



WSPCF Guide to SEND Support in Mainstream Settings

A practical guide for parent carers, based on the West Sussex OAIP, to help you understand, navigate and make use of the support your child should receive in mainstream education.



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1. Introduction

Welcome to the **WSPCF Parent Carer Guide to SEND Support in Mainstream Settings**.

This guide has been written by the **West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF)** - a parent carer-led organisation that represents families of children and young people with **special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)** across West Sussex.

SEND stands for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – this guide is for families whose children or young people may need additional support to access education.

Our aim is to help you, as a parent carer, understand:

- What support should be available for your child or young person in a mainstream nursery, school or college (also known as their setting).
- How to work in partnership with settings and what to do if you have concerns.

We've based this guide on the **West Sussex Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP)** document and the **SEND Code of Practice (2015)**. These documents set out what settings should do to support children and young people with SEND as part of their everyday practice. You can find the links to these later in this guide.

As many parent carers feel overwhelmed by the OAIP and we know that SEND journeys can be emotional, confusing and sometimes frustrating, we've created this guide in **friendly, practical language**, with real examples, checklists, and tools for you to use.

Whether you're just starting to notice differences in your child's development, or you've been navigating SEND for years, this guide is here to support you.

Remember, you know your child or young person best, you've seen them learn and grow. You help them communicate, manage emotions, and meet their physical needs. Your involvement (and theirs) in co-production with their setting is vital, as it allows for a holistic view of your child or young person, helping them reach their full potential.

We welcome your feedback and invite you to stay involved with WSPCF - your voice helps shape better services for all families in West Sussex.



2. What to Do If You Have Immediate Concerns

Whether your child or young person is already receiving support, or if you're starting to feel that your child or young person may need extra support in nursery, school or college, this guide is for you.

A). Early Signs and What to Look For

You might start noticing things that feel different about your child's development, behaviour or learning. These could include:

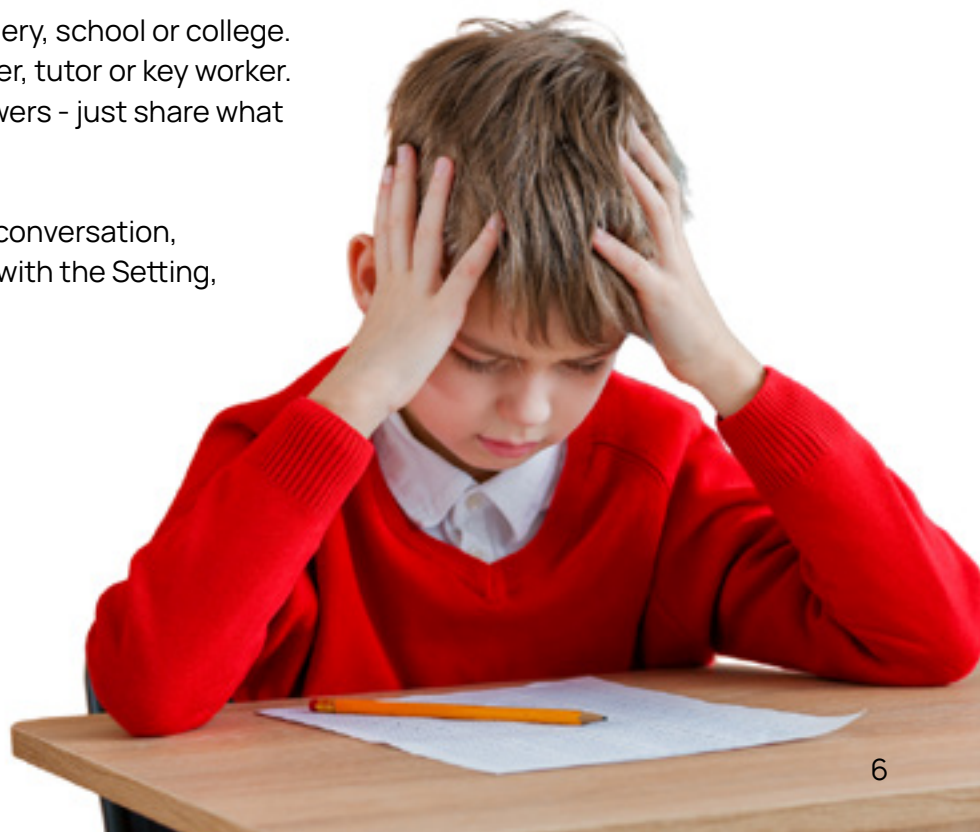
- Struggling with friendships or joining in.
- Finding it hard to follow instructions or stay focused.
- Becoming anxious or upset about school.
- Sensory sensitivities (e.g. noise, touch, light).
- Changes in sleep, mood or behaviour at home.

You don't need to wait for a diagnosis or formal assessment to raise concerns. If something doesn't feel right, it's okay to ask for help.

B). What to Do If Your Child Is Struggling

Start by talking to your child's nursery, school or college. You can speak to their class teacher, tutor or key worker. You don't need to have all the answers - just share what you're noticing.

If you're not sure how to start the conversation, see Section 6 - Working Together with the Setting, for tips and checklists.



C). Keeping a Diary and Preparing to Talk to the Setting

It can be helpful to keep a simple diary or log of what you're noticing at home. This might include:

- Meltdowns or shutdowns.
- Sleep patterns or anxiety.
- Homework struggles.
- Emotional outbursts.
- Withdrawal, hiding, or spending long periods alone.
- Changes in friendships or routines.

This information helps the setting understand what's happening outside school - especially if your child is masking or presenting differently in class.

If you want more information about this, see Section 6 – Working Together with the Setting, for more about keeping a diary and communicating with the setting.



