This article describes how children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities are supported in mainstream education. It covers the age range 0-25. The legal framework, which covers all SEN provision in both mainstream and special education settings, is described in the 'Introduction' to this chapter.

Note: In describing SEN provision, both the terms ‘special educational needs (SEN)’ and ‘special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)’ are employed.

**Definition of the target group(s)**

**Learning difficulties and disabilities**

Section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014 states that ‘a child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her’.

As stated by the Act, a child of full-time compulsory school age (5 to 16) or a young person aged 16 to 25 has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

- 'has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
- has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.'

A child under compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if the above definition is likely to apply when he or she reaches compulsory school age.

Section 21 of the Act defines special educational provision for a child aged 2 or more, or a young person, as ‘educational or training provision that is additional to, or different from, that made generally for others of the same age’ in mainstream education institutions. In the case of children under 2, special educational provision means educational provision of any kind.

**Categories of special educational needs (SEN)**

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015; pages 97-98) outlines four ‘broad areas of need’ which should be planned for. These are:

- communication and interaction
- cognition and learning
- social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- sensory and / or physical needs.

The Code of Practice acknowledges that individual children or young people often have needs that cut across all these areas and that their needs may change over time.

Schools use the following categories to report pupils’ special educational needs (SEN) for the statutory school census [5] (as outlined on page 141 of the School census 2018 to 2019 [6] guide):

- specific learning difficulty
- moderate learning difficulty
- severe learning difficulty
- profound and multiple learning difficulty
- social, emotional and mental health
- speech, language and communication needs
- hearing impairment
- visual impairment
- multi-sensory impairment
- physical disability
- autistic spectrum disorder
- other difficulty
- SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need.

Schools may record pupils as having two areas of special need from this list, but must record one of the above needs as the pupil’s most significant, or primary, need.

The data on pupils’ SEN from the census is used to ensure accurate targeting of funding and in the monitoring and development of SEN policy.

As set out in Section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014 [3], a child or young person does not have a learning difficulty or disability solely because the language in which he or she is or will be taught is different from a language which they speak at home.

‘Giftedness’, or exceptional learning ability, is not regarded as a category of SEN – see the article on ‘Support Measures for Learners [7]’.

**Specific support measures**

Under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 [3], and in accordance with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice [4] (2015), there are two broad levels of support for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities:

a. **special educational needs support / SEN support** is the support given to a child or young person in their pre-school [8], school or further education [9] institution from within the school or college’s overall budget, up to a nationally prescribed (financial) threshold per student per year;

b. **Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans** are for children and young people aged up to 25 with more complex needs, who need more support than is available through SEN support. EHC plans aim to provide a unified approach, including a young person’s education, health care and social care needs.
Special educational needs support / SEN support

Special educational needs support / SEN support is the support given to a child or young person in their mainstream pre-school, school or further education institution from within an institution’s own budget.

SEN support in early childhood education and care

SEN support for children under five includes:

- a written ‘progress check’ for all two-year-olds, and a health and development check for all children aged between two and two-and-a-half undertaken by a child health visitor;
- a written assessment (the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile) in the summer term of the year in which a child becomes five;
- making reasonable adjustments for disabled children, e.g. providing aids like tactile signs.

See the article on ‘Assessment’ in early childhood education and care for further information.

SEN support in schools

SEN support in schools might include:

- a special learning programme,
- extra help from a teacher or assistant,
- working in a smaller group,
- observation in class or at break times,
- help taking part in class activities,
- extra encouragement in a child’s learning, e.g. to ask questions or to try something they find difficult,
- help communicating with other children,
- support with physical or personal care difficulties, e.g. eating, getting around school safely or using the toilet.

Historical note: SEN support in schools replaced the previous ‘School Action’ and ‘School Action Plus’ levels of support in September 2014, when the revised Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice, introduced under the Children and Families Act 2014, came into force.

SEN support in further education colleges

In cases where a young person (aged 16+) studying at a further education college is judged by the college to require SEN support, staff discuss the student’s ambitions with him/her, along with the nature of the support to be put in place, the expected impact on progress, and a date for reviewing the support. In such cases, SEN support might include:

- assistive technology
- personal care (or access to it)
- specialist tuition
- note-takers
- interpreters
- one-to-one and small group learning support
- independent living training
- accessible information such as symbol-based materials
- access to therapies such as speech and language therapy.
Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans

Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans are for children and young people aged up to 25 with more complex needs. Introduced under the Children and Families Act 2014, EHC plans replace the previous dual system of statements of special educational needs for children from 0 to 16 and Learning Difficulty Assessments (LDAs) for 16- to 25-year-olds.

