


# SENAC

Special Educational Needs Advice Centre





**SENAC** is a regional charity providing advice and information on the statutory Special Educational Needs System in Northern Ireland.

All our services are independent and confidential, for more information and contact details visit our website [www.senac.co.uk](http://www.senac.co.uk)



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## The Identification, Assessment and Provision for Special Educational Needs in Northern Ireland

This guide is designed for parents/carers as a brief, easy read summary of all aspects of the statutory special educational needs system in Northern Ireland.

Sources for further information and guidance about the special educational needs framework within Northern Ireland are included in this pack. It is recommended that parents contact the school, Education Authority or other relevant agencies for further advice and information about their individual circumstances.

For the purposes of this information 'parents' refers to anyone with parental responsibility



**DARS – Dispute Avoidance Resolution Service:** – independent mediation service to resolve disagreements between parents, EA, educational settings or schools regarding children with SEN. Mediation provided by an independent body Global Mediation

028 9072 6060  
Global Mediation  
55-59 Adelaide Street,  
Belfast BT2 8FE

### Department of Education NI

Rathgael House  
Balloo Road, Rathgill  
Bangor BT19 7PR  
Email: [DE.DEWebMail@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:DE.DEWebMail@education-ni.gov.uk)

### Education Authority (EA)

**Regional Offices** - contact details for all offices.

- 028 9056 4000
- Email: [info@eani.org.uk](mailto:info@eani.org.uk)

**SEN provision:** <https://send.eani.org.uk> - dedicated section on EA's website with information and guidance for schools, parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs.

**SEN Helpdesk:** – Option 2 for the SEN Advice & Information Service – regional team which provides advice and information for parents, schools and EA Services on SEND-related issues including the new SEN Framework and the statutory and statementing process.

- 028 9598 5960

**SARS - Statutory Assessment & Review Service:**

- 028 9598 5960 Option 1

**EA Transitions Service 14+:** advice and information on possible pathways into training, supported employment, Further Education and employment.

- 028 9041 8080
- Email: [eatransitionsservice@eani.org.uk](mailto:eatransitionsservice@eani.org.uk)

**EA Transport Helpline:** for details on how to contact your local transport office.

- 028 9598 5959

### SENDIST - Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal:

The Tribunal deals with appeal cases in certain situations where a parent disagrees with a decision of the Education Authority. You can request a copy of the Appeals Booklet using the following contact details:

2nd Floor  
Royal Courts of Justice  
Chichester Street  
Belfast BT1 3JF  
028 9072 4847 or 028 9072 4886  
Email: [SENDIST@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:SENDIST@courtsni.gov.uk)



### What does Special Educational Needs (SEN) mean?

The term 'special educational needs' (SEN) has a legal definition. It relates to children with a learning difficulty which means they have more difficulty learning than most children of their own age and require SEN provision or, children who have a disability which hinders them from making use of educational facilities generally provided for children of the same age.

If a child is having more difficulty than most children of their age with learning, they may have a learning difficulty and may need additional help from teachers, specialists or other educational professionals.

The term 'special educational provision' refers to the help and education provision **additional to or different from** that usually provided for children of the same age.

If a child is of school age and a parent is worried about their child's progress, they should first speak to the class teacher.

### What to ask the school

- Does the class teacher think the child is having difficulties with their learning or progress?
- What help has already been given?
- Is the child able to work at the same level as other children their age?
- Is the child on the Medical and/or SEN Register in the school?

If a parent is told by the school that their child has special educational needs, the school will follow a framework of staged support as set out within the 1998 Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN to help identify, assess and make provision for the child's needs.

**NB: The current SEN Code of Practice applies a 5-Stage framework of support. However, a new Draft Code of Practice, which has yet to be made operative, applies a revised 3-Stage framework. The EA have directed schools to record all children on the SEN Register on the new 3 Stages. This new Framework will be fully outlined in the new Code of Practice, which has not yet been issued. Therefore, the current Code of Practice (1998) remains the operative statutory guidelines and should still be followed when planning and implementing a child's special educational needs provision.**

### Special Educational Needs Legislation

The law dealing with Special Education in Northern Ireland is:

