

# Special educational needs: A parent/carer guide

Dorset County Council's  
Inclusion Services



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# Special educational needs: A parent/carer guide

## **I am worried that my child may be having difficulties.**

### **What can I do?**

The first step is to talk to your child's school or early years setting. This can either be the class teacher, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo), or if necessary the head teacher. If your child is in an early years setting this is usually the manager. Working together in this way will often help. Extra or different help may be provided for your child.

This extra or different help could be a different way of teaching certain things, some help from an extra adult, perhaps in a small group, or use of particular equipment like a computer or a desk with a sloping top. Your child's progress with this help will be reviewed regularly, and any changes to the help that are needed will be made. Your child might need help for only a short time or for some years, and in some cases it might be for the whole of their education.

If your child is still having difficulties despite the help provided specialist expertise can be brought in to help the school or early years setting.



You may also wish to seek advice or support from the Parent Partnership Service. The Parent Partnership Service offers independent information and support to parents who may have concerns about their child's education, including those with special educational needs. Their contact details can be found at the back of this booklet.

## **What is a statutory assessment?**

If your child still does not seem to be making enough progress, or needs a lot more extra help, your child's school, early years setting or you can ask the local authority to carry out a more detailed assessment to find out

exactly what their special educational needs are and what special help they need. This is called a statutory assessment. In some cases, other people such as a community paediatrician or a social worker can refer a child to the local authority for consideration of a statutory assessment.

The local authority will usually let you know within 6 weeks of the request whether or not they are in agreement to starting a statutory assessment of your child.

If the local authority does not feel that your child requires a statutory assessment, they will write to you explaining their reasons for this and they will offer you a meeting to talk about this further, if you wish. You may also wish to get advice or support from the Parent Partnership Service if you are unhappy with the decision.



The Parent Partnership Service can also provide you with information about the local Disagreement Resolution Service (Wessex Mediation Service), a free service which is set up to help resolve, or prevent any disagreements between you and the local authority.

You also have a right of appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) if you do not agree with the local authority's decision. You must register this appeal within 2 months of the letter informing you of the decision not to start a statutory assessment. Contact details for SENDIST will be included within this letter.

If the local authority does agree to start a statutory assessment they will write to you to confirm this and they will ask you to provide your written views about your child's special educational needs.

The local authority will also ask for information from your child's school or early years setting and other people working with your child such as an educational psychologist, a community paediatrician, a social worker (if they are involved), and anyone else whose advice the local authority considers appropriate.

People should provide their advice towards the statutory assessment within 6 weeks but occasionally this can take longer whilst appointments are made and reports are written.

## **What happens next?**

Once all the advice towards the statutory assessment has been received, the Local Authority, via a weekly SEN Panel, will decide whether or not to issue a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The local authority will also decide whether a local mainstream school can provide the additional help that your child needs.

## **What is a Statement of Special Educational Needs?**

A Statement of Special Educational Needs is a legal document which will describe your child's special educational needs and the additional help that they should receive. This will be written using the advice received towards the statutory assessment.

You will be sent a 'Proposed Statement', that is a draft version of the Statement, before the Final Statement is written. At this point you will be asked to express a preference for a school placement. You have a right to say which state school or academy you want your child to go to, either mainstream or special. This can be the school they already go to. The local authority must agree with your preference as long as:

- the school you choose is suitable for your child's age, ability, skills and SEN;
  - your child's needs can be met in a way that not will not affect the education of other children/young people already at the school;
- and
- placing your child in the school will be an efficient use of the local authority's resources.

This part of the process can take some time but the local authority usually aims to issue a Proposed Statement within 18 weeks of the request for statutory assessment being received.

A Final Statement must be issued within 26 weeks of the request for statutory assessment being received by the local authority.

If you disagree with any part of the Statement you may wish to contact your SEN Casework Officer to discuss this. You may also wish to seek advice or support from the Parent Partnership Service.

The Parent Partnership Service can also provide you with information about the local Disagreement Resolution Service (Wessex Mediation Service), a free service which is set up to help resolve, or prevent any disagreements between you and the local authority.

If you are not able to resolve any disagreements with the local authority using either the Parent Partnership Service or a Disagreement Resolution Service, you have a right of appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) following the issue of the Final Statement. You can appeal against Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the Statement. You must do this within 2 months of the Final Statement being issued. Contact details for SENDIST will be provided by the local authority.



