

Section 5: SEN Support in the Early Years – A Graduated Approach

This section of the toolkit describes what settings need to do when parents and practitioners have agreed that a child has a special educational need and requires special educational provision.

Settings are required to *have regard to* the Code of Practice. The Code explains the approach that settings should adopt. SEN Support in the early years includes a graduated approach and a cycle of Assess, Plan, Do, Review.

SEN Support

Providers **must** have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities. These arrangements should include a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN.

Where a setting identifies a child as having SEN they **must** work in partnership with parents to establish the support the child needs.

It is particularly important in the early years that there is no delay in making any necessary special educational provision.

DfE and DH (2015) *SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years*, para 5.4, 5.36- 5.38

SEN Support builds on high quality teaching which has been differentiated and personalised for individual children, see *Section 3: Universal inclusive provision*, and should be firmly based in the setting's approach to monitoring the progress and development of all children. The graduated approach should be informed by EYFS materials, the Early Years Outcomes guidance and the Early Support resources.

SEN Support is designed to provide a graduated approach based on a cycle of action that can be revisited with increasing detail, increasing frequency and with the increased involvement of parents. Throughout the graduated approach, the practitioner, usually the child's key person, remains responsible for working with the child on a daily basis and implements agreed interventions. The SENCO supports individual practitioners and leads and co-ordinates the graduated approach across the setting.

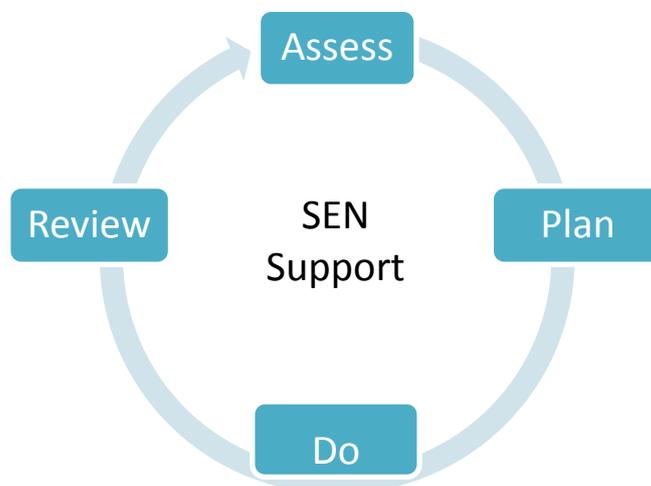
All settings should adopt a graduated approach with four stages of action: assess, plan, do and review. This cycle of action:

- Is usually led by the key person, supported by the setting SENCO
- Parents are engaged throughout
- Action is informed by the child's views throughout
- The cycle can be revisited in order to identify the best way of securing good progress

Throughout the cycle, children's views can be represented by parents and practitioners, but in order to ensure the child's views inform the process directly, these need to be captured before any discussion. Whether children communicate verbally or by other means, pictures and objects of reference can be used to promote communication with children about their views and their preferences, both at home and in the setting. These views can be brought to inform discussion and decisions at each stage.

Disability: at the same time as assessing special educational needs, the Code of Practice encourages settings to consider whether a child may count as disabled under the Equality Act and may require reasonable adjustments as well as special educational provision, *SEN and disability code of Practice*, para xxii.

Assess, plan, do, review



Assess

The early years practitioner works with the setting SENCO and the child's parents and:

- Brings together all the information
- Analyses the child's needs

This discussion will build on, and may be held at the same time as, the discussion with parents about their child's SEN and the decision to make special educational provision for them, see *Section 4: First concerns and early identification*.

Special educational needs are generally thought of in 4 broad areas of need and support:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, emotional and mental health
- Sensory and/or physical needs

SEN and disability code of practice, para 5.32 and para 6.28 onwards

These broad areas of need are not definitive; the Code recognises that individual children often have needs that cut across all of these areas and that children's needs may change over time. The *SEN and disability code of practice* is clear that the purpose of identification is to work out what action is needed, not to fit a child into a category.

Where there is a need for more specialist expertise to identify the nature of the child's needs, or to determine the most effective approach, specialist teachers, educational psychologists or health, social services or other agencies may need to be involved.

