

# SEND update:

## The reform is under way

With the final SEND code of practice now published and the new school year begun, Suzanne O'Connell gives advice on what schools will be expected to have in place and when.

### Summary

- + Big differences are expected in how ready local authorities are to deliver the SEN reform.
- + Children who are newly identified as requiring a statutory assessment will be some of the first to try out the new system.
- + Statements will be phased out gradually. The deadline for the transition period from statements to EHC plans has been extended from September 2017 to April 2018.
- + Your SEN support should include clear targets for your pupils, agreement on what support they need and processes to track how it is working.
- + You must be able to demonstrate that you are aware of what the new requirements are, reviewing your current practice, engaging with your school community and identifying staff training needs.

There can have been few dates in schools' calendars that required so much change to take place. September 2014 brought with it not only the new SEN reform but a new curriculum and assessment too. These external challenges come at a time when schools are still busy with settling in a new intake and planning the year ahead.

The good news is that not all of the new SEND code of practice was expected to be in place from 1 September. The changes represent a massive shift in practice, which local authorities and their schools could not hope to have signed and sealed by the beginning of the term.

The Government has acknowledged that a transition period will be needed and their advice to local authorities, *Implementing a new 0 to 25 special needs system: LAs and partners*, provides a very useful indicator of what the expectations are.

### What the LA must have in place

We can expect to see big differences in how ready local authorities are to deliver the SEN reform. Some pathfinder authorities have already had a chance to try out the new



arrangements. Others have been making trials of their own. Whichever LA you fall into, you should find that they already have in place:

- the local offer
- independent information advice and support for children, parents and young people
- an EHC template
- a co-ordinated EHC assessment process
- a clear policy setting out the scope of the personal budget offer for families in September.

Statements will be phased out gradually. The deadline for the transition period from statements to EHC plans has recently been extended from September 2017 to April 2018. The transfer to EHC plans will be led by those children who are at key transition points, such as entry to secondary school.

Children who are newly identified as requiring a statutory assessment will be some of the first to try out the new system. Schools and parents with ongoing concerns about unmet needs should be able to access the EHC



needs assessment process. It is at this point that we should see just how ready LAs really are.

An LA readiness survey reported in *Implementing a new 0 to 25 special needs system* suggests that 96 per cent of respondents were 'reasonably' or 'very' confident that new entrants would be offered the new system from September 2014. 88 per cent of respondents reported that they were making good progress in developing EHC plans and assessment processes or that the plans were 'complete'.

However, a look at some local authority websites suggests that they may be over-optimistic. Many appear to be still in the process of completing and publishing their local offer, and the level of guidance and support in relation to schools' duties varies significantly.

### What schools must have in place

Local authorities do not only have their own arrangements to put in place. They are also charged with reassuring themselves that schools are on track too. The document *Implementing a new 0 to 25 special needs system* provides LAs with a list of what schools should have had up and ready by September 2014 and what can be implemented later in the academic year.

This provides a good indication that everything does not need to be in place for pupils' return in the autumn term.

What the advice does state is that you should now have:

- begun to review core teaching and wider policies and how they meet the requirements in the SEND code of practice
- started to engage with parents and pupils with SEN more widely and put in place arrangements (or structures) on how you will review and discuss progress
- made sure class teachers are aware of the changes and recognise their responsibilities for identifying and supporting children with SEN
- begun to explore how you will monitor and track the progress and development of pupils with SEN
- identified and begun to deliver any training needed by staff
- contributed to your LA's local offer
- engaged with the LA in relation to delegated funding, joint commissioning, EHC plans and implications for personal budgets
- begun to explore how you will support pupils with SEN in their transition to post-16 education

- arrangements in place to support pupils with medical conditions
- published the annual SEN information report.

What schools are being given more time to implement is the transfer over from school action and school action plus to SEN support. It is anticipated that most children who need it will be in the SEN support category by spring 2015 and that all pupils will have moved to SEN support by September 2015.

Your SEN support should include:

- clear targets for your pupils
- agreement on what support they need
- processes to track how it is working.

Schools will be expected to be supporting children over the course of the year using their best endeavours, SEN support, person-centred approaches and through working with families.

### Where to start

A phased implementation it may be, but it still presents quite a daunting list of requirements for schools. What is most important is that, whatever stage you are at, you can demonstrate that you:

- are aware of what the new requirements are
- are reviewing your current practice
- are engaging with your school community
- are identifying staff training needs.

Include these activities in your own action plan, which should indicate a clear timeline and, as far as possible, reflect the expectations here.

As SENCo you must ensure that your senior leadership team is aware of the time constraints and the pressures on you and your team. You will need their full co-operation and additional time for yourself to create a system that meets the needs of the staff and pupils in your school.



### Further information

*Implementing a new 0 to 25 special needs system: LAs and partners. Duties and timescales – what you must do and when*, July 2014, [http://bit.ly/Implementing\\_0\\_to\\_25\\_special\\_needs](http://bit.ly/Implementing_0_to_25_special_needs).



### Toolkit

Use the following items in the Toolkit to help you put the ideas in this article into practice:

- Handout – SEND code of practice (pages 18–20)
- Glossary – SEND code of practice (page 21)



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