3. Understanding SEND

A). What is SEND?

SEND stands for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. A child or young person has SEND if they need different or additional support to access education compared to others of the same age.

SEND can affect your child or young person's:

- Learning and thinking.
- Communication and interaction.
- Emotional wellbeing.
- Physical access and sensory processing.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) groups SEND into four broad areas of need. These help schools and families understand what kind of support might be needed.

B). The Four Areas of Need

i. Communication and Interaction - this includes:

- Speech and language difficulties, Social communication differences (e.g. autism)

You might notice these things in your child or young person:

- Difficulty expressing themselves.
- Struggling to follow instructions.
- Finding it hard to make friends or join in conversations.

ii. Cognition and Learning - this includes:

- Learning at a slower pace than peers.
- Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia).

You might notice these things in your child or young person:

- Trouble remembering things.
- Difficulty with reading, writing or maths.
- Needing more time or repetition to learn new skills.

iii. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) - this includes:

- Anxiety, Depression, or Trauma, Behaviour that challenges, Difficulty managing emotions.

You might notice these things in your child or young person:

- Dysregulated behaviour.
- Meltdowns or shutdowns.
- Withdrawal or refusal to attend school.
- Struggles with friendships or following rules.

iv. Sensory and/or Physical Needs - this includes:

- Physical disabilities, Sensory processing differences, Medical conditions.

You might notice these things in your child or young person:

- Sensitivity to noise, light, touch or smells.
- Not hearing clearly or speaking very loudly
- Difficulty seeing the board. (visual impairment)
- Difficulty with coordination or movement.
- Needing help with personal care or equipment.

The examples above are a guide and do not cover every possible need or situation.

v. Children Or Young People May Have Needs Across More Than One Area

It's very common for children or young people to have overlapping needs. For example, a child with autism may need support with communication, sensory processing, and emotional regulation. The OAIP encourages settings to take a holistic view and adapt support to the child or young person's unique profile - not just their diagnosis.



C). Dysregulation and Masking

My child or young person presents/acts differently at home to at school, what should I do?

Some children and young people react very strongly to everyday things like changes, noise, or frustration, this is called emotional or behavioural dysregulation. It means they might find it hard to understand their feelings, calm themselves down, or work through social situations.

All children and young people will present their dysregulation in different ways, and when this behaviour is misunderstood it may be thought of as bad behaviour, but it's not. Some children and young people will try to stop or hide these reactions whilst at school as they don't want to get into trouble or they work hard to cope or manage until they get home (often called masking). In these situations, it is difficult for settings to realise that the child or young person needs more support, as they have never witnessed this dysregulation.

This is one of the reasons it is a good idea to keep a diary about what happens at home, as this will help when you talk to the setting about your child or young person and why they need more support.

Some children and young people are dysregulated because of their particular sensory needs, for more information about this, please see Section 8 of this guide – Specialist Teams and services.



D. What Is a Transition and Why Can It Be Hard?

In the SEND world, a transition means any kind of change or move your child or young person experiences, big or small.

This could be:

- Starting a new school or moving up a year.
- Changing classrooms or teachers.
- Moving between activities during the day.
- Changes at home, like a new sibling or moving house.

For many children and young people, especially those with SEND, transitions can feel unpredictable or overwhelming.

They might struggle with:

- Not knowing what's coming next.
- Feeling anxious about new people or places.
- Coping with changes to routines or expectations.

Some children and young people show this by becoming upset, withdrawn, or refusing to go to school. Others might mask their feelings and seem fine - but struggle quietly. That's why well-planned transitions are so important. There should be information and support provided for all children and young people as they approach transition to a new school year or a different setting, but children and young people with SEND should be offered additional support and this could look like:

- Additional Information being shared between the settings about the child or young person.
- Transition planning taking place to make sure that the transition support is effective and personalised to the child or young person.

When schools and families work together to prepare children or young people for change, it helps them feel safe, understood, and ready to cope.

E. EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance)

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is when a child or young person finds it very difficult to go to school because of emotional distress. You might also hear it called school refusal, school anxiety, or emotionally driven non-attendance. Some children or young people may struggle to go into school in the morning or to stay at school all day.

It's really important to identify early, before it becomes a significant problem that children or young people are finding it difficult to attend school. EBSA isn't about being "naughty" or "lazy" - it's often linked to anxiety, stress, or other emotional needs that make school feel overwhelming or unsafe. Children and young people experiencing EBSA may want to go to school but feel unable to.

There are better outcomes for children or young people who are at risk of EBSA when this is noticed early and action is taken by the school and at home.

Why Does EBSA Happen?

There are many reasons why a child or young person might struggle with EBSA.

These can include:

- Anxiety about social situations, learning, or routines.
- Sensory overload (e.g. noise, crowds, bright lights).
- Feeling misunderstood or unsupported.
- Changes at home or school (e.g. transitions, bereavement, bullying).
- Mental health challenges such as Depression or Trauma.

Sometimes EBSA is linked to neurodivergence (e.g. autism, ADHD), especially when a child is masking their distress during the school day and then struggling at home.

Signs of EBSA risk include but are not limited to:

- Becoming dysregulated, especially in the mornings.
- Struggling to sleep because they are worried about going to school the next day.
- Not being able to leave the house or not being able to get out of the car.
- Having less interest in spending time with friends and/or doing hobbies.
- Reduced attendance.
- Having difficulties with their mental health or wellbeing.

What Can Help?

Early support is key

Schools and families working together can make a big difference.

This might include:

- Adjusting the school day (e.g. soft starts, quiet spaces).
- Emotional support and mentoring.
- Sensory tools or breaks.
- A personalised plan that includes the child's view.

Remember to look after yourself too, having a child or young person who is experiencing EBSA or is at risk of EBSA is very stressful.