The plans are legal documents detailing the special educational, health and social care provision that will be made to support an individual child or young person. Young people and parents of children who have an EHC plan have the right to request a personal budget to use in support of their needs. This may contain elements of education, social care and health funding.

Government guidance on EHC plans is provided in Chapter 9 of the 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years and in specific guidance published in 2017 on EHC plans for 19-to 25-year-olds.

Coordination of SEN provision

In early years settings, school and colleges, a member of staff is designated to oversee special educational needs (SEN) provision. This role is both strategic, in terms of developing SEN policy and provision, and operational, in terms of day-to-day coordination within a school / education setting.

In early years settings and schools, the role is usually known as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), but may also be known as the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCO), or the Inclusion Coordinator. In further education colleges, the coordinator is known as the ‘named person’.

SENCOs in early childhood education and care

The role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in early childhood education and care involves:

- ensuring that all practitioners in the setting understand their responsibilities towards children with special educational needs (SEN), and the setting’s approach to identifying and meeting SEN;
- advising and supporting colleagues;
- ensuring parents are closely involved and that the setting takes their insights into consideration;
- liaising with professionals or agencies beyond the setting.

Under the Children and Families Act 2014, maintained nursery schools must ensure that there is a qualified teacher designated as the SENCO. Voluntary and private early years providers receiving government funding are also expected to have arrangements in place for meeting children’s SEN, which may involve identifying a SENCO.

For statutory guidance on the role of the SENCO in early years provision, see pages 88-9 of the 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years.

SENCOs in schools

The role of a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) includes:

- determining the strategic development of special educational needs (SEN) policy and provision,
alongside the headteacher and governing body [18] of the school;
• day-to-day responsibility for the coordination and operation of SEN policy;
• providing professional guidance to colleagues;
• working closely with staff, parents and other agencies (including other educational institutions, health care professionals and voluntary bodies);
• tracking and recording the progress of all SEN pupils and ensuring that they are appropriately supported in class.

Designation of a SENCO in a maintained school or academy [19] is a requirement under the Children and Families Act 2014 [3]. The member of staff appointed must be a headteacher (or acting headteacher), or a qualified teacher working at the school who has completed his / her induction period. This requirement is determined by The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 [20], which also require a newly appointed SENCO to achieve a postgraduate [21] National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination within three years of appointment.

Statutory guidance on the role of the SENCO in schools is provided on pages 108-9 of the 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years [4].

Named person in further education colleges

Further education colleges are expected to ensure that there is a ‘named person’ in the college with oversight of special educational needs (SEN) provision. This role is similar to the role of the SENCO in schools, and the person is expected to coordinate support and to contribute to the strategic and operational management of the college.

Pages 116-7 of the 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years [4] provide further information on the statutory guidance with regard to named persons.

Inclusion in curriculum and assessment arrangements

National curriculum inclusion statement

The national curriculum inclusion statement [22] sets out that teachers must determine the support and teaching interventions that all their pupils need to participate fully in all parts of the school curriculum, including the national curriculum [23]. The statement gives teaching staff the freedom to teach the national curriculum in line with pupils’ specific and individual needs and to make reasonable adjustments where necessary. Timetables can also be adjusted under the Equality Act 2010 [24] to allow for the inclusion of children with disabilities.

The inclusion statement specifies that, in curriculum planning, potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset, and that lessons should be planned to remove barriers to pupil achievement. It states also that, in many cases, such planning will mean that pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities are able to study the full national curriculum. The statutory Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years [4] (2015) provides detailed advice on approaches to planning to ensure that pupils’ needs are met.

In addition, Section 92 of the Education Act 2002 [25] allows the national curriculum to be modified or disapplied for individual children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan [26].

In terms of assessment, the national curriculum inclusion statement specifies that teachers should set high expectations for every pupil, whatever their prior attainment, and that they should use appropriate assessment to set targets which are deliberately ambitious.
The Education Act 2002 [25] also allows the national curriculum assessment arrangements to be modified or disapplied for individual children with an EHC plan. The subheadings which follow describe the assessment arrangements.

Note: although the national curriculum is not a statutory requirement for academies, it allows them to benchmark their provision against national expectations.

**Access arrangements for end-of-key-stage assessment**

The statutory national curriculum assessment arrangements at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 of primary education are intended to assess all pupils’ abilities in a fair and comparable way. They are designed so that most pupils with special educational needs and disabilities can participate, but adjustments may need to be made for some pupils. Adjustments made before the assessment based on evidence of individual pupil need and on a pupil’s normal way of working are known as ‘access arrangements’. For example, scribes, readers or technical aids may be used, providing that these are based on normal classroom practice for the pupil and so do not provide an unfair advantage. Access arrangements may also include modified tests in braille or large print. Primarily designed for pupils with significant visual impairments, these may be suitable for pupils with other needs such as dyslexia.