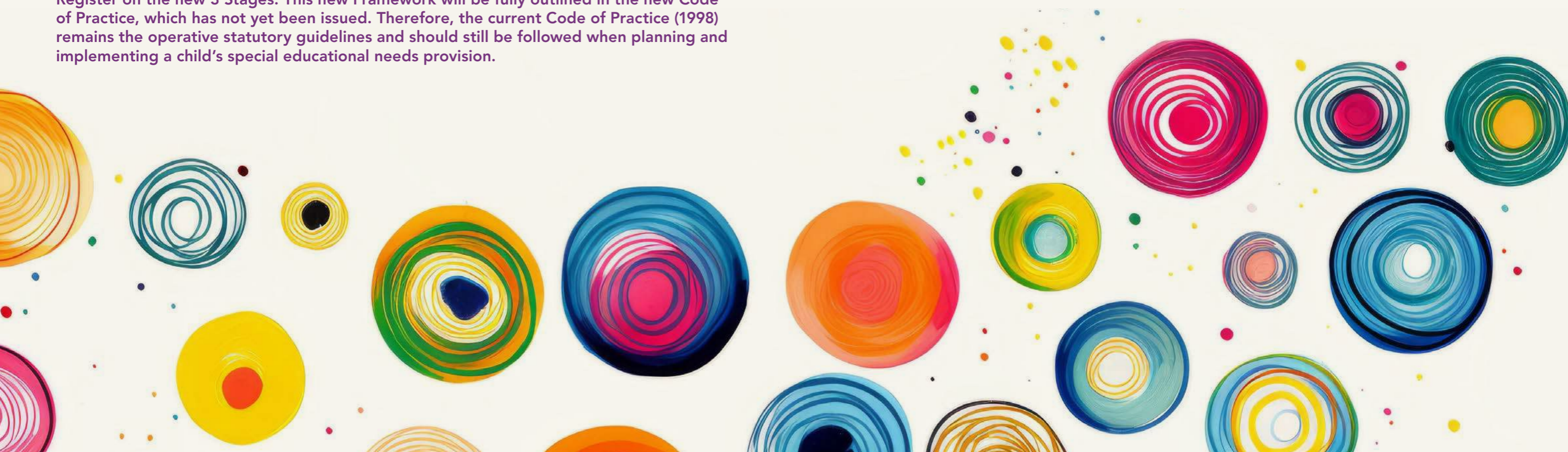
- The Education Order (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Act (2016)
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) (NI) 2005
- The SEN Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005
- The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs 1998

### The Code of Practice

**The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998) and The Supplement to the Code of Practice (2005)**

- The SEN Code of Practice is the statutory guidance document that all statutory educational settings/schools must follow when making decisions about identifying, assessing and making provision for children/young people who have, or may have, special educational needs.
- The current Code of Practice and the Supplement to the Code of Practice should be read together. This will provide a full understanding of the procedures, principles and practices and how they relate to a child's needs and situation. A new Code of Practice, issued following the SEN Review, is currently in development and will be issued in due course. At this point, the current 1998 Code is still the legal framework.

The current 1998 Code of Practice is available on SENAC's website <https://senac.co.uk/advice-useful-reading/>



### What is a Statutory Assessment?

A Statutory Assessment is a full assessment of your child's educational needs which is carried out by the Education Authority (EA) at Stage 2 of the new Code of Practice. The process takes up to **26 weeks** from beginning to end, unless valid exceptions apply. (Those valid exceptions are set out in The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005).

The assessment will determine if the EA are required to meet a child's Special Educational Needs (SEN) through a Statement of SEN.

Statutory Assessment involves gathering reports ('Advices') from numerous people involved with your child's education. This includes parents, school, medical/HSCT professionals, an Educational Psychologist and any other relevant professionals e.g. social services if involved.

The Statutory Assessment does not always result in a Statement. After the assessment is carried out the EA may conclude that your child's needs can be met by the school. Sometimes they may support this decision with an additional document called a Note in Lieu which sets out your child's needs and how the school can provide for them. It may also allow for access to some EA support services.

### Who can request a Statutory Assessment?

- School
- Parents
- other agencies e.g. health services

### Criteria for assessment

When considering whether to carry out a Statutory Assessment the EA will look at evidence of the action the school have already taken to meet a child's difficulties. They will look at the learning plans and review notes and reports from specialists if involved. They should also take account of the views of parents and seek the views of the child or young person if possible.

The EA must comply with a request from a parent to conduct a Statutory Assessment, unless:

- an assessment has already been done within the previous 6 months
- or, having examined the available evidence they have decided that a Statutory Assessment is not necessary.

### When the request for Statutory Assessment is received

The gathered information will go to the EA Statutory Assessment and Review Service (SARS). They will consider the information provided by the parents/carers, the child or young person if appropriate, teachers and the LSC/SENCO of the school. They will also consider information from the EA Educational Psychologist, and if applicable medical professionals, specialist teachers from EA SEND Services, social services and anyone else working with the child who may have relevant information.