Plan

Where the broad approach to SEN Support has been agreed, the practitioner and the SENCO should agree, in consultation with the parent:

- The outcomes they are seeking for the child
- The interventions and support to be put in place
- The expected impact on progress, development, behaviour
- Date for review

Plans should:

- Take into account the views of the child
- Select the interventions and support to meet the outcomes identified
- Base interventions and support on reliable evidence of effectiveness¹
- Be delivered by practitioners with relevant skills and knowledge
- Identify and address any related staff development needs

SEN and disability code of Practice, para 5.40

Do

The practitioner, usually the child's key person:

- Remains responsible for working with child on daily basis
- Implements the agreed interventions or programmes

The SENCO supports the key person in:

- Assessing the child's response to action taken
- Problem solving
- Advising on effective implementation

SEN and disability code of Practice, para 5.42

Review

On the agreed date, the practitioner and SENCO working with the child's parents, and taking into account the child's views, should:

- Review the effectiveness of the support
- Review the impact of the support on the child's progress
- Evaluate the impact and quality of support

In the light of child's progress, they agree:

- Any changes to the outcomes
- Any changes to the support and
- Next steps

SEN and disability code of Practice, para 5.43

¹ Two starting places for evidence of effectiveness are:

The Education Endowment Foundation Early Years Toolkit:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/early-years/>

The Communications Trust, What works: <http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/whatworks>

SEN support: what next?

At each cycle the key person and SENCO consider, with the parents, and informed by the child's views, whether the child is making expected progress, and whether:

- Special educational provision and SEN support continue to be required
- To revisit the cycle in more detail or with increased frequency
- More specialist assessment may be called for
- Staff require more specialist advice or the child requires more specialist support
- More specialist expertise is needed to inform reasonable adjustments and access arrangements for a disabled child
- The child requires an EHC needs assessment

Keeping records and sharing information

Practitioners **must** maintain a record of children under their care as required under the EYFS framework. Such records about their children **must** be available to parents and they **must** include how the setting supports children with SEN and disabilities.

DfE and DH (2015) *SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years*, para 5.50

There are a number of key requirements in relation to record-keeping and sharing information:

- EYFS requires practitioners to maintain records;
- The progress check at 2 requires settings to review progress and provide parents with a short written summary of their child's development; and
- Settings will need to be able to provide a range of evidence if they, or the parent, request an EHC needs assessment at any point.

The EYFS is clear about the importance of avoiding excessive paperwork - there is a risk that paperwork swamps or substitutes for the participative decision-making process that is key to improving outcomes for children with SEN. The Schools chapter of the Code of Practice recommends that a short note is made of the discussions with parents and is shared with them. The Early years chapter recommends that this discussion with parents should cover:

- The outcomes they are seeking for the child
- The interventions and support to be put in place
- The expected impact on progress, development, behaviour
- Date for review

A short note that captures the key points of this discussion is a helpful way of thinking about what is *necessary to promote children's successful learning and development*; and can ensure that, at the review point in the *assess, plan, do, review* cycle, there is a record of what was planned and done at each stage.

A further guide to what is strictly necessary is what the local authority will require if the setting or the child's parents request an EHC needs assessment. The local authority will consider whether, *despite relevant and purposeful action by the early years setting to identify, assess and meet the special educational needs of the child, the child has not made expected progress*. The local authority will consider a range of evidence, including evidence of:

- The child's developmental milestones and rate of progress
- The nature, extent and context of the child's SEN
- The action taken by the early years provider

- Any evidence that, where progress has been made, it has only been achieved by support that is more than that which is normally provided
 - The child's physical, emotional, social development and health needs
- SEN and disability code of practice: 0-25 years, para 9.14*

Settings will want a standard approach to record-keeping and a standard format to capture the essential evidence. The key test for any standard format is whether it enables the setting to:

- Focus on outcomes and impact
- Focus on the participative *assess, plan, do, review* process without excessive paperwork
- Capture the essential evidence
- Meet the setting's needs for information
- Meet parents' needs for information
- Capture parents' views
- Capture children's views

Does the setting's paperwork meet these tests?

SEN Support: A Graduated Approach in the Early Years

