



Continuum of Provision for Children & Young People with Complex Special Educational Needs

2023-2024

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This is a working document that will continue to be reviewed in line with best practice, legislative changes and guidance.

1 INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of the provision made available by the Education Authority (EA) for children and young people (CYP) who present with complex special educational needs (SEN). Placements are arranged via a Statement of Special Educational Needs or the Annual Review process.

It will aid decision making regarding provision recommendations within the local context for those CYP who present with a complex profile of developmental/learning needs.

The continuum of provisions for CYP who experience complex learning needs will:

- Enable opportunities for CYP to have time to access and respond to additional options of intensive and individualised supports outside of a special school setting.
- Enable greater opportunities for CYP to benefit from inclusion at earliest stages of education.
- Enable more comprehensive decision making about longer term SEN and provision requirements in response to CYP progress.
- Enable educational professionals, in partnership with parent/carers, to have flexible judgement in relation to most appropriate type of provision to meet CYP needs throughout the educational journey.

2 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

The SEN Framework is made up of primary legislation, secondary legislation and statutory guidance. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 is the main piece of (primary) legislation setting out the law surrounding SEN as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. It was amended more recently, within the context of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Act 2016. The Department of Education is working towards finalising the Regulations for commencement. The SEND Code of Practice sets out guidance on policies and procedures aimed at enabling CYP with SEN to reach their potential, to be included fully in their school communities and be successful through their educational journey.

Some CYP who experience a greater difficulty in learning and are not making suitable progress despite a school based graduated response¹ with the support of EA SEND and/or Health Services support, will require a statutory assessment by the EA to determine the nature of the provision and type of placement required to meet their needs. Where a statutory assessment leads to a statement of SEN, the EA can, in cognisance of professional advice, with parent/carer contribution and CYP/ Young person views, arrange placement in a specialist provision in a mainstream school.

There is a duty on the EA to educate a CYP with a statement in an ordinary school (mainstream), unless it is incompatible with the wishes of a CYP's parent/carer or the provision of the efficient education of other CYP. In determining the placement which best meets the CYP's needs, the EA should give careful consideration to expressed preference of the parent/carer and the views of the CYP concerned. Where the preference is for mainstream education, the EA and schools should take all reasonable steps to provide for it and enable inclusion.

¹*Draft SEN Code of Practice states that schools should follow a graduated response in order to address a CYP's difficulties in learning. It is a duty of Board of Governors of a school to secure that teachers in the school take all reasonable steps to identify and provide for CYP with SEN attending the school. The Board of Governors of schools are required to use their best endeavours to secure appropriate special educational provision to which a CYP responds positively, makes adequate progress and achieves improved outcomes.*

3 MAINSTREAM SCHOOL WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Attending a mainstream school will provide opportunities for the CYP to experience a higher level of inclusion with their typically developing peers, which is mutually beneficial. It fosters connections with the local community and an opportunity to be educated alongside their siblings.

Where a CYP with severe learning difficulties (SLD) is included in a local mainstream school, the level of additional resources is identified in the statement of SEN. School staff may need support and advice to assist them in delivering an appropriately differentiated curriculum. This can be supported by EA educational professionals, often a specialist teacher.

In deciding whether a mainstream placement is appropriate, the following list of indicators should be considered by parent/carers and educational professionals. The indicators are not listed in hierarchical order nor is it suggested that any CYP should necessarily meet all of the indicators for a mainstream school to be successful. It should also be recognised that the CYP may need an initial transition period to support integration and achieve success.

Some indicators of success in mainstream:

- the CYP can communicate their needs without experiencing exceptional levels of frustration
- the CYP can understand what is communicated to them and respond appropriately
- the CYP is becoming an increasingly independent learner
- the CYP can access and respond positively to a differentiated curriculum
- the CYP is able to spend the majority of the school day accessing education in a mainstream class
- the CYP's social, behavioural, emotional and well-being needs can be met without significantly impacting on the efficient education of peers

A move from special school to mainstream may be considered via the Annual Review process, when the CYP can securely demonstrate the ability to:

- Make positive choices more frequently;
- Operate in various social contexts;
- Cope with different situations and make independent transition successfully (e.g. from smaller to larger groups);
- Overcome resistance to and fear of learning;
- Maintain workable relationships with adults.

