LEARNING AND WORKBOOKS ENGLAND

Understanding SEN Support (plain-English guide)

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A plain-English guide to SEN Support in England: what it is, how the graduated approach should work, and how to prepare for a conversation with school.

This is general information, not legal advice, and it is not an official form. Schools organise SEN Support in different ways. Other UK nations have different systems.

Who this is for

Parents, carers and school staff who want a clear starting point for SEN Support, including when a child does not have an EHCP.

What is inside

- What SEN Support is, and is not
- The graduated approach
- What you can ask for
- A conversation planner

Please read this first

This is a free starting-point resource from My SEND Friend. It is general information, not legal, medical or benefits advice, and it is not an official or government form. It does not guarantee an assessment, plan, adjustment, payment or any other outcome. Check current official guidance (for example GOV.UK) and get individual advice from SENDIASS, IPSEA or a suitably qualified adviser when you need it.

SEN Support is for children who have SEN

If a child has special educational needs, a mainstream school in England should use its best endeavours to make sure they get the special educational provision they need. Much of this happens as SEN Support: planned help from the school's ordinary resources, reviewed over time. A child does not need an EHCP, or a diagnosis, before SEN Support can start.

SEN Support is not a consolation prize, and it is not a formal legal "plan" in the same way as an EHCP. In practice, schools should still be clear about what they are putting in place, who is doing it, and when it will be reviewed. If SEN Support is not enough, an EHC needs assessment can be requested. The two are not a strict ladder you must climb for years first.

EHCP processes described here apply in England, under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014, and the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015). Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different systems. Always check the current official position and any deadline on letters you receive.

Assess, plan, do, review

The SEND Code of Practice describes a graduated approach: assess the child's needs, plan the support, do the support, and review it. Families should be involved. The child's views should be heard in a way that works for them. A cycle should be repeated, with changes if something is not helping.

- Assess: what do we understand about the child's needs, including from the family and from school?
- Plan: what outcomes are we aiming for, and what support will be put in place, by whom, and by when?
- Do: the planned support actually happens, including any help class teachers need.
- Review: what changed, what did not, and what we will do next.

Reasonable adjustments still apply
The Equality Act 2010 includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and others, so they are not substantially disadvantaged. This duty can apply whether or not the child has an EHCP. This pack is general information, not legal advice, and it does not decide whether a particular adjustment must be made.

What you can take to a conversation

You can ask what support is in place, how often it happens, who is responsible, and the next review date. You can share what you see at home. You can ask for notes in writing. If you think an EHC needs assessment may be necessary, you can discuss that, and you can also request one yourself.

What I already know about the support in place

What I see at home or after school that school may not see

What I would like school to consider, and the questions I will ask

The review date I will ask for, and how I would like notes shared

If SEN Support does not seem enough

Keep a dated record of what was agreed and what actually happened. You can request an EHC needs assessment under section 36 of the Children and Families Act 2014. You do not need the school's permission. Get advice from SENDIASS or IPSEA if you are unsure. Other routes, including reasonable adjustments and complaints, may also be relevant.

Advice I will seek, and the next step I will take

Useful next steps and sources

Use what helped in this pack and leave the rest. You can come back to it when you need to. Live tools on mysendfriend.co.uk remain free, including Help Me Now, the SEND Letter Builder, the Reasonable Adjustments Builder, the DLA and PIP Claim Planners, and the free resources hub. Saving work to My SEND Plan is optional.

Where to check official or independent information

Guidance and benefit rules can change. Check the current official position, and get individual advice when you need it.

- GOV.UK: Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- The SEND Code of Practice 2015 (England)
- The school's SEN information report and complaints policy
- Your local SENDIASS service
- IPSEA, for legally based information in England

A reminder about this free pack

This is a free starting-point resource from My SEND Friend. It is general information, not legal, medical or benefits advice, and it is not an official or government form. Using it does not start a statutory process or guarantee a particular outcome. Adapt every page to your situation.

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