



HELP IN THE EARLY YEARS

This factsheet explains how children with special educational needs are supported to learn and develop, and gives information about education options and finding suitable childcare. Guidance to childcare and other early years' providers is set out in the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 years**, Chapter 5, and the **Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage**.

EDUCATION BEFORE SCHOOL AGE

Most children will start school at some point in the school year when they turn five. From 0–5, different childcare and education options are available. All providers should offer appropriate play and learning opportunities for the children they support, and must be registered with Ofsted if they offer free early years education places.

EARLY YEARS OPTIONS

A day nursery

Usually open long hours, for example 8am–6pm, and cares for children aged between 0–5.

Playgroups

Usually provide 2–3 hour long sessions for 2–5-year-olds.

Nursery schools

Can be privately run or state funded. Some primary schools may have nursery classes. Others may be linked to children's centres, which offer other support for families such as health visitor clinics. Many disabled children are able to go to local play groups and nurseries. Specialist nurseries may be a more suitable option for some children with complex special needs.

Childminders

Someone who cares for children in the childminder's own home. The childminder has to be registered with Ofsted if they look after children under eight.

Nannies

Person employed by the parent to care for a child in the child's home. Nannies do not have to be qualified or registered with Ofsted, although some may be. In this factsheet we refer to all of these as 'early years settings' or 'providers'.



IF YOUR CHILD HAS ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Some children may find it more difficult to learn because they have a special educational need or are disabled. Disabled children have a right to the same educational opportunities as all children, and may need extra help in a mainstream early years setting, or a place in a specialist setting. These settings work closely with therapists to support individual children.

All education providers must take steps to include and support disabled children, and children who have (or may have) special educational needs (SEN). Local authorities must set out all the support they expect to be available for disabled children, and children who have or may have SEN in the early years in their Local Offer. A child does not need to have a diagnosis to access support they need. See our factsheet **The Local Offer explained** for more information.

It is particularly important in the early years that there is no delay in making any necessary special educational provision... Early action to address identified needs is critical to the future progress and improved outcomes that are essential in helping the child to prepare for adult life. (SEND Code of Practice section 5:36)

All early years providers must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework which sets out what providers must do to make sure children from the age of 0–5 learn and develop, and stay safe. This includes having arrangements in place to identify and support disabled children, children who have or may have SEN, and medical conditions.

Early years settings will continually observe and assess how a child is learning, and parents' insights are an important part of this. This information helps the setting to plan activities which are tailored to the child's individual interests and the way they learn.

At ages two and five a child's progress is formally reviewed, and a written summary given to parents. This will enable the setting to identify where a child is progressing well, and any areas where extra support may be needed within the setting or from other specialists.


For two year olds, the progress check looks at three key areas of learning and development. These are:

- **language and communication – for example listening and following instructions**
- **physical development – learning how to throw or push an object**
- **personal, social and emotional development – for example learning how to play with other children.**

At age **five** another assessment called the EYFS profile is done, usually by the reception class teacher in the last term. In addition to the above three areas this will show how the child is developing skills in:

- **literacy – for example predicting how a story might end**
- **mathematics – for example comparing size and weight of different objects**
- **understanding the world – for example being aware that other people are different**
- **expressive arts and design – for example exploring what happens when colours are mixed.**

Health visitors will also check a child's progress and developmental milestones between the age of two and three, so concerns may also be picked up this way.

 Our website has more information about diagnosis, including helpful guides. Search for 'about diagnosis' at www.contact.org.uk

CHILDCARE

Childcare might be provided by a childminder, day nursery, nursery school, or playgroup setting. Local authorities must ensure that there is enough childcare for families in the area, and provide support to help families find childcare that meets their needs.

Childcare providers should ensure disabled children have the same play and learning opportunities as other children, and should not charge families more for providing extra support.

Some childcare providers specialise in providing support for disabled children and children with SEN.


The local Family Information Service can provide details of all the registered childcare providers in the area. The local authority should have an area special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in the Early Years team. This person can advise families on the kind of extra support available in pre-school settings in the area.

BIRTH TO TWO


Some children with complex development and sensory needs may have their needs identified at birth by health professionals. Routine screening tests may pick up difficulties such as hearing. Parents' observations of their baby as he or she develops are crucial.

Paediatricians, health visitors and other professionals should work with parents to make sure needs are picked up early, and that the family can access support as soon as possible.

Health professionals must tell parents if they think their child has, or probably has, SEN. They must also tell parents where they can get further support and advice, and discuss the kind of support which is available for their child before they start school.

 For more information about how your child will be assessed see our factsheet **Education, Health and Care needs assessments**.

Specialists such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, or specialist teachers (for example teachers of children with visual or hearing impairment) may all be involved in helping a child to learn. Some families can access a home visiting education service called Portage.

 For more information about other support available to help you care for your child see our guides **Concerned about your child** and **Services and support from your local authority**.

FROM TWO YEARS OLD

Some two year olds can now get free early education and childcare places, usually taken as 15 hours each week for 38 weeks of the year.

To qualify, children must be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an Education, Health and Care Plan.