### **What is a Note in Lieu?**

If the local authority decides that your child's school or early years setting can meet their needs without the need to issue a Statement of Special Educational Needs, they will produce what is called a Note in Lieu instead, using the advice received towards the statutory assessment. This will still describe your child's special educational needs, and will explain why the Authority has decided not to issue a Statement.

This part of the process can take some time but the local authority usually aims to issue a Note in Lieu within 18 weeks of the request for statutory assessment being received by the local authority.

If you are unhappy with the local authority's decision to issue a Note in Lieu rather than a Statement of Special Educational Needs, you will be offered a meeting to talk about this. You may also wish to seek advice or support from the Parent Partnership Service.

The Parent Partnership Service can also provide you with information about the local Disagreement Resolution Service (Wessex Mediation Service), a free service which is set up to help resolve, or prevent any disagreements between you and the local authority.

You also have a right of appeal to the SEN and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) if you do not agree with the local authority's decision. You must register this appeal within 2 months of the issue of a Note in Lieu. Contact details for SENDIST will be provided by the local authority.

## **How often is a Statement of Special Educational Needs reviewed?**

A Statement of Special Educational Needs is reviewed every year and this process is called the Annual Review, except in Year 9 when it becomes a Transitional Review. For children under 5 years of age, the SEN Code of Practice recommends an informal review every 6 months. The aim of the Annual Review is to check whether the provision prescribed in the Statement is meeting the stated aims and objectives for your child and whether their school placement and existing level of provision and support remains appropriate.

## **Which school will my child attend?**

Most children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs in Dorset attend their local mainstream school. However, some who have more complex needs may attend a specialist resourced base attached to a mainstream school, or a special school.

You will be sent a list of all Dorset schools and academies with the Proposed Statement and asked to express your preference for the school you would like your child to attend. You can also find the list of special schools and specialist resourced bases in Dorset on the internet at: <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/educ/sen>.

You could also ask the SEN Team, the Educational Psychologist or your local school or early years setting for a list.

## **If a decision is made to place my child at a Special School or Specialist Resourced Base – how is this decision made?**

Only children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs can attend a special school or specialist resourced base attached to a mainstream school.

If, at the Proposed Statement stage you express a preference for your child to attend a special school or specialist resourced base attached to a mainstream school, then the assessment reports will be sent to the SEN Panel, which meets every week. At the Panel very careful consideration will be given to the

match between your child's needs and the provision on offer at the special school or specialist resourced base. If the Panel feels that the special school or specialist resourced base is the best setting for meeting your child's needs then they will recommend admission and will seek the special school or specialist resourced base's view on whether they have an appropriate vacancy for your child. The final decision about placement is made by the SEN Team.

If your child already has a Statement of Special Educational Needs and is attending a mainstream school but you would like them to be considered for a place at a special school or specialist resourced base the most appropriate place to discuss this request is the Annual Review.

It is usually helpful for you to provide a written contribution to the Annual Review explaining why you think a special school or specialist resourced base is more appropriate for your child.

It is also helpful to discuss your concerns with your child's school as soon as possible so that they can involve appropriate professionals, to ensure that all that can be done to meet your child's special educational needs in a mainstream school, is being done.

Following the Annual Review meeting, the school will forward the Annual Review paperwork to the local authority who will consider your request for a special school or specialist resourced base at one of its weekly SEN Panels.



# Where can I find more information?

## **Parent Partnership Service**

### **East and North Dorset:**

Jane Schmidt

Tel: 07748 624609

Email: [j.e.schmidt@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:j.e.schmidt@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

### **West Dorset and Dorchester:**

Anne Barker

Tel: 01300 341978

Email: [a.m.barker@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:a.m.barker@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

The Dorset Parent Partnership Service provides information and support for parents and carers who have children with special educational needs or who are concerned that their child may have special educational needs which have not been recognised as yet.

A copy of this leaflet also appears on the website:

<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/educ/sen>

## **SEN Team**

Inclusion Services, Children's Services

Dorset County Council, County Hall, Colliton Park

Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

Telephone: 01305 224888

Email: [senteam@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:senteam@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

The SEN team is responsible for the statutory assessment of children/young people with special educational needs in line with the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice (2001). It is also responsible for issuing Statements of Special Educational Needs, monitoring Annual Reviews and making decisions regarding school placements and levels of provision.

**All leaflets can be made available in audio tape, large print and Braille, or alternative languages on request.**