For more information, please see Section 8 of this guide – What if my child or young person needs more support?

The Educational Psychology service has produced useful information booklets for parents, children and young people about EBSA, look here for these resources and more: [Emotionally Based School Avoidance | West Sussex Services for Schools](#)



4. What Support Should Be Readily (or Ordinarily) Available

A. What Does “Ordinarily Available” Mean?

In West Sussex, mainstream schools, nurseries and colleges are expected to support the majority of children and young people with SEND **without needing an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**. An EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) is a legal document for children and young people whose needs cannot be met through ordinarily available support with enhanced, targeted intervention that has been in place over time.” Mainstream settings provide additional enhanced, targeted or intensive support, and refer to specialists for children and young people without EHCPs when this is needed.

It means that settings should:

- Use their existing staff, funding and resources.
- Make reasonable adjustments.
- Provide inclusive teaching and support.
- Work in partnership with families.

This is backed by the **SEND Code of Practice**, which says:

“Higher quality teaching ordinarily available to the whole class is likely to mean that fewer pupils will require such support.” (Section 6.15)

The West Sussex County Council OAIP guide is full of practical strategies that settings can use. More information about this document can be found in Section 7 of this guide – Understanding and Using the OAIP.



Support should follow **The Graduated Approach's Assess-Plan-Do-Review** cycle whether your child receives SEND support or has an EHCP. This process is focused on getting to understand and know your child – their strengths and weaknesses – in order to accurately identify need so that the most appropriate support can be planned, implemented and reviewed.

The cycle involves:

1. **Assess** the child's needs
2. **Plan** support strategies
3. **Do** – put the support in place
4. **Review** – check what's working and adapt

This cycle should be continuously repeated and advice sought from specialists if needed so that support is effective and tailored to meet your child's needs. For more information see Section 5 of this guide - The Graduated Approach.

B. Examples of Support and Equipment in Mainstream Settings

This section gives real-world examples of the kinds of support your child or young person might receive in a mainstream nursery, school or college - without needing an EHCP. These examples are drawn from the West Sussex Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP) guide and show how settings can adapt their teaching, environment and routines to meet a wide range of needs.

Children and young people with SEND also often benefit from simple tools and equipment that help them access learning, regulate emotions, or feel more comfortable in their environment. These tools don't require an EHCP - they are also part of Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP) and should be accessible in mainstream settings.



According to the OAIP, settings should:

- Make equipment available to all children and young people who need it.
- Normalise the use of tools to reduce stigma.
- Model how to use equipment effectively.
- Review the impact of tools and adapt as needed.
- Work with families to share strategies that work at home.

1. Communication and Interaction

Early Years (0–5)

- Staff use Makaton signs and visual prompts to support understanding.
- Group times include short turn-taking games and language modelling.
- Talking Buttons or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) boards.

School (5–16)

- Teachers use visual timetables, now/next boards, and simplified instructions.
- Staff are trained to understand different neurotypes and adapt expectations.
- Talking buttons or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) boards.
- Headphones to help block out background noise.
- Communication Apps or PECS Boards.

College (16–25)

- Tutors provide written summaries of lessons and allow extra time for processing.
- Students may use assistive technology like speech-to-text or symbol-based apps.
- Headphones to help block out background noise.
- Communication Apps or PECS Boards.

2. Cognition and Learning

Early Years (0–5)

- Activities are broken into small, manageable steps.
- Staff use concrete resources like blocks, counters or sensory trays.
- Sand timers to support focus.

School (5–16)

- Lessons are adapted using scaffolding, visual aids, and multi-sensory approaches.
- Children may use writing frames, coloured overlays, or alternative recording methods.
- Spellcheckers or predictive text tools.
- Access arrangements for exams (e.g reader, scribe, extra time).

College (16–25)

- Students can access study skills support, note-taking tools, and quiet spaces.
- Support is available for organisation, memory and exam access arrangements.
- Mind-mapping software or smart pens.
- Access arrangements for exams (e.g reader, scribe, extra time).



3. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

Early Years (0-5)

- Children have access to a safe space or calm corner.
- Strategies like co-regulation, breathing tools, and sensory breaks are used.
- Emotional regulation tools (e.g. breathing cards or feelings charts).

School (5-16)

- Staff use therapeutic approaches and avoid punitive behaviour systems.
- Children and young people may have a trusted adult or key worker to check in with.
- Emotional regulation tools (e.g. breathing cards or feelings charts) and social stories.

College (16-25)

- Students can access mental health mentors, drop-in wellbeing sessions, or counselling.
- Timetables may be adapted to reduce stress and support attendance.
- Emotional regulation tools (e.g. breathing cards or feelings charts) and social stories.



4. Sensory and/or Physical Needs

Early Years (0-5)