Parents will be told within 6 weeks whether the EA have decided to carry out a Statutory Assessment or not.

If the EA decide **not** to carry out your request for a Statutory Assessment, they must inform you in writing, giving reasons for the decision. They must also inform you of your right to, and how you can appeal their decision

If the EA decide to carry out a Statutory Assessment they will:

- Write to the parent explaining the procedures of the Statutory Assessment and will request Advices/Reports from parents/carers, the school, medical, educational psychology service and therapists if involved, and any other relevant professionals.
- They will give a name of a SEN Link Officer who will be the parent's contact.
- They will explain the parent's rights to make representations within a specified period. This must be no less than 22 days
- As part of this process the EA will ask you to complete a consent and a Parental Advice form. There are guidelines on how to complete your Advice form in the Code of Practice (Part 3.46, page 34). The named EA officer can also provide guidance. Include all the information that you feel will be relevant.
- Following the assessment, if the EA decides that they are required to issue a Statement of SEN, you will receive a Proposed Statement. You will be asked to name your preferred school. You can ask for changes if you feel something has been omitted or not specific enough, you can also ask for a meeting. You can ask for more time to consider the Proposed Statement.
- The EA will consult with the named school to decide if they can comply with your preference of school and if the school can meet your child's needs as outlined in the Proposed Statement. A copy of the final Statement, naming the school, will be sent to the parents and forwarded to the school.



## What is a Statement of Special Educational Needs?

A Statement of Special Educational Needs (Statement) is a legal document which sets out a child's educational and non-educational needs and outlines how the Education Authority (EA) will meet those needs in an educational setting.

**Parents will be issued a Proposed Statement, along with a copy of all the Advices/Reports received, as part of the Statutory Assessment.**

There are six parts to a Statement

### Part 1 Introduction

This contains the child's name, address, date of birth, and the names and addresses of the child's parents or guardians

### Part 2 Special Educational Needs

The description of the child's educational needs as identified during the Statutory Assessment and described in the Advices/Reports received as part of the assessment.

### Part 3 Special Educational Provision other than Placement

This section will outline:

- what the special educational provision aims to meet (the objectives)
- the provision that the Education Authority considers is required to meet the needs as described in Part 2 of the Statement
- any arrangements made for (1) setting short term educational targets and (2) to monitor and review the child's progress

### Part 4 Placement

This section will be left blank on the Proposed Statement so that the parent may express their preference. On the final Statement this section will contain the type and name of the school or other institution that the Education Authority considers appropriate.

### Part 5 Non-Educational Needs

Describes any non-educational needs as identified within the Reports from the Health Trust services, or other agencies and the Education Authority

### Part 6 Non-Educational Provision

Describes how the child will get help to meet any non-educational needs through the arrangements agreed between the Education Authority and the Health Services

## Considerations when you receive your Proposed Statement:

- Have you received copies of all the Advices/Reports?
- Does the Statement give an accurate and detailed description of all your child's needs as identified in the Advices/Reports?
- Are there any needs identified in the Advices/Reports that have been left out, or are vague and not reflective of the description in the Advices?
- For each educational need described in Part 2 is there matching provision in Part 3?
- Is the special educational needs provision specified and quantified?
- When you read Part 3 do you know exactly the type and level of support your child will receive and from whom?
- Is there any condition or disability which is only listed in Part 5 'Non-Educational Needs' which the evidence shows impacts on their learning and therefore may also be included in Part 2 as a SEN?

## What Happens Next?

You can make written comments (representations) on the content of the Statement within 15 days of receiving the Proposed Statement. You have the right to request a meeting to discuss any aspect of the Proposed Statement. From the date of the meeting, you have another 15 days to submit further representations.

Deciding if the Proposed Statement adequately meets your child's needs is an important decision for a parent. If you are unhappy with the Statement or have difficulty understanding what it means, speak to the SEN Link Officer. If agreement can't be reached and the EA proceeds to issue the final Statement, they will explain your right to appeal their decision.

## Choosing a School

You can express your preference for a school. The EA will consult with the school to be named on the final Statement. If the EA decides not to name a parent's choice of school on the Statement, they will suggest other schools available. If you wish your child to be placed in a non-grant aided school in Northern Ireland you can make representations for that school within 15 days of the Proposed Statement being issued.

For further information on Statements and fuller information on choosing a school refer to the Code of Practice, see link to the Code on our website <https://senac.co.uk/advice-useful-reading/>



Below are brief explanations of words, phrases and terms frequently used in special education

**Annual review:** the review of a Statement of Special Educational Needs which the Education