4 SPECIALIST PROVISION EARLY YEARS & FOUNDATION (SPEYF)

This section is intended as guidance for Educational Psychologists and SEN Link Officers on the profile of CYP who would benefit from placement Specialist Provision Early Years & Foundation (SPEYF). When making recommendations, it is imperative that Educational Psychologists consider all of the available types of provisions.

SPEYF provisions allows an opportunity to adopt a more inclusive approach in meeting their presenting needs and to inform a more comprehensive assessment process over time to identify longer term needs.

- Profile of the CYP who would benefit from placement in a SPEYF where the SEN category cannot be definitively identified through psychometric testing;
- Evidence that the CYP may benefit from opportunities to interact with typically developing peers and display a level of curiosity;
- Evidence of islets of ability and some capacity to respond to adult direction;
- Adaptive functioning would suggest global developmental delay/severe learning difficulties;
- Significant social communication/interaction difficulties;
- Attention and concentration poorly developed making it difficult for the CYP to engage with the adult led activity;
- Poorly developed self-help and independence skills;
- Difficulties with sensory integration which impact on their ability to engage with developmentally appropriate play opportunities;
- Severely delayed receptive and expressive language skills;
- Difficulty with emotional regulation;

4.1 Exit Considerations

Assessment information evidences that the CYP has either made significantly greater or less progress than their peers and may meet the admissions guidance for another type of specialist provision, special school or mainstream school that might better meet their needs and provide a more suitable peer group.

4.2 Indicators of the likely success of a local mainstream placement

For placement at Key Stage 1

At this stage CYP are likely to be successful in a mainstream placement with the recommended level of support if they can be enabled to:

Social expectations

- separate from parent/carers within an appropriate period of time
- tolerate the proximity of other CYP or adults for large parts of the school day
- fetch a familiar object on request from within the classroom. Supplementary cues (objects of reference, symbols, signs or gestures) may be necessary to support the request
- play in parallel with other CYP
- show indications of responding to toilet training
- eat independently
- have a basic awareness of the dangers in the environment
- have an awareness of the need to stay within established physical boundaries (eg the classroom or playground, school grounds).

Academic expectations

- sustain their attention to an adult directed task, with one to one adult supervision, for approximately five minutes
- consistently spend at least five minutes on an activity they have chosen for themselves without adult support
- respond to instructions given to the group or remain within physical boundaries, though it may be necessary to provide several prompts in order to secure this
- cope with the distractions of a mainstream classroom.

5 SPECIALIST PROVISION IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS (SPiMS)

There are a range of specialist provisions in mainstream schools (SPiMS) that may be considered for CYP and young people who are experiencing moderate to severe learning difficulties or social communication difficulties.

Placement consideration focuses on key actions to meet a CYP's SEN. Whatever the level of a CYP's difficulties, inadequate progress should be the key test of whether additional or different action should be taken. However, it cannot be assumed that all learners progress at the same rate and there needs to be a judgement in each case about what is reasonable to expect a CYP or young person to achieve.

'Adequate' progress is defined as the progress which:

- a) Closes the attainment gap between a CYP and their peers - preventing the attainment gap growing wider; or
- b) May be similar to that of peers starting from the same attainment baseline, but less than that of the majority of peers; or
- c) Matches or betters the CYP's previous rate of progress; or
- d) Maintains progress commensurate with their assessed cognitive ability; or
- e) Ensures access to the full curriculum; or
- f) Demonstrates an improvement in self-help, social or personal skills; or
- g) Demonstrates improvements in the CYP's behaviour.

The CYP's needs and progress will be closely monitored and recorded against targets laid out in his or her IEP/PLP and the objectives set out in Part 3 of the Statement of SEN. CYP within specialist provisions in mainstream schools should have opportunities for integration and inclusion within mainstream classes as appropriate.

6 SPECIALIST PROVISION LEARNING

Evidence that will be taken into account during the statutory assessment process or following a review of a CYP's statement when a SPiM for learning is being considered.

- the assessed primary need of the CYP has been identified in the range of moderate to severe learning difficulties with additional complex presentation.
- there should be multi-agency involvement.
- evidence of at least two cycles of planning (Primary and Post Primary), one cycle of planning (Early Years), demonstrating that the CYP is failing to respond to the special educational provision made by the school/setting and educational professionals, in line with the graduated response, unless exceptional arrangements apply.

