

SEND Categorisation of Need

Definitions of SEND to support completion of school census and to help schools with the correct identification of need.

Context

The School Census is a statutory requirement of schools, under Section 537 of the Education Act 1996 (Sections 1.2.1 of School census 2017 to 2018 guidance).

The information collected on special educational needs via the school census provides the only individual level source of data on children and young people with special educational needs. Central and local Government, Ministers, Parliament, external organisations and the public use this data to monitor government policies and their effectiveness.

The Headteacher is responsible for the review and authorisation of census data, prior to submitting it to the local authority and/ or direct to the Department for Education.

The most significant need is the primary area of need. Further needs can be identified but only two rankings are collected in the school census. No two needs can be given the same ranking, that is, if there is more than one SEN type/ description reported they cannot both have a ranking of '1'.

SEND information is only collected in the spring census and is for all pupils on roll on census day. It is advisable that systems are kept up to date.

Some systems will record children as N when they have previously been identified as having SEN. Other systems will use N in a different way. It's important to check your system to see how N is used. N can be useful for populating reports and for transition and monitoring purposes.

Purpose of this Document

The Department for Education has yet to publish definitions or guidance on these classifications. This guidance has been developed to provide clarity and consistency across Derby City.

In Derby there is a significant variation on the understanding of what constitutes such a difficulty and how this is identified.

Learning Difficulties – definitions

Using labels for learning difficulties can be both helpful and unhelpful at the same time. It can be helpful to the person, their family or those people who work with them to understand their needs and what support they might need. However, the categories can be unhelpful if the person is just seen as that label.

The international definition sets out three criteria that are required to be met before a learning difficulty can be identified. These are: intellectual impairment, social or adaptive dysfunction and early onset.

Intellectual impairment - within an educational context, intellectual impairment can be reflected in the young person's interaction with the curriculum in relation to their peers. In summary:

	Mild	Moderate LD	Severe LD	PMLD
End FS	<DJ Step 12 (36 months)	<DJ Step 11 (30 months)	<DJ Step 8 (20months)	<DJ Step 5 (9months)
End KS1	<Y1 ARE (72 months)	<PKSS4 (60months)	<PKSS2 (36 months)	<PKSS1 (24 months)
End KS2	<Y4 ARE	<Y2 ARE	<PKSS3	<PKSS1 (24 months)
End KS3	<Y6 ARE	<Y4 ARE	<PKSS4	<PKSS1 (24 months)
End KS4	<Y7 ARE	<Y5 ARE	<Y1ARE	<PKSS1 (24 months)
End KS5	<Entry Level2	<Entry Level3	<Entry Level 1	<PKSS1 (24 months)

IQ or other standardised assessments can sometimes be used to assess the presence and degree of learning difficulty.

Social or adaptive dysfunction - alongside an intellectual impairment, young people with a learning difficulty are likely to have some impairment of social functions including communication, eating and drinking, keeping safe, personal care and recognizing risks. Whilst there are assessments which seek to capture and quantify this, within an educational context, this can be evidenced based on experience of how the young person functions within the school environment.

Early onset – for the majority of individuals, the presence of a learning difficulty is from birth or during the early development period of life. Acquired learning difficulties can also occur as a result of a brain injury or other trauma but this is rare.

A Continuum of Need

The DfE require SENCOs to identify children who have a moderate learning difficulty, severe learning difficulty or profound and multiple learning difficulty. There is no requirement to identify children with a possible mild learning difficulty but for the purpose of this guidance SENCOs might find it helpful to have a definition of mild learning difficulty particularly to help distinguish between moderate and mild learning difficulties.

Definition of a mild learning difficulty (*Mild learning difficulties are not included as a category in the school census and so not included in the table below*) – a young person who is said to have a mild learning difficulty is usually able to hold a conversation, and communicate most of their needs and wishes. They may need some support to understand abstract or complex ideas and be delayed across the curriculum. Such young people are often independent in caring for themselves and doing many everyday tasks. They usually have some basic reading and writing skills. Young people with MiLD will usually have their needs met in a mainstream settings, using resources normally available to the school.

This information has been taken and adapted from: British Institute of Learning Disabilities, Factsheet: Learning Disabilities, 2011 and also with permission the ‘Working Definitions of Learning Difficulties’ produced by Bradford Metropolitan District Council – April 2020.

Codes and Definitions

- Pupils who receive therapeutic or other health-related services from external agencies and who do not receive provision which is additional to or different from that which is normally available should not be recorded as having special educational needs.
- Under-attainment may be an indicator of SEN but poor performance may be due to other school or home-based factors.
- Lack of competence in the language used in school (English) must not be equated with, or allowed to mask, learning difficulties. A pupil who falls outside the context of the SEN CoP should not be recorded. At the same time, some pupils whose first language is not English may also have SEN.

The table below highlights key information and guidance on this matter to encourage a consistent approach of best practice regarding the school census.

