



Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Many children will at some time in their school life have special educational needs of some kind. In most cases their school, sometimes with specialist help, will meet these needs. In a few cases, the Education and Library Board may decide to draw up a formal document called a 'statement of special educational needs'. The statement will set out the child's needs and the resources that will be provided to meet those needs. These resources include money, staff time and special equipment.

What are special educational needs?

When a child has a learning difficulty where they find it much harder to learn than most children of the same age, or a disability, which makes it difficult to use the educational facilities provided then he, or she may require special help. This help is known as special educational provision. This support will be different from, or additional to, the provision made generally for children of similar age.

What can you do if you are worried that your child may be having difficulties?

You should always ask for advice without delay:

If your child is not yet at school or attending an early years setting you can talk to your doctor/health visitor/social worker who will be able to give you advice about the next steps to take. Whom ever you speak to will be able to put you in touch with your Board who will discuss your child's needs with you and consider what help it might be able to provide.

You have a vital role in supporting your child's education. If you have concerns or worries at any time, you should share them with your child's teacher or principle or any other professional working with your child.

What procedures, identify and assess a special educational need?

Code of Practice

The code is a statutory requirement which describes how help for children with special educational needs in schools and early years settings should be made by a step-by-step approach. With the school deciding in consultation with parents/carers what will help a child progress.

To request a free copy of the code of practise plus the supplement telephone: Department of Education NI on 028 9127 9939 or visit www.deni.gov.uk to view code of practise or to download the information.



Statementing Process

This is a five stage approach:

(Stages 1 to 3 are school based)

Stage 1: Initial action taken when teachers identify and register a child's special educational needs and consult the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). (In addition it is important to note that parents can request that their child be considered for the 'statementing process' themselves by contacting the school or if that fails by contacting their child's education board)

Stage 2: The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) will take the lead responsibility for collecting and recording information and for co-ordinating the child's special education provision with the teachers. (At stage 4 of the process the education board will appoint a statementing officer who deals with individual cases)

Stage 3: Teachers and SENCO are supported by specialist's e.g. educational psychologist from outside the school. (Please note that at present all education boards may have a long waiting list to access an educational psychologist)

(Stages 4 and 5 the Education Board shares responsibility)

Stage 4: The Board considers the need for a statutory assessment and if appropriate will undertake a comprehensive assessment. The information (advice) gathered will be from: Parent/carer, school, GP, designated medical officer, Health and Social Services Trust, education psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist for children with motor difficulties and communication difficulties. Plus other advice sought from relevant agencies with involvement of the child whenever possible. (If parents have information from private practitioners i.e. speech therapy, occupational therapy the Board should access this advice and if there is a dispute with these findings then the Board must state why)

Stage 5: The Board considers the need for a 'statement of special education needs': if appropriate, makes the statement then arranges, monitors and reviews the provision.

What is my role as a parent/carer during the 'statementing process'?

Your feedback is very important at all stages of the 'statementing process'. You should feel free to ask questions at any time. Your concerns, views and knowledge of your child are very important – you know your child best. You should be consulted about all the decisions that affect your child. If your child reaches the final stage of the 'statementing process' the Board will send you a draft statement and will welcome your views prior to the statement being finalised.

Read through the draft statement carefully:

- Check that it lists all of your child's needs and difficulties
- Check that it lists all the provision needed by your child
- If there are any words or phrases that you do not understand ask for an explanation



What if I disagree with the final statement or my child is not going to be statemented?

You have the right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST)

- Do not accept the draft statement if you are unhappy with any part of it, first ask the Board for an explanation and remember that discussion at this stage is very important – keep negotiating wherever possible.
- DARS (The Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service) aims to resolve disagreements without going to Tribunal and may be your next option, prior to or instead of a Tribunal. The DARS is an independent, confidential, voluntary and informal service designed to provide an opportunity for finding ways forward that all parties are willing to accept.

For detailed information on DARS and the SENDIST and how to appeal go to www.education-support.org.uk

If you want to know more about the Tribunal and the procedure for making an appeal or a claim then you can telephone 028 9032 2894 or write to Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal, Secretariat, 2nd Floor, Albany House, 73-75 Great Victoria Street, Belfast. BT2 7AF

Why have an annual review of the statement?

To discuss your child's educational progress you will be invited to a formal meeting (called the Annual Review) every year. This meeting will consider if your child's needs have changed and whether they are being suitably met. The school will tell you the date for the review meeting and invite you to attend. Before the meeting, you will be asked to send in your views on your child's progress over the last year. Your views are important, and the school, a voluntary organisation or a parents' group can help you give them.

A record of the meeting is sent to the Special Education Section of your local Board. The school must consider the outcome of the Annual Review and may make changes to your child's education plan. (As a parent you may wish for information to be added to the education plan regarding what the school should do and that the plan is within the child's achievable goals). If the outcome of the Annual Review suggests major changes are necessary, the Special Education Section will contact you on how they propose to take matters forward.

How long does a statement last?

Your child could have a statement for their whole school career, or for just a part of it. . The Board must regularly check your child's progress and make sure the statement continues to meet your child's needs. If the Board intends to stop maintaining your child's statement, it will write to you, giving its reasons. If your child stays at school, the Board may keep the statement until age 19.

Further sources of information?

There are many national or local voluntary organisations that help children with disabilities or learning difficulties, and their parents.

If you would like help with any family issue, Please ring **Parents Advice Centre** for guidance and support on **Freephone 0808 8010 722** or email parents@pachelp.org
(The Department Of Education for Northern Ireland material is the main source for this Fact Sheet)