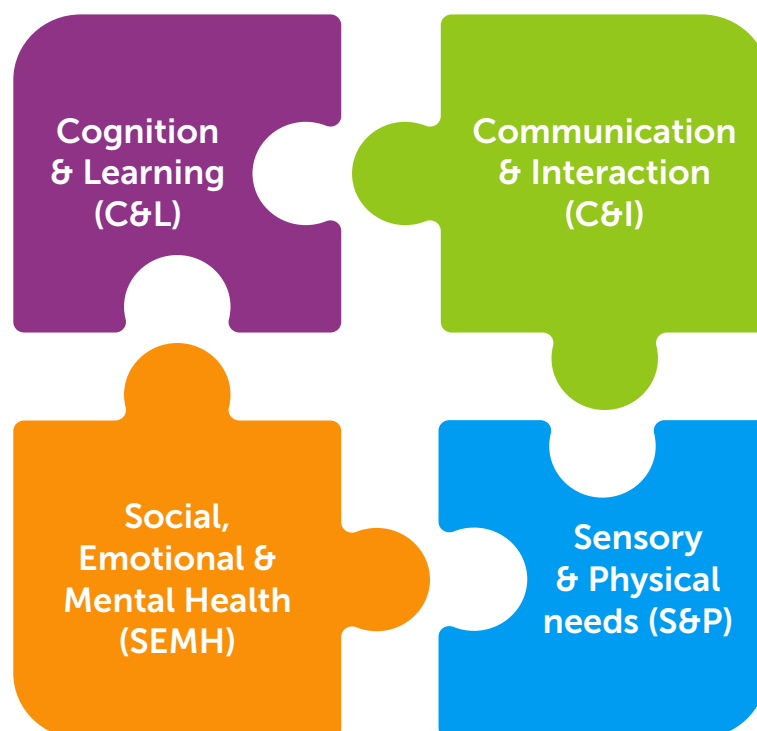
- Children use sensory tools like fidget toys, ear defenders, or weighted cushions.
- The environment is adapted with low-arousal spaces, soft lighting, and accessible furniture.
- Adapted cutlery, cups or seating

School (5-16)

- Classrooms include quiet zones, flexible seating, and visual supports.
- Children may use writing slopes, ICT tools, or mobility aids.
- Adapted cutlery, cups or seating, adapted PE equipment, wobble cushions.

College (16-25)

- Students can access assistive technology, accessible buildings, and personal care support.
- Sensory needs are considered in exam arrangements and classroom layouts.
- Standing desks or mobility aids.



C. Funding and Legal duties

i. Does the school get any extra funding to support my child?

Yes - all mainstream schools and colleges (for children and young people aged 5–18) receive funding to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is called the Notional SEND Budget.

The Notional SEND Budget is part of the school's overall funding. It's not a separate pot of money, but it's an amount that schools are expected to use to meet the needs of children and young people who require additional support - especially those at SEND Support level who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

This funding helps schools provide things like:

- Adapted teaching.
- Emotional and social support.
- Sensory tools and equipment.
- Small group or 1:1 interventions (a specific type of support that goes beyond everyday classroom strategies).

Schools are expected to use this budget to cover the first £6,000 of additional support per pupil, before applying for extra funding from the local authority if needed. The OAIP (Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice) guide helps schools understand how to use this funding effectively, with examples of best practice.

ii. What does the law say?

Under Section 66 of the Children and Families Act 2014, all mainstream schools have a legal duty to use their best endeavours to make sure that children and young people with SEND get the support they need - whether or not they have an EHCP. This means schools must do everything they reasonably can to:

- Identify your child's needs.
- Put appropriate support in place.
- Review and adapt that support regularly.

This duty applies to: Local authority maintained schools, Academies, Colleges, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs – alternative education settings for children who cannot attend mainstream school) and maintained nursery schools. Schools must also follow the SEND Code of Practice (2015), which sets out how they should work with families, plan support, and ensure inclusive education.

5. The Graduated Approach

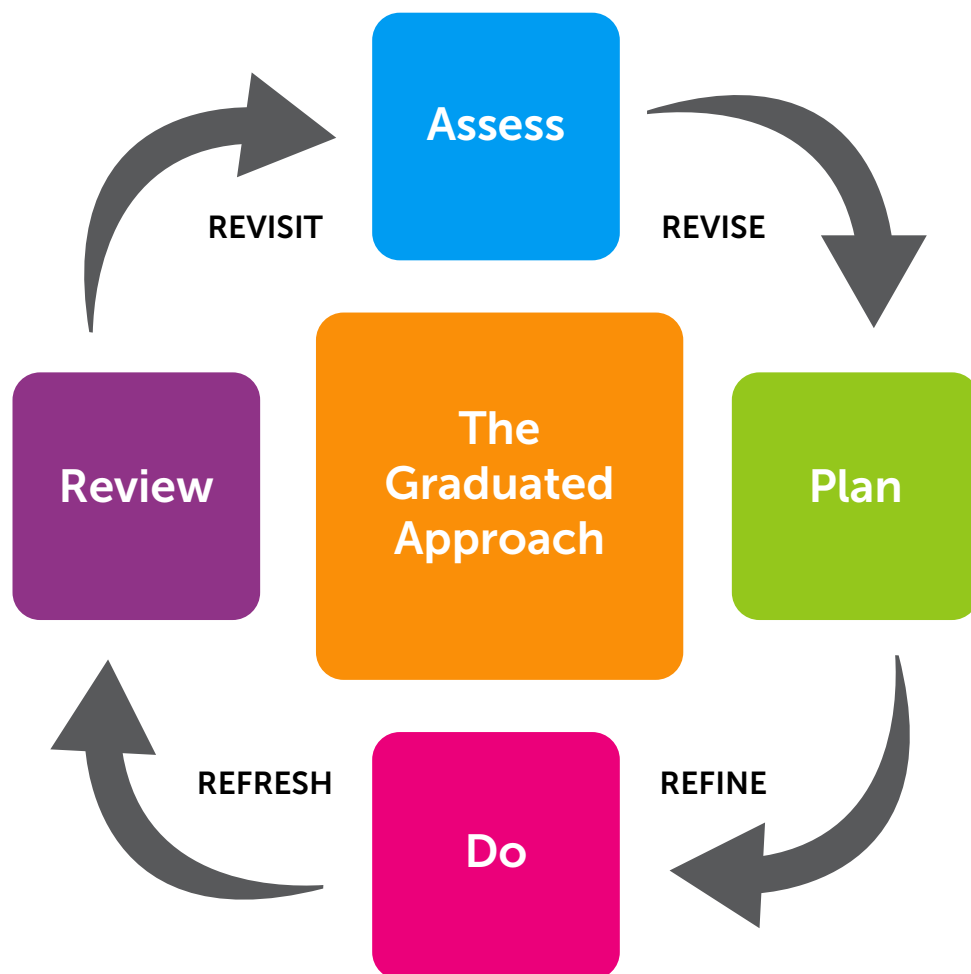
The Graduated Approach is a way for schools and settings to support children and young people with SEND step by step, adapting and reviewing support as needed. It's a cycle of continuous improvement - not a one-off event. It's used for children or young people with identified SEND, those who may need support but don't yet have a diagnosis or identified need and those who do not have an EHCP.

