

SEN support and EHCPs

How help for special educational needs works in school

A plain English guide to the system · for parents and carers of primary aged children

A child has **special educational needs (SEN)** if they find learning significantly harder than most children of the same age, or have a disability that gets in the way, and need extra or different help as a result. In England about **15%** of pupils receive SEN support and a further **6%** have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). **A diagnosis is not needed:** support should be based on what your child needs.

The four areas of need

Communication and interaction

Speech and language needs and autism.

Cognition and learning

General learning difficulties and specific ones such as dyslexia and dyscalculia.

Social, emotional and mental health

Anxiety, ADHD, attachment difficulties and other needs affecting wellbeing and behaviour.

Sensory and physical

Hearing or vision impairment, physical disability and sensory processing needs.

Step one: SEN support

Every school must have a **SENCo** and use its best efforts to meet children's needs. SEN support follows a cycle of **assess, plan, do, review**: the school works out what is getting in the way, agrees targets and support with you, puts it in place, and reviews it, usually each term. You should be told your child is on SEN support and be involved in each review.

What SEN support can include

- Small group or one to one teaching, often called interventions.
- Adjustments such as visual timetables, extra time, rest breaks or a quiet space.
- Advice from specialists such as speech and language therapists or educational psychologists.

Step two: an EHCP

If SEN support is not enough, the council can carry out an **EHC needs assessment**. It may lead to an EHCP, a legal document setting out your child's needs and the support they must receive.

Who can ask

The school can request an assessment, but **so can you**, by writing to the council. The test is that your child may have SEN and may need provision through a plan; it is not a high bar.

The timescales

- 6 weeks for the council to decide whether to assess.
- 20 weeks from request to a final plan.
- Reviewed at least once a year.

If you disagree

You can appeal to the SEND Tribunal against a refusal to assess, a refusal to issue a plan, or the contents of a plan. In most cases you must first consider mediation.

Changes on the way

The government has proposed major SEND reforms, including new support plans in school. Nothing has changed yet: new law is not expected before 2029, and current EHCPs and rights stay in force.

“Every child learns, some just need a different path.”

Nicola, Moss Grove Tutoring

Where tutoring fits

Extra tutoring is **in addition to** the support your child is entitled to at school, never a replacement for it. The school's legal duties stay the same whether or not your child has a tutor.

What Nicola can offer

- **Inside knowledge:** over twenty years in primary schools, most of them specialising in SEN, so she knows how support works day to day.
- **Targeted teaching** on the specific gaps your child's plan identifies.
- **Consistent strategies:** with your permission she can share what works with the SENCo, and use theirs.
- **Session notes** you can share with school or bring to a review, if you choose.

Questions to ask the SENCo

- What do you see as my child's main needs?
- What support is in place, how often, and who delivers it?
- How will we know whether it is working?
- What happens next if progress is slow?

What Nicola cannot do

Nicola is a tutor, not an advocate. She cannot represent you in disputes with a school or council or at tribunal. For that, SENDIASS and IPSEA (opposite) offer free, expert help.

Working together

You know your child best. Before starting, Nicola will ask what has happened so far, what helps and what makes things worse. A short update follows each session, and with your permission she can link with your child's teacher or SENCo so that everyone is working to the same plan.

Tips for parents

- **Put requests in writing** and keep copies; a short email after each meeting is enough.
- **Keep a folder:** reports, school plans, letters and examples of work.
- **Ask for the plan:** what support, how often, from whom, and how it will be measured.
- **Bring your child's voice:** what they say helps and what they find hard.
- **Ask about the graduated approach** if things are not improving after a couple of reviews.
- **Look after yourself.** The system can be slow and tiring; you do not have to do it alone.

Jargon buster

SENCo: the teacher who leads SEN in a school.

Assess, plan, do, review: the cycle used for SEN support, also called the graduated approach.

EHC needs assessment: the council's assessment that may lead to an EHCP.

Annual review: the yearly meeting to check an EHCP is still right.

Code of Practice: the statutory guidance schools and councils must follow.

Where to find out more

SENDIASS: free, impartial advice on SEN support in school. Search "SENDIASS" with Gloucestershire or Herefordshire.

IPSEA: free legal advice on SEN law, ipsea.org.uk

Contact: support for families with disabled children, contact.org.uk

Local Offer: your council's directory of SEND services. Search "local offer" with Gloucestershire or Herefordshire.

About Nicola

Nicola has worked in primary schools since 2003 and has been a Higher Level Teaching Assistant since 2008, specialising in special educational needs, including running nurture groups.