, changes made and any remaining barriers.	☐	☐	
Relevant professional advice has been used, implemented and reviewed where appropriate.	☐	☐	
The evidence explains why an EHC Needs Assessment may be necessary.	☐	☐	

Final check

Before sending the request, consider whether someone unfamiliar with the child or young person could understand the key issues, the support already provided, the impact of that support and why statutory assessment may be needed.