

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) IN EARLY YEARS

WHAT ARE SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN THE EARLY YEARS?

The SEND Code of Practice explains that children under compulsory school age are considered to have Special Educational Needs (SEN) if they:

- Have a learning difficulty or disability that requires special educational provision to be made for them, and
- Are likely to have greater difficulty learning than their peers when they reach school age or have a disability that prevents them from accessing typical facilities.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS

Early years practitioners play a key role in monitoring children's progress and development. They follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, which sets out safeguarding, welfare, and learning requirements.

Through this framework, practitioners can:

- Identify children's strengths and any areas where progress may not be in line with expectations.
- Maintain records of children's learning and development to share with parents and carers.
- Complete a Progress Check when a child is aged 2–3, summarising their development and identifying any additional support needs.

Parents and carers should always be involved in decisions about special educational provision. Additionally, maintained nurseries and most private nurseries have a designated Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to oversee support for children with SEN.



WHAT SUPPORT CAN EARLY YEARS ACCESS?

Local authorities must ensure early years settings can meet the needs of children with SEN and disabilities. This includes making funding available to provide the necessary support. For more information on early years funding, visit Early Years SEND Funding.



WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR CHILD?

If you're concerned about your child's progress, start by speaking to their keyworker. They know your child well and can provide insights into their development.



Tips for Preparing for a Meeting

Before the meeting:

- Find out who your child's keyworker is and arrange to meet with them.
- Review your child's learning record to understand their current progress.
- Revisit your child's 2-Year Progress Check for any earlier concerns (you can request a copy if needed)

During the meeting, you may wish to ask:

- Is my child progressing as expected for their age? Are there any concerns?
- Is my child receiving any additional support?
- What are their current targets or next steps?
- How can I best communicate with my child's keyworker (e.g., face-to-face, email, phone)?
- Are there activities I can do at home to support their progress?

SHARING WHAT YOU OBSERVE ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AT HOME IS VITAL. ESTABLISH A WAY TO REGULARLY COMMUNICATE THIS WITH YOUR CHILD'S SETTING.

NEXT STEPS IF CONCERNS PERSIST

If your child's early years setting has implemented support and followed the assess, plan, do, review cycle but progress remains limited, it may be time to discuss further steps with the local authority.

For some children, an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment may be needed to determine whether support through an EHC Plan is appropriate.

For more details, see our factsheet on Education, Health, and Care Plans or contact us for advice and support.