Evidence must include:

- the views of CYPs and parent/carers;
- the CYP's presenting needs, difficulties and any diagnosis, if relevant;
- the CYP's level of cognitive ability, attainment and functioning;
- a detailed overview of progress, with supporting assessment information and reviewed IEPs/PLPs;
- a detailed chronology of school/setting based support, strategies and interventions with supporting evidence that the CYP has failed to make adequate progress;
- evidence of engagement with SEND Support Services and/or with external agencies including Allied Health Professionals.
- the CYP's needs are significantly impacting on the efficient education of peers

7 SPECIALIST PROVISION FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION/AUTISM

Evidence that will be taken into account during the statutory assessment process or following a review of a CYP's statement when a SPiM for social communication/autism is being considered.

- the assessed primary need of the CYP has been identified as communication and social interaction difficulties.
- there should be multi-agency involvement.
- evidence of at least two cycles of planning (Primary and Post Primary), one cycle of planning (Early Years), demonstrating that the CYP is failing to respond to the special educational provision made by the school/setting and educational professionals, in line with the graduated response, unless exceptional arrangements apply.

Evidence must include:

- the views of the CYP and parent/carers/carers;
- quantitative and qualitative evidence that ASD has impacted severely on progress across the curriculum including functionality of learning communication socialisation independence. Consequently, the CYP's primary need will be identified as communication and social interaction difficulties (CSID) with significant sensory processing difficulties;
- the CYP has a medical diagnosis of ASD from/ratified by the Health and Social Care Trust or is undergoing assessment;
- the CYP's level of cognitive ability and attainment is in keeping with a curriculum typically delivered in a mainstream class;
- level of adaptive functioning within the school environment is indicated in the extremely low range;
- a detailed overview of progress, with supporting assessment information and reviewed IEPs/PLPs;
- a detailed chronology of school/setting based support, strategies and interventions with supporting evidence that the CYP has failed to make adequate progress;
- evidence of engagement with SEND Support Services and/or with external agencies including Allied Health Professionals.;
- the CYP's needs are significantly impacting on the efficient education of peers.

7.1 Requests for Placements in Exceptional Circumstances

Generally, requests for placements will not be considered unless there is clear evidence to suggest that a graduated response to SEN has been adopted. Clearly, however there will be exceptional cases where it would not be in the CYP's best interests to delay action and these cases will be considered accordingly. An example of this may be when a CYP arrives from another jurisdiction with a statement or the equivalent; or a CYP arrives unexpectedly in NI with complex learning difficulties and the EA needs to establish the nature of the CYP's SEN and the most appropriate interim placement. An emergency placement should be made only when the EA, the parent/carer and/or young person, school and relevant professionals involved are all agreed that the CYP's needs require such action to be taken immediately.

7.2 Consideration for exiting SPiMS

- Where there is evidence that the primary SEN has changed
- CYP is coping with mainstream integration and interaction for 50% or more of the school timetable with support
- CYP can cope socially and emotionally during structured and unstructured periods
- CYP has made adequate progress in relation to their academic attainment levels and engaged with academic curriculum.

8 SPECIAL SCHOOL

This section is intended as guidance for Educational Psychologists and SEN Link Officers on the profile of CYP who would benefit from placement in a special school.

When making recommendations, it is imperative that Educational Psychologists consider all of the available types of provisions.

A special school environment should be considered for CYP with complex SEN and/or medical needs, who require access to a range of specialist expertise, facilities and equipment on site.

8.1 Factors which indicate that a special school placement may be most appropriate are:

- the need for frequent and regular access to staff from other agencies, eg health
- the need for highly specialised equipment
- the need for access to a hydrotherapy pool
- the need for multisensory facilities on site
- the need for continuing augmentative communication techniques.

8.2 Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD)

CYP and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) have the most severe learning difficulties, a high level of adult dependency and will continue to function at the earliest levels of development throughout their school career and into adulthood. They have a very severe global developmental delay (or acquired impairment from, for example, an accident) with associated physical, sensory and health related needs. Some will have severe communication and language difficulties and severe physical difficulties. They generally have a developmental level which is less than one third of their chronological age and can be functioning at the level of a very young infant. They are likely to operate within the lower Q-levels throughout their educational years and are entirely dependent on an adult for all personal needs. Their communication can be restricted to non-verbal gesturing, body language and physical contact.

