

Special Educational Needs in the early years

Definition of Special Educational Needs in the early years

The SEND Code of Practice says, *'children under compulsory school age are considered to have Special Educational Needs if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made and when they are compulsory school age are likely to have a greater difficulty in learning than their peers, or have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the facilities that are generally provided.'*

Roles and responsibilities of early years practitioners

All early years practitioners have a responsibility to monitor the progress and development of all children in their care. They must follow a framework called the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This framework sets out safeguarding and welfare requirements as well as learning and development requirements. The EYFS will support practitioners to identify where a child is at in terms of progress and if there are any significant gaps in their development which might be a cause for concern.

The benefits of early identification are widely recognised and so early years providers must have clear systems in place to identify and respond to SEN. They are also required to keep a record of the children's learning and development and they must make this information available to parents and carers.

As part of the EYFS requirements, a progress check must be carried out between 24 and 36 months of age and a summary of the child's development must be provided to their parents or carers. This should be done by someone who knows the child, usually their key worker within their setting. This check will enable the opportunity for early identification of developmental needs and if any additional support is required. Early years providers must involve parents and carers in any decisions regarding special educational provision.

All maintained nurseries must have a qualified teacher designated as their Special Educational Needs Coordinator, usually referred to as a SENCO. The SENCO is responsible in ensuring the appropriate implementation of support for children with SEN. Private nurseries are also expected to have a SENCO.

What extra help can a setting access for a child?

The Local Authority must ensure that early years settings are meeting the needs of children with SEN and disabled children. To do this they should make sure funding arrangements are reflective of the level of support required for a child. Details regarding what funding is available to early years settings can be found here: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/early-years-support-age-0-6/funding-for-early-years-send/>

What to do if you are concerned about your child?

Communication is key in ensuring the best outcomes for your child, so if you are concerned that your child is not making the expected progress in line with their age, you should discuss this with your child's setting. The best person will be your child's keyworker as they will know and understand your child. It is always a good idea to prepare for any meeting.

Helpful tips when preparing for a meeting

Prior to the meeting:

- Ensure you know who your child's keyworker is. They will be the person who will know your child and usually the best person to meet with.
- It will be helpful to have an understanding of your child's current achievements prior to a meeting so take a look at their learning record. This might be available to you through an online system or it might be paper form, in which case request to have a look.
- If your child has had their 2 year progress check, have a re-read to see where they were at and if there were any concerns at that time. You can request a copy from your child's setting if you do not have one.

At the meeting, you might like to ask:

- Is my child at expected levels for their age and are there any areas of concern?
- Is my child currently accessing any additional or alternative support during their time at nursery?
- What are my child's current next steps or targets?
- What is the best way to communicate with my child's keyworker? Is this face to face, email, telephone?
- Are there any activities I am able to do with my child at home which supports their current targets or potential area of need?

It is important to be as active as you can in sharing and communicating your child's learning and development at home with their early years setting. Ensure there is an established way you are able to do this.

If following a meeting, some concerns have been identified and a plan of support is discussed, ensure there is a written record of the plan and a date to review it.

If the Early Years setting have taken the relevant action to identify and assess any SEN, and despite following a plan, do, review process, the child has not made expected progress, you may need to liaise with the local authority about the next steps. For a small number of children, it may be appropriate for your child's needs to be assessed through an Education Health and Care needs assessment to establish if they need support set out in an Education Health and Care plan. For further information on this, please see our factsheet on 'Education Health and Care plans in the Early Years.'

Where can I get further information, advice or support?

Contact the IASS team on:

Phone: 01743 280019 (Open 10am-4pm Monday—Friday)

Web: www.cabshropshire.org.uk

www.facebook.com/IASSShropshire

Email: iass@cabshropshire.org.uk

Address: Fletcher House, 15 College Hill, Shrewsbury, SY1 1LY