Government guidance on assessment and reporting arrangements includes sections on modified tests and on participation for pupils requiring access arrangements. See pages 25 - 26 of the Key Stage 1 guidance [28] and pages 26 – 28 of that for Key Stage 2 [29]. Additional guidance on access arrangements at Key Stage 1 [30] and Key Stage 2 [31] is also available.

There are no statutory assessment arrangements at the end of Key Stage 3 in secondary education.

**Alternative end-of-key-stage assessment**

The national curriculum assessment arrangements at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 may be disapplied for some pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities.

Teachers use the **pre-key stage standards** to assess SEN pupils who are working below the overall standard of the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 tests, and are engaged in subject-specific learning. They use these standards to make a statutory assessment judgement for these pupils, who have reached the end of the key stage but have not completed the relevant programmes of study [32] or taken the statutory tests (in reading and / or writing and / or mathematics). For more information, see the pre-key stage standards for 2018/19 for the end of Key Stage 1 [33] and Key Stage 2 [34].

Teachers use the **P scales** to assess SEN pupils who have complex individual needs and so are not engaged in subject-specific learning. P scales [35] were previously used to assess all SEN pupils working below the overall standard of the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 tests.

A new system of assessment for SEN pupils not engaged in subject-specific learning, which centres on seven ‘areas of engagement’ for learning, is being piloted. This will replace the P scales and is expected to be introduced from 2020.


**Access arrangements for external qualifications**

Assessment at the end of Key Stage 4 and in further education is through external qualifications such as...
GCSEs [38] and A Levels [39].

GCSEs, which are the qualifications most commonly taken at age 16, are designed to accredit a wide range of achievement. Although higher GCSE grades are an important benchmark for progression, these qualifications also accredit achievement at lower levels.

Access arrangements allow students with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities or temporary injuries to access external qualifications. Such arrangements, which may involve readers, scribes or Braille question papers, aim to allow candidates to demonstrate what they can do without changing the demands of the assessment or disadvantaging other students. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) [40] produces guidance [41] on access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration which applies to all qualifications offered in schools and colleges [12].

For pupils judged not ready for GCSEs at age 16, there are Entry Level [42] qualifications, which constitute the first levels of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) [43]. Entry Level qualifications aim to encourage progression, for example, to Level 1 [44] and Level 2 [45] qualifications such as GCSEs. See the subheading ‘Certification’ [46] in the article on ‘Assessment in General Lower Secondary Education’ for more information on GCSEs and Entry Level qualifications.

External services - education, health and care

Schools have access to external services provided by the local authority (LA) [47] to support students with special needs. These usually include:

- educational psychology services (see the article on ‘Guidance and Counselling’ [48])
- parent support services
- special educational needs (SEN) teaching and support services
- behavioural support services
- education welfare services.

Specific training for staff focused around the needs of particular pupils may be commissioned. Similarly, it may be necessary to regularly access specialist advice to provide effective provision for a pupil.

Where schools make use of external (peripatetic) SEN teachers to support pupils with visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairment, The Education (School Teachers’ Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003 [49] (as amended) require these teachers to hold a specialist Mandatory Qualification [50], or to gain the qualification within their first three years in post. The specialist qualification is in addition to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) [51].

Under Section 25 of the Children and Families Act 2014 [3], LAs have a duty to ensure integration between educational and training provision and health and social care provision, where this would promote wellbeing and improve the quality of provision for disabled young people and those with SEN. Under Section 26 of the Act, LAs and National Health Service commissioners must also make joint commissioning arrangements for education, health and social care provision for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. Such services include:

- specialist support and therapies, such as clinical treatments and delivery of medications
- speech and language therapy
- assistive technology
- personal care
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (see the article on ‘Guidance and
Counselling

- occupational therapy
- habilitation training
- physiotherapy
- a range of nursing support
- specialist equipment
- wheelchairs and continence supplies
- highly specialist services.

For further information regarding partnerships across education, health and care to support children and young people with SEN or disabilities, see Chapter 3 of the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 0 to 25 Years* [4].

**Support for pupils with medical conditions**

Section 100 of the *Children and Families Act 2014* [3] places a duty on maintained schools and academies to make arrangements to support pupils with medical conditions. Individual healthcare plans will normally specify the type and level of support required to meet the medical needs of such pupils.

Where children and young people also have special educational needs (SEN), their provision should be planned and delivered in a coordinated way with the healthcare plan. In addition, for those children and young people whose special educational needs are identified in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, the healthcare plan should be linked to, or become part of, the EHC plan. Further information is available in 2017 statutory guidance [52].

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