This approach is part of the SEND Code of Practice and is embedded in the OAIP as a core principle of inclusive practice.

There is a more in-depth explanation of this process here:

[Watch the Graduated Approach video](#)

A. Assess-Plan-Do-Review explained



i. Assess

The setting gathers information about your child or young person's strengths and needs.

This might include:

- Observations in class, conversations with you and your child or young person, input from specialists (e.g. speech and language therapists), academic progress and wellbeing data.

ii. Plan

Staff work with you (and your child or young person) to decide:

- What support will be put in place, what outcomes you're working towards, how progress will be measured. This might be written in an Individual Support Plan (ISP) or on a one-page profile.

iii. Do

The agreed support is put into action. This could include:

- The school requesting specialist support from WSCC teams, such as ASCT and LBAT.
- Adapted teaching strategies, use of equipment or sensory tools, emotional regulation support, small group or 1:1 interventions.
- Working in a small group with the teacher/tutor or the Teaching Assistant/Support Staff (this could happen inside the classroom).
- **Soft landings / slow start / morning transitions:** This focuses on how the day. It might involve spending a short time in a quieter space such as a sensory room, doing a brief physical activity on arrival, or reading a book - whatever best supports their individual needs.

iv. Review

After a set period (often 6–12 weeks), the setting reviews the plan and considers:

- What's working, what needs to change, whether outcomes are being met.
- You should be involved in this review and help decide next steps.

B. What Might This Look Like in Practice?

- A child with speech delay is assessed by the SENCO and a speech therapist. A plan is made to use visual prompts and small group sessions. After 8 weeks, progress is reviewed and the plan is updated.
- A teenager with anxiety is given a soft start to the school day and access to a quiet space. Staff monitor attendance and wellbeing, and meet with the family every half term to review support.
- A child with dyslexia is given coloured overlays, access to a laptop, and extra time in lessons. Their progress in reading is tracked and reviewed regularly.

C. Your Role as a Parent Carer

You should be:

- Involved in every stage of the cycle and asked for your views and ideas.
- Given clear information about what support is in place and invited to regular reviews.

If you feel the cycle isn't being followed, or support isn't working, you can ask to meet with the SENCO or request a review.



6. Working Together with the Setting

A. Communication and Coproduction

i. Communication

Settings should:

- Use clear, jargon-free language.
- Offer multiple ways to communicate (e.g. email, phone, meetings, home-school books).
- Be respectful of family preferences, including cultural and language needs.
- Listen actively and take parent carers' concerns seriously.
- share information regularly and transparently.

You should feel:

- Heard and understood, Informed about what support is in place.
- Involved in setting and reviewing goals, comfortable asking questions or raising concerns.

ii. Coproduction

Coproduction means working together as equal partners. In SEND, it's about parent carers, children and young people, and education settings making decisions together about support, planning and outcomes.

It's not just being consulted - it's being involved from the start – real partnership working.

The SEND Code of Practice says:

“Local authorities must ensure that parents, children and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision.”
(Section 1.3).

iii. What Does Co-production Look Like in Action?

- A teacher meets with a parent carer to co-write a support plan, using the child's own words and drawings.
- A SENCO invites families to a coffee morning to gather feedback on the school's SEND provision.
- A college student helps design their own timetable and chooses which staff member they want to check in with weekly.
- A setting uses a communication book or app to share daily updates and celebrate small wins.

iv. Why Does it Matter?

When families and settings work together:

- Children and young people feel more secure and understood and support is more consistent across home and school.
- Outcomes improve - academically, socially and emotionally, trust grows, and problems are easier to solve.

B. How to Talk to Your Child's Setting

i. Why Communication Matters

When you're concerned about your child's development, learning or wellbeing, talking to their nursery, school or college can feel daunting. But you are the expert on your child - and your voice matters.

The West Sussex OAIP encourages settings to work in co-production with families. That means listening, sharing ideas, and making decisions together.

These checklists are designed to help you feel confident and prepared when talking to your child's nursery, school or college about their SEND support. You can use them before, during and after meetings - and share them with staff if helpful.

ii. Checklists for Meetings and Planning

Preparing to Talk to the setting, here are some tips to help you feel confident and prepared:

Before the Meeting

- ☐ Write down your concerns: what are you noticing at home and what has changed?
- ☐ Keep a diary or log: Note sleep patterns, meltdowns, anxiety, homework struggles, friendships, etc.
- ☐ Ask your child how they feel about school and write that down: Their voice is important too.
- ☐ Gather any relevant reports or letters: From health professionals, previous settings, or support services.
- ☐ Think about what you want to say/ask and jot some questions down: See suggestions below in '**During the Meeting**'.

Booking the Meeting

- ☐ Contact your child's class teacher, tutor or key worker.
- ☐ Ask for a meeting in a format and time that works for you - in person, phone, video call, or email.
- ☐ Let them know you'd like to talk about your concerns about your child's additional needs or SEND.