Code	Type/Description	Area of Need	Definition
SpLD	Specific learning difficulty	Cognition and Learning	<p>Encompasses a range of conditions such as specific literacy difficulties (dyslexia), specific number difficulties (dyscalculia) or developmental coordination difficulties (dyspraxia), where the child or young person is experiencing difficulties in one (or more) specific area of learning. Taken from section 6.31 of the SEND CoP</p> <p>This would include children with a specific difficulty in literacy or numeracy with or without a diagnosis.</p> <p>NB – slow progress and low attainment do not necessarily mean that a child has SEN and should not automatically lead to a pupil being recorded as having SEN. Taken from 6.23 of the SEND CoP</p>
MLD	Moderate learning difficulties	Cognition and Learning	<p>Child/ young person learns at a slower pace and has greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic oracy, literacy and numeracy skills and understanding concepts across all areas of the curriculum. Their attainment will typically be well below expected levels for their age (see table above), despite appropriate interventions.</p> <p>Child/ young person will have some language skills that mean they can communicate about their day to day needs and wishes. Young people with MLD will require a highly differentiated curriculum and some personalised learning. They may need some support with caring for themselves, but will be able to carry</p>

			<p>out day to day tasks with support. They will usually have their needs met in a mainstream setting, using resources normally available to the school.</p> <p>NB – slow progress and low attainment do not necessarily mean that a child has SEN and should not automatically lead to a pupil being recorded as having SEN. Taken from 6.23 of the SEND CoP</p>
SLD	Severe learning difficulties	Cognition and Learning	<p>Child/ young person experiences significant intellectual and/ or cognitive challenges that impact on their ability to engage in learning. They may also present with associated difficulties with mobility and communication and experience issues with developing age-appropriate self-care skills. Their overall cognitive level is very low (see table above).</p> <p>Child/ young person will usually use basic words and gestures to communicate their needs. They will need a high level of support in school requiring significant personalisation of the curriculum. They may be able to look after some if not all of their personal care needs. Some young people will have additional medical needs and some need support with mobility issues. Young people with SLD will usually have an Education, Health and Care Plan and will be educated in either a mainstream or a specialist school environment</p>
PMLD	Profound and multiple learning difficulties	Cognition and Learning	<p>Child/ young person will have severely limited understanding and will have multiple disabilities, which can include impairments of vision, hearing and movement as well as other challenges such as epilepsy and autism. Young people in this group need support with mobility and may have complex health needs requiring extensive support. They will require a bespoke curriculum and will have considerable difficulty communicating. While most pupils will communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others have basic communication skills. They are likely to require specialist equipment and support for posture, feeding and intimate care. Young people with PMLD will usually have an Education Health and Care Plan and be educated in a specialist provision.</p>
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health difficulties	Social Emotional and Mental Health	<p>Child/ young person may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • become withdrawn or isolated, • displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviours <p>These behaviours may also reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Alternatively, the child/ young person may have a diagnosed medical condition such as attention deficit</p>

			<p>disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or attachment difficulties. Taken from SEND CoP 6.32.</p> <p>NB – it's important to consider whether a child's behaviour may be due to an underlying difficulty in language or learning</p>
SLCN	Speech, language and communication needs	Communication and Interaction	<p>Child/ young person has difficulties communication with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them and/ or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. Taken from 6.28 of the SEND CoP.</p> <p>This category can therefore include those presenting with social communication difficulties who have not been formally diagnosed.</p>
HI	Hearing impairment	Physical and Sensory	<p>Child/ young person who requires specialist support and/ or equipment to access their learning because of a hearing impairment. Taken from SEND CoP section 6.34.</p> <p>This also includes children with a mild hearing loss, a unilateral, bilateral or conductive hearing loss who require specific provision to be put in place where specialist support may or may not be provided by an outside agency.</p>
VI	Vision impairment	Physical and Sensory	<p>Child/ young person who requires specialist support and/ or equipment to access their learning or additional habilitation support because of a visual impairment. Taken from SEND CoP section 6.34</p> <p>Vision impairment refers to a range of difficulties from minor impairment through to blindness. Pupils are considered to be visually impaired if they require adaptations to their environment and differentiation of learning materials in order to access the curriculum.</p>
MSI	Multi-sensory impairment	Physical and Sensory	<p>As for HI/VI above. Child/ young person has a combination of vision and hearing difficulties. Taken from SEND CoP section 6.34</p> <p>Those with MSI have much greater difficulties accessing the curriculum and the environment than those with a single sensory need. They will have difficulty with perception, communication, mobilising and acquiring information.</p>
PD	Physical disability	Physical and Sensory	<p>Child/ young person requires additional ongoing support and equipment to access all the opportunities available to their peers because of a physical disability. Taken from SEND CoP section 6.35.</p>

ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder	Communication and Interaction	Child/ young person diagnosed with ASD, including Aspergers Syndrome and Autism. Taken from SEND CoP section 6.29.
OTH	Other difficulty	Physical and Sensory	Other special educational needs, which do not fit into the categories above. This could include children/ young people identified as needing specialist support for sensory processing difficulties.
NSA	SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	n/a	As defined by the category descriptor

Coproduced in 2020 by:

Eleanor Moore, Derby City Council, Joanna Gilhooly, St John Fisher, Judith McAlister, Derby City Council, Simon Field, Allenton Primary and Sally Harrison, Reigate Park Primary.

Updated in 2024 by:

Derby City Educational Psychologists