

Diagnosing Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Children

Special educational needs (SEN) are not always easy to identify. SEN is spotted early on in some children, but in others, it might not be diagnosed until they are older. A later diagnosis could be picked up if a child has experienced problems in their personal or academic lives.

What makes a diagnosis difficult is that many of the characteristics of SEN can be put down to normal childhood because children develop at different rates. In general, parents tend to be the first person to spot any changes or differences in their children.

If you suspect your child might have SEN, this blog post is here to help. Here, we will cover what SEN is, how it is identified, and the steps you can take to get a diagnosis so you can help your child get the most out of education.

What Are Special Educational Needs?

SEN can affect a young person's ability to learn. A child has special educational needs if they have a disability or learning problem that can make it more difficult for them to learn than other children of the same age.

If SEN is spotted early on, children can receive additional support, and provisions can be made so they are not limited in any way.

Some signs of SEN in children include difficulties and frustration in the following:

- Socialising and making friends
- Reading and writing
- Number work
- Organisation
- Concentration
- Understanding topics
- Expressing themselves
- Behaving properly

Some examples of SEN are:

- Autism
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- General learning difficulties
- Sensory processing challenges
- Communication difficulties

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

This is not an exhaustive list.

How Are Special Educational Needs Identified In Children?

Every child is different and will develop at a different pace. Not every child with the above characteristics will have SEN.

Early years settings like nurseries and schools have a responsibility to spot SEN. Healthcare professionals can also identify it. Your child might have special educational needs if they have a mental or physical impairment – including a learning difficulty, mental health issues and physical disability – that makes it harder for them to learn.

If a child has SEN, they might need extra help depending on their individual needs in the following areas:

- Speech and language
- Understanding and thinking
- Sensory or physical
- Emotional and behavioural
- Behaviour with others

Some children may only need additional support for a short time when at school, and others might need help throughout their school lives.

What Steps Can I Take If I Think My Child Has SEN?

If you are worried about your child's behaviour or development, there are some steps you can take. Depending on what stage your child is at, you might wish to speak to your GP or the local council Information, Advice and Support (IAS) Service for advice about SEN and referral for assessment.

If your child is in school or nursery, it is advised that parents follow the steps below to voice their concerns:

Step 1: Speak To The Teacher

Raise your concerns with the class teacher as early as you can. In this meeting, you can tell them how your child is coping and provide examples of where you believe they are struggling. The teacher may wish to share anything they have noticed and make suggestions for the support available to move forward.

Step 2: Meet With The SENCO

Every school has a SEN Coordinator (SENCO) who ensures that special needs provisions are met. If you or the school is concerned with the progress your child is making, then a meeting with the SENCO will be arranged.

You can talk about whether the SENCO feels your child has SEN and the support the school can provide in response. Take note of everything discussed and agreed upon in the meeting so you can keep track of your child's progress. If it is necessary, you can request that the school arrange assessments from specialists like a Speech and Language Therapist or an

Educational Psychologist. The support your child receives at school should be regularly reviewed in line with their progress.

Step 3: Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment

If your child is not progressing with additional SEN support through their school, you can apply to the local authority for an Education, Health and Care needs assessment. This application can be made by yourself or the school.

If the school does not agree to a further assessment, you can go private with an educational psychologist report, which costs around £500.

In the application, you will need to:

- Outline what your child's SEN is
- The difficulties they're having
- The support they currently receive
- Evidence of the additional support they need

The local authority will assess your child to see if they have or may have SEN and outline what provision may need to be taken.

The assessment will determine if your child needs extra provision through an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). If an EHCP is issued, it will outline the budget for the additional support provided.

If an EHCP isn't granted, you can appeal it.

How Long Does The Process Take?

SEN can be diagnosed at any time. Some children are diagnosed when they are born, while others are diagnosed at school. For some, it could be years before diagnosis, and others may never get one. If you make a formal request for assessment, the Education Authority must make a decision within six weeks.

Are There Different Processes For Diagnosing Different Special Educational Needs?

Diagnosis for SEN usually starts with a referral from the school or your GP. After this, the above steps are taken.

It can take time to adjust to a SEN diagnosis. However, it is essential to ensure your child gets the help and support they need to get the most out of their education. A diagnosis should be looked at in a positive light as it can help you to understand your child's condition better and celebrate the progress they make towards their goal and adjusting to their diagnosis. With the proper diagnosis and support in place, you can watch your child's motivation and confidence around school grow.