During the Meeting

☐ You can ask:

- Is my child on the SEND register?
- Do they have an Individual Support Plan or one-page profile?
- What support is already in place? What else can be tried? Who else can help?
- How does the setting use OAIP to support children and young people without an EHCP?
- What changes can be made to help my child?
- How will we know if it's working? What outcomes are we working towards?
- When will we review the support?

☐ Take notes and/or ask for a written summary afterwards.

☐ Ask for copies of any relevant paperwork or forms for your child or young person.

After the Meeting

☐ Keep a record of what was discussed and agreed.

☐ Follow up if you don't hear back.

☐ Continue to monitor what's happening at home and in school and keep notes.

☐ If things don't improve, ask to meet with the SENCO or Head of Year.

C. Tips for Positive Communication

- Be honest and open - you don't need to have all the answers.
- Stay calm and focused - it's okay to bring someone with you for support.
- Use "I" statements: e.g. "I've noticed that..." or "I'm worried about..."
- Ask for clarification if something isn't clear.
- Remember: you are your child's advocate, and your insight is valuable.
- Work with the school.

D. SEND Register and Individual Support Plans

If your child or young person is not making expected progress - even with support through the Graduated Approach (Assess-Plan-Do-Review) - the school's SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) may carry out further assessments.

If the school identifies that your child or young person has special educational needs, they may be added to the SEND Register.

i. What Is the SEND Register?

The SEND Register is a list that schools keep of all children and young people who have been identified as having SEND. Being on the register means your child is recognised as needing additional support to access learning. Children and young people are added to the register for many different reasons, including:

- Having a diagnosed condition (e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia).
- Struggling with learning, communication, emotional wellbeing, or physical access.
- Needing support that goes beyond what is typically available in the classroom.

Some children and young people stay on the register throughout their time at school, while others may only need support for a short period. Being on the SEND Register does not mean your child or young person has or needs an EHCP - it means they are receiving SEND Support within the setting.

ii. What Is an Individual Support Plan?

When a child or young person is added to the SEND Register, the school should create an Individual Support Plan (ISP). This is a working document that outlines:

- Your child or young person's strengths and needs.
- The support being provided.
- The outcomes you're working towards.
- How progress will be reviewed.

West Sussex County Council recommends the use of ISPs, but schools may use similar documents with different names, such as:

- Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

Whatever it's called, the plan should be:

- Co-produced with you and your child or young person and reviewed regularly (usually every term).
- Clear and easy to understand.

7. Understanding the OAIP: What Parent Carers Need to Know

A. What the OAIP is?

The **Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP)** guide is a West Sussex document that explains what support should be available for children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings - **without needing an EHCP**.

It was co-produced with:

- Schools and colleges, early years settings, parent carers, local authority teams, and SEND specialists.

The OAIP is based on the principle that **inclusive practice is everyone's responsibility** - and that most children and young people's needs can be met through high-quality teaching and reasonable adjustments.



Access the full WSCC OAIP here - www.westsussex.gov.uk/tools-for-schools/oaip

The OAIP is split into two main sections:

Section 1: Quality First Teaching and Universal Provision

This includes:

- Inclusive teaching strategies.
- Adaptations to the environment.
- Emotional and social support.
- Equipment and resources.
- Staff training and transitions.

It's organised by age:

0-5 years (nurseries, preschools, reception).

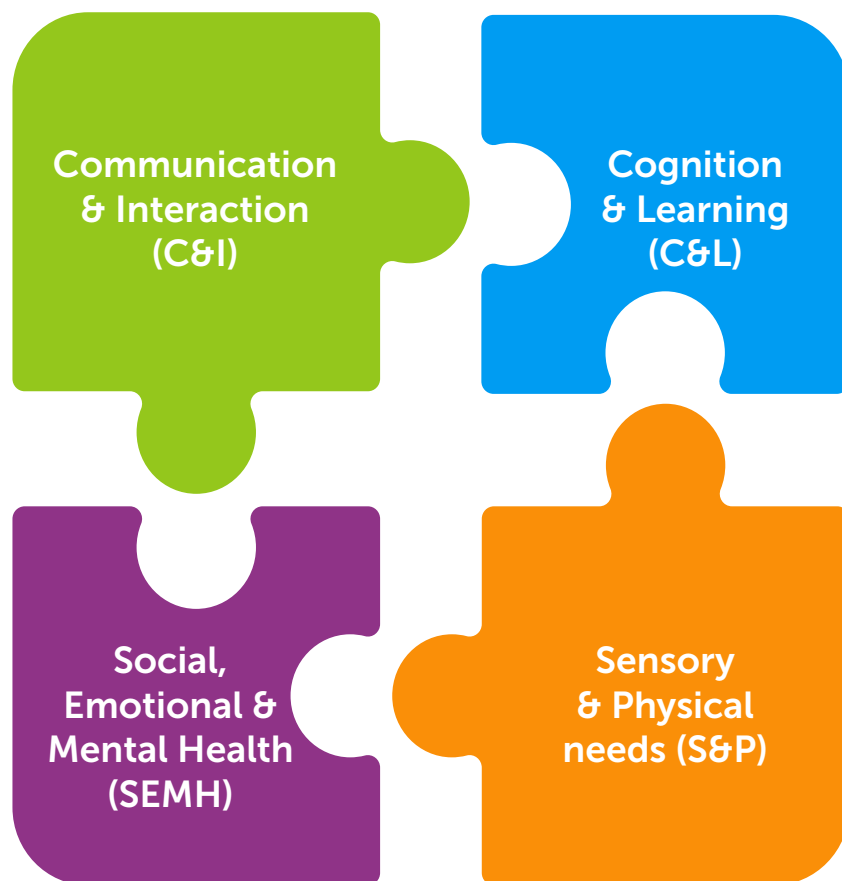
5-25 years (schools, colleges).