CYPs with profound and multiple learning difficulties have significant and complex learning needs. In addition to severe learning difficulties, they will have:

- significant SEN in at least two or three other areas, e.g. physical disability/sensory impairment/and medical condition(s).
- require a high level of adult support, for both their educational and personal care needs.

- likely to require specialist equipment and support for their posture, feeding and intimate care. Many will have a Healthcare Plan.
- will require sensory stimulation and a highly differentiated and graded approach to their learning provided by experienced staff.
- While most CYPs with PMLD communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others have basic communication skills.

8.3 Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)

CYPs with SLD have significant intellectual or cognitive impairments with a standard score of 55 or below and attainment levels normally at or below the 0.1 percentile. They will require a higher level of support than their age related peers in all areas of the curriculum and in most activities throughout the school day. They may also have difficulties with mobility, co-ordination, communication and perception. They will require experiential learning in order to develop their self-help, independence and social skills. CYPs with SLD will require support to further their independence, and the majority will remain dependent on adults for aspects of their care. Some may communicate through the use of modified sign and symbols; however, many will be able to use basic functional language and enjoy learning, interacting and socialising with their peers. CYPs with SLD will require provision that is additional to or different from their peers. The majority of parent/carers elect to have a special school placements for their CYP with SLD. However, depending on their individual profile, some CYPs with SLD make good progress in mainstream school with additional support and where this is the parent/careral preference. If a CYP has SLD this should always be recorded as their primary SEN due to the impact on their ability to access strategies or equipment to bypass other areas of SEN.

A CYP will be considered to have severe learning difficulties if he or she fulfils the following criteria:

- his or her general functioning is at a developmental level which is significantly less than half of his or her chronological age (this criterion is generally more applicable to younger aged CYP)
- he or she is, or is likely to be, significantly below age related expectations in all areas of the NI National Curriculum and may not be able to attain beyond Q-levels and is likely to have difficulty in the generalisation of learned skills.
- he or she continues to have many of the following needs beyond the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Significant delay in acquiring communication skills, eg:

- little or no functional spoken language
- little or no understanding of spoken language
- a need to sign and/or use a symbol system to aid communication

- communication skills that are only effective and functionally useful in a context where other individuals know the CYP well
- his or her own idiosyncratic means of communicating.

Significant delay in acquiring personal independence skills, eg:

- is unable to dress/undress him or herself or able to do so only with considerable assistance or prompts
- needs adult assistance or prompts to eat and drink independently
- has limited or no toilet skills, and sometimes not aware of that need
- is totally dependent upon an adult for all personal care.

Significant delay in other life skills, eg:

- is unable to appreciate or respond appropriately to common potentially dangerous situations and has little idea of reducing dangers in his or her environment
- has very immature social skills for their chronological age.

8.4 SLD with challenging behaviour

Only CYPs identified with SLD or very occasionally CYPs with PMLD should be recorded in this category. CYPs with SLD or PMLD may display severe and challenging behaviour (SCB) which serves the purpose of having their needs met and coping with their environment. These behaviours are normally pervasive, characterised by their frequency and intensity and will include unpredicted outbursts and unco-operative behaviour often accompanied by obsessional habits. These behaviours will pose serious risk of harm to self and others and can often result in damage to the environment. In other cases, sudden onset of SCB is often an indicator that a CYP is in pain or distress e.g. toothache, joint pain, or experiencing mental health difficulties, but the CYP is unable to comprehend or communicate their needs.

In these cases, appropriate treatment should alleviate the SCB and the category would no longer be appropriate. CYPs with SCB will have had a risk assessment and will have a risk management plan and/or behaviour plan that will include any medication and safe handling requirements. They are likely to be involved with the HSCT services. CYPs with SCB and SLD/PMLD, require close supervision in a modified and specialist setting where the staff are trained in Safe Handling and experienced in understanding and managing the needs of CYPs with SCB. With the correct environmental adjustments, a CYP's severe challenging behaviour can often reduce in frequency and intensity.



8.5 SLD with Autism

A number of CYP and young people with SLD and autism will be highly dependent because of their associated SCB. For others their SLD are compounded by autism which manifests itself in extreme passivity and extreme difficulties with communication. These CYP and young people may exhibit high levels of ritualistic or stereotypical behaviour and typically their social communication and social interaction are severely impaired. They need a very highly structured teaching environment and explicit teaching of communication and interactional skills.

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