

WHAT ARE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) describe the difficulties and disabilities that can make it more difficult for a child to learn. They can sometimes also affect how a child/young person engages with others. Children learn important skills as they develop and will usually hit developmental milestones about the same time as other children, but not always. Not all children are the same and a missed milestone might not mean a problem. However, if you are concerned, talk to your doctor or health visitor as they may refer your child for assessment.

There are four types of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as defined by the Department of Education:

SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

This is when a child or young person is noticeably behind children of the same age in developing speech and/or language skills. You may have noticed that your child has difficulty making certain sounds, has slurred speech or has limited vocabulary compared to children of a similar age. This is usually when communication is considered delayed.

They may have greater understanding of words and the language of others (receptive language), than they have of spoken language, on how they use words to express themselves (expressive language) but this is not always the case. These difficulties can sometimes make it hard for children/young people to make sense of language or understand how to communicate effectively with others.

Children who have language difficulties may have:

- Limited spoken vocabulary
- Poor eye contact
- Difficulty interacting with other children
- Difficulty communicating their wants and needs
- Using incorrect language and grammar as they get older

Sometimes the issues can be very slight, and sometimes more noticeable. If you have any concerns, you can ask your nursery, school or doctor to refer you to an audiologist (who will check your child's hearing) or a speech and language professional for an assessment.

COGNITION AND LEARNING

This refers to a child or young person's thinking skills; their ability to process, retain and recall information. These skills are the core skills your brain uses to think, read, learn, remember, reason and pay attention. These skills create a bank of knowledge that we use in everyday life – at nursery, at school, and at work.

Learning difficulties can be general or specific and related to one or more areas of the curriculum – including;

- **dyslexia**, a learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling
- **dyscalculia**, a learning difficulty in mathematics, primarily arithmetic
- **dyspraxia**, a condition affecting physical co-ordination also known as developmental co-ordination disorder - DCD
- **adhd**, which causes issues with concentration and focus attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD)

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH (SEMH)

This is when a child or young person struggles to understand social situations. They may have difficulty forming and maintaining positive relationships and difficulty managing their own emotions, behaviour. They may struggle with significant levels of anxiety which can have a negative effect on their mental wellbeing over time.

SEMH could include children and young people on the autistic spectrum, or those with an anxiety disorder. They may be receiving ongoing support from paediatric and mental health professionals, such as Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services (EWMHS). A young person living in Essex can access EWMHS services in two different ways: by a referral via a doctor/school or nursery, or by self-referral, which means parents or young people can call directly or fill out an online form.

SENSORY AND PHYSICAL

A child or young person whose physical or neurological disability may prevent them from fully accessing their learning environment, their classroom or school. A neurological condition is any condition that affects the brain, spinal cord or nervous system. Other conditions can include a vision impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) or a multi-sensory impairment (MSI).

Physical and sensory needs cover a wide range of medical conditions, including sensory processing disorder (SPD) and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). Children/Young people with sensory or physical conditions may need specialist support or equipment to help them in school or the workplace.

THE SEN CODE OF PRACTICE 2015

Explains the duties of local authorities, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs under the Children and Families Act 2014. The code, which applies to England, is for: headteachers/Principals and governing bodies. Parent Carers are at the heart of the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

If a parent carer thinks their child has SEN, they should talk to their child's early education setting, school, college or other provider. They will discuss any concerns you have, tell you what they think and explain to you what will happen next.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Under the Equality Act 2010, educational settings have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure all children and young people, including those with SEND, can fully access their learning environment.

These adjustments may often be down to a change in working practice, rather than the need for expensive equipment or additional staff. For example there might be some relaxation of the uniform code if a child or young person with high sensory needs is not able to manage certain textures or styles of clothing.