Section 2: Tailored Approaches for Individual Needs

This includes strategies for children and young people at **SEND Support** level, grouped by the **four areas of need**:

1. Communication and Interaction
2. Cognition and Learning
3. Social, Emotional and Mental Health
4. Sensory and/or Physical Needs

There's also a section on **medical needs**.



The OAIP recognises that some children and young people have **medical conditions** that affect their access to education. These needs may be physical, sensory, or related to long-term health conditions.

Mainstream settings are expected to:

- Make reasonable adjustments to support children and young people with medical needs.
- Work with families and health professionals to understand the child's condition.
- Ensure staff are trained to meet medical needs safely and confidently.
- Include medical needs in Individual Support Plans (ISPs) where relevant.
- Support attendance and participation, including during transitions and school trips.

B. Why Is the OAIP Useful for Families?

Although the OAIP is written for professionals, parent carers can use it to:

- Understand what support should be available in mainstream settings.
- Prepare for meetings with schools or colleges.
- Ask informed questions about what's being done.
- Spot gaps in provision.
- Advocate for their child without needing an EHCP.

It helps you speak the same language as the setting - and shows what's reasonable to expect.

C. Where to Look in the WSCC OAIP (0–5 and 5–25 Age Guides)

The **Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP)** guide is a large document – but you don't need to read all of it. This section helps you find the parts that are most useful for your child or young person, based on their **age** and **area of need**.

i. How to Find the Right Section

Ask yourself:

- What age group does my child or young person fall into?
- Which area(s) of need apply?
- What kind of support are we looking for - teaching, emotional, sensory, equipment?

Then go to the matching section in the OAIP where you can:

- Search the PDF using keywords (e.g. “anxiety”, “visual timetable”, “dyspraxia”)
- Use the contents page to jump to the right part.
- Ask your child or young person's setting to help you navigate it.

For Children Aged 0–5 (Early Years)

Look at Section 1A of the OAIP:

- **Quality First Teaching and Universal Provision – Ages 0–5**

This includes information about:

- Leadership and management, curriculum and learning, assessment and planning and staff training.
- Co-production with families, social and emotional development, physical and sensory environment.
- Equipment and resources and transitions.

Then look at Section 2A:

- **Tailored Approaches for Individual Needs – Ages 0–5**

Organised by the **four areas of need**, plus medical needs. Each area includes practical strategies and examples of support (like the examples we gave earlier) that should be available in nurseries, preschools and reception classes.

For Children and Young People Aged 5–25 (School and College)

Look at **Section 1B and 1C** of the OAIP:

- **Quality First Teaching – Ages 5–25** and **Foundations of Universal Provision – Ages 5–25**

These cover:

- Inclusive teaching and curriculum, assessment and planning, staff training and use of expertise.
- Equipment and resources, coproduction and communication, social and emotional support.
- Transitions and the Physical and sensory environment.

Then look at **Section 2B**:

- **Tailored Approaches for Individual Needs – Ages 5–25**

Organised by the same **four areas of need**, plus medical needs. Each section includes strategies (like the examples we gave earlier) for mainstream schools and colleges to support children and young people at SEND Support level.



8. What If My Child or Young Person Needs More Support?

Specialist services like the Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT) are accessed through your child or young person's setting. While settings make the referrals, you can ask the SENCO or class teacher to consider involving these services if you feel your child would benefit.

A. Specialist Teams, Services and Resources

When a child or young person doesn't make the expected levels of progress or is significantly impacted by their difficulties the school should seek support from teams listed below. Each team's website explains the work they do with schools and children and young people and there is also information on these websites that may be helpful to parent carers.

i. Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT)

[Autism and Social Communication Team - ASCT | West Sussex Services for Schools](#)

ii. Learning and Behaviour Advisory Team (LBAT)

[Learning and Behaviour Advisory Team - LBAT | West Sussex Services for Schools](#)

Both LBAT and ASCT offer schools Consultation and Review Meetings (CARMs) . Schools are advised to invite parents to this meeting as it is an opportunity for school staff, you and the advisory teacher to focus on your child- their strengths and needs and to discuss the adaptations and strategies that will best support your child. Following this meeting, the school is sent a record (aide-memoire) of the meeting. It is the school's responsibility to send this record to parents.

ASCT and LBAT work in the same way with ASCT specialising in autistic children and children with social communication needs and LBAT specialising in ADHD, behaviour, specific learning difficulties, Downs Syndrome etc. Both teams provide training to schools and the ASCT provide training to parent carers. No diagnosis or identification of SEND is required for the school to refer to these teams- they focus on early identification. The teams also offer advice lines to schools.

iii. Thought-Full - Mental Health in Schools Team

[Thought-Full - West Sussex County Council](#)

The team provide support for individual children and young people as well as providing advice, support and training to setting staff.

Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

[Educational Psychology Service | West Sussex Services for Schools](#)

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) provides advice and support to schools. Each school has an Educational Psychologist (EP) allocated to it and schools can get advice about the whole school or individual children and young people with Parents consent.

These are the main teams that support schools most relevant to this document there is more information about other support for schools here [Services supporting schools and settings - West Sussex County Council](#)



Resources

There is more information here about Individual Support Plans (ISP):

[View Individual Support Plan ISP](#)

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum have developed a document in co-production with the Autism and Social Communication Team to help parent carers to input into this process, this is called the ILP input form and can be found on the resources page of our website:

[Info & Resources - West Sussex Parent Carer Forum](#)

SEND Code of Practice (2015):

Explains legal duties and rights [View SEND Code of Practice January 2015](#)

Settings should use the resources provided by West Sussex Autism and Social Communication Advisory Team.

