

SEN in the Early Years

- Identification and Support



Please note: 'child' = 'child or young person'

Definition of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the Early Years

Although similar for those at compulsory school age, the definition of SEN differs slightly for early years, in that there is an anticipatory duty to look at what provision is needed now AND what might be needed once they reach compulsory school age and start school.

Early Years' covers children aged 0-5 who haven't yet reached compulsory school age (which starts the term following a child's 5th birthday). Some children will need support for SEND at home or in informal settings before, or as well as, the support they receive from an early years' provider (i.e. preschool, nursery etc).



The SEND Code of Practice 2015 (5.1) states that: "all children are entitled to an education that enables them to: achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes and; become confident young children with a growing ability to communicate their own views and ready to make the transition into compulsory education".

How SEN may be identified in the Under 5s

- Identified at birth - Children with more complex developmental and sensory needs may have already been identified at birth.
- As a newborn - Some health assessments, such as the hearing screening test, which is used to check the hearing of all newborn babies, enable very early identification of a range of medical and physical difficulties.
- As a young child - Health services, including paediatricians, the family's general practitioner (GP), and health visitors, may be / become involved with your child's care. A childminder or early year's setting may also identify that your child has or may have SEN. They are all expected to work with the family, supporting you to understand your child's needs and help you to access early support.

As a parent, your early observations of your child are crucial. Your concerns could be about your child's: Play and learning / Speech and language / Social development and behaviour / Physical development / Vision or hearing.

SEND Under 5s Group

If any professional thinks your young child has, or probably has, SEN, they must inform you and bring the child to the attention of the appropriate local authority. In West Sussex this is done by making a referral to the SEND Under 5s group.

The group looks at what evidence of SEN there is already and decides whether more assessments are needed, what type of support may be needed now and once a child starts school (i.e. SEN Support or an EHC plan).

Only professionals can refer to the SEND Under 5s group. If your child is not being seen by a professional but you think your child has or may have SEN and may need additional support to learn and develop, then you can speak to your Health Visitor, family doctor, or your child's early years' setting (if they attend one).

Support for SEN in Early Years

It is particularly important in the early years that there is no delay in making any necessary special educational provision (support). Whether or not your child is in an early year's setting, support for your child's SEN can take several forms, including (but not limited to):

- specialist support from health visitors; educational psychologists; speech and language therapists; or specialist teachers, such as a teacher of the deaf or vision impaired. These specialists may visit families at home to provide practical support, answering questions and clarifying needs
- early learning programmes to promote play, communication & language development
- home-based programmes, such as Portage, which offer a carefully structured system to help parents support their child's early learning and development

If your child is in an early year's setting, the SENCO and pre-school staff will want to plan with you the best way of meeting your child's needs. This could include:

- building on your child's strengths and what they can do,
- providing appropriate toys and materials, or
- agreeing approaches to be used

All early years' settings who receive Local Authority funding should have a member of staff appointed as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). This is the member of staff who has responsibility for planning support for children with SEND, seeking advice and support from other professionals, and talking to you.

Preparing for and Starting School

The support provided at school may not be the same as your child was receiving at pre-school. However, it should still be appropriate to support your child's needs, and discussion may be needed before your child starts attending.

Whether or not your child has been attending an 'early years' setting, it will be important to give all the relevant information about your child's physical and special educational needs to their new school before they start. This may be in the form of reports and other paperwork and will help the school to plan and ensure the support is in place. You may be offered or want to request a transition meeting to discuss this with them.

Most children with SEND have needs that can be met through quality first teaching and reasonable adjustments using the resources that are already or 'ordinarily' available in their mainstream school. This is known as '[Ordinarily Available Provision](#)'.

Unless SENAT have told you they are issuing a Draft EHCP, you should continue to apply for a school place through the normal online admissions process. There may also be circumstances where you may want to consider delaying or deferring your child's school place. Please see our Delaying or Deferring Factsheet in our 'School Related Topics' series on our '[factsheets](#)' [webpage](#).

Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with any individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help in the circumstances. For more detail, view our [policies and privacy notice](#) on our website.

How to contact us: Tel: 0330 222 8555 / Email: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk or cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk (up to age 25) / Website: www.westsussexsendias.org

To view factsheet online and access all links: <https://tinyurl.com/btwbxzep>

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