 For more information about DLA, see our guide to [Claiming Disability Living Allowance for children](#).

It also applies to two year olds whose parents are receiving certain benefits. This includes anyone who is eligible for tax credits and whose annual income is £16,190 or less.

THREE TO FIVE YEARS OLD

All three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free early education or childcare a week for 38 weeks of the year. You can start claiming free childcare at the start of the term after your child turns three.

The hours can be spread over 2–5 days and can be split between more than one childcare provider. It may be possible to stretch the free provision over more weeks in the year. Families may also be able to supplement the free provision by paying for extra hours themselves. However, families should not be charged for anything provided as part of the free place.

Families can take up a place for their child at any early years setting which is funded to provide free education, including local authority maintained and some private nurseries, as well as play groups and childminders. All settings providing free places will have been inspected by Ofsted. Individual providers do not have to offer free places, and some have decided not to take part in the scheme.

The government plans to increase free childcare to 30 hours a week for three and four year olds, where both parents are working. Call our helpline for updates.

 For details of providers offering free places and how to qualify and apply for a childcare place, contact the local Family Information Service or call our free helpline on **0808 808 3555**.

SEN SUPPORT IN PRESCHOOL SETTINGS

Local authorities must ensure that all providers who deliver funded early education meet the needs of disabled children, and children who have (or may have) SEN.

This includes providing funds for extra support. Providers can decide how best to use their funding to support disabled children, and children with SEN.

Maintained nursery schools have a specific duty to do their best to support children with SEN. They must have a SENCO – a teacher who is responsible for arranging and coordinating SEN support. All settings must not discriminate against disabled children, for example by refusing them admission.

Support for children should begin as early as possible and settings must work together with parents to identify the support a child needs. All early years settings should have a graduated approach to supporting children with SEN. This includes four stages:

Assess

The early years setting, together with the SENCO and parents should work together to explore the cause of any learning difficulty or delay. In assessing progress, they can use guidance that looks at the seven areas of learning:

- *communication and language*
- *physical development*
- *personal, social and emotional development*
- *literacy, mathematics*
- *understanding of the world, and*
- *expressive arts and design.*

Plan

Where SEN support is needed, parents must be told. The SENCO should work together with parents and other professionals to agree outcomes, plan the support a child will get, what progress will be expected and when it will be reviewed. An outcome is the benefit or difference which the support will make to a child.

Do

The key person with support from the SENCO will work with the child on a daily basis and oversee any extra support that is in place.

Extra help would depend on a child's needs but might include for example:

- *more individual or small group help from a teacher or assistant, to learn communication or play skills*
- *support from other specialist services, for example autism advisory service or educational psychology. They may assess the child and recommend particular equipment or ways to help the child learn*
- *help from a visiting professional such as a teacher of deaf children, or speech and language therapist.*

They may work with a child directly or set up a programme and train nursery staff to follow it. They may visit regularly to monitor the child's progress and advise staff.

Review

The SENCO, staff and parents should review the support on the agreed date. This should include a meeting to discuss the child's progress, whether they are meeting their outcomes and whether the amount or kind of help needs to change. Parents should be given clear information about this, and should be involved in planning the next steps.

The action taken should be reviewed when needed, at agreed times, to identify whether the child is making good progress or whether more help is necessary, for example further assessment by specialists such as speech and language therapists.

EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS

If a child needs a lot more help than the early years setting can give at the level of SEN support, they may need an Education, Health and Care plan. This is a legal document which describes a child's special educational needs, and the extra help they will get. The first step is an Education Health and Care Needs assessment. A parent or someone from the early years setting can request an assessment.

 See our factsheets on **Education, Health and Care needs assessments** and **Education, Health and Care plans** for more information.

PREPARING FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

Support should include planning for the move to primary school and helping families to think about the education options for their child.

Most children with SEN will go to a local mainstream school where there are pupils with and without SEN, and the law gives parents the right to say they prefer this option for their child.

Some children with complex needs may go to a special school where all the pupils have SEN and where there are specialist teachers, therapists or special equipment

or facilities to support their learning. Other options might be available, such as a dual placement at a special and a mainstream school, or a mainstream school with specialist facilities.

It is important that the school and early years setting or nursery talk to each other about the child's needs so that the right support is in place from the start.

Most children will start school in the September following their fourth birthday. However, a child does not have to be in education until the term after they turn five.

For some children a later start date or a part-time attendance might be best and parents can request this if they feel their child is not ready for full-time school. However, any part-time arrangement should be for the benefit of the child.

Disabled children have the right to the same educational opportunities as other children their age and they should not be required to attend part-time simply because their school feels that they do not have enough support in place.

FURTHER INFORMATION


This is one of a series of free factsheets for parents about extra help in education. Our helpline can send you a free copy or you can download them. Others include:

- **Extra support in mainstream school – SEN support**
- **Preparing for adulthood:**

 www.contact.org.uk/the-sen-process

Find out how you can have a say about services in your area by joining your local parent carer forum. Find it at the National Network of Parent Carer Forums website:

 www.nnpcf.org.uk

 020 7608 8708

 **FREEPHONE HELPLINE**
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