One of these resources is the Sensory Package, Available from the ASCT website – West Sussex Services for Schools Autism & Social Communication Team (ASCT). [Visit the ASCT website](#)

From the ASCT link above, download the Sensory Package which contains several documents to help you explore your child or young person's sensory profile.

Start with: The Sensory Toolkit - A checklist you can fill in to identify sensory differences (e.g. sound, touch, movement, taste, smell, etc.). [Download The Sensory Toolkit](#)

Then: Use the other documents in the pack for practical advice and strategies tailored to those needs.

If your child or young person is masking at school (appearing fine in class but struggling at home), it can be especially helpful to share the completed [Sensory Toolkit](#) with their setting. This helps staff understand what's going on beneath the surface and adjust support accordingly.

Transition Toolkit

Also available from the ASCT website – West Sussex Services for Schools Autism & Social Communication Team (ASCT). [Visit the ASCT website](#)

This toolkit was developed by ASCT advisory teachers as part of the Autism in Schools Project. It's designed to help school staff and professionals support autistic children and young people - whether diagnosed or not - through key transitions (e.g. starting school, changing year groups, moving to secondary).

What's inside:

- Practical strategies to reduce anxiety and improve communication
- Tools to help plan and prepare for changes
- Inclusive approaches for all neurodivergent learners
- The document is called ASCT **Transition Toolkit Guidance**

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum has created step-by-step guidance to help you use both the Sensory Toolkit and the Transition Toolkit. These resources are available on the [Info & Resources page of our website](#).

What is an EHCP?

An **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** is a legal document that sets out:

- A child or young person's **special educational needs**.
- The **support** they need.
- The **outcomes** they're working towards.

It's for children and young people aged **0–25** whose needs **cannot be met** through the support that is ordinarily available in a mainstream setting, and where enhanced, targeted and specialist support has been in place over time.

When Might an EHCP Be Needed?

You might consider applying for an EHCP if:

- Your child or young person is **not making progress** despite support.
- Their needs are **complex or long-term**.
- They need **specialist input** or **significant adaptations**.
- The current support is **not enough** to help them access learning.

The SEND Code of Practice says:

“A local authority must conduct an assessment of education, health and care needs when it considers that it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person.” (Section 9.3).



How Does the OAIP Fit In?

The **Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP)** guide helps settings show what they've already tried. This is important because:

- The EHCP process looks for **evidence** of what support has been provided.
- The **Assess-Plan-Do-Review** cycle should be documented.
- The setting should show how they've used their **existing resources** to meet needs.
- What support has been tried.
- Why you believe an EHCP is needed.

You don't need a diagnosis to apply - the focus is on **needs and provision**.

For more information on Assessment for an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). This assessment can be applied for by a setting, a parent or a young person who is over 16.

This fact sheet from SENDIAS provides more information.

[EHCNA-factsheet-Aug-2025.pdf](#)



9. Who Can Help?

Navigating support for SEND can feel overwhelming, but you're not alone. There are local and national organisations that offer **free, confidential advice**, help with paperwork, emotional support, and opportunities to connect with other families.

Below are some of the most useful contacts for parent carers in **West Sussex**.

Local Support Organisations

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF)

- A parent carer-led organisation representing families of children and young people with SEND.
- Offers workshops, consultations, and opportunities to influence local services.
- Website: www.wspcf.org.uk
- Email: office@wspcf.org.uk

West Sussex Local Offer

- Lists all SEND services available in the county.
- Includes education, health, social care, leisure and support groups.
- Website: westsussex.gov.uk/local-offer

SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS)

- Independent advice on SEND law, EHCPs, school support, and mediation.
- Helps families understand their rights and navigate the system.
- Website: westsussexsendias.org

Reaching Families

- Provides parent-friendly guides, training, and peer support.
- Offers resources on specific conditions and practical advice.
- Website: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk

Health and Wellbeing Support

Early Help Service

- Supports families with children who have emerging or additional needs.
- Can help with behaviour, routines, emotional wellbeing and more.
- Accessed via the school or directly through the Local Authority.

School Nursing Team

- Offers support with medical needs, toileting, emotional health and referrals.
- Can be contacted via your child's school or GP.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

- Specialist mental health support for children and young people.
- Referral usually via GP or school.

National SEND Organisations

Contact

- National charity for families with disabled children.
- Offers advice on benefits, education, and health.
- Website: www.contact.org.uk

IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice)

- Legal advice on SEND law, EHCPs, and tribunals.
- Website: www.ipsea.org.uk

Council for Disabled Children

- Policy and practice guidance for professionals and families.
- Website: www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

10. Feedback and Next Steps

Why Your Feedback Matters

This guide was written by the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF) - a parent carer-led organisation that represents the views/voices of families with children and young people with SEND across West Sussex.

WSPCF exists to:

- Champion parent carers' views
- Influence local services and policy
- Co-produce solutions with the Local Authority and NHS
- Support families through information, events and consultation

Your feedback helps us:

- Improve this guide and make it more useful
- Understand what's working (and what's not) in local SEND support
- Represent your experiences in meetings with decision-makers
- Shape future resources, training and campaigns

How to Share Your Feedback

We'd love to hear:

- What you found helpful in this guide
- What could be clearer or more useful
- What support you need next
- Your experiences of using the OAIP or talking to your child's setting

You can share feedback by:

- Emailing us at **office@wspcf.org.uk**
- Joining one of our **online or in-person events**
- Filling in a **feedback form** (available on our website)

Becoming a **WSPCF member** - it's free and helps us stay in touch

Website: www.wspcf.org.uk

11. Final Thoughts

This guide is just the beginning. WSPCF is here to walk alongside you - to listen, support, and amplify your voice.

Together, we can make SEND support in West Sussex more inclusive, responsive and effective.

To become a member, scan the QR code:





www.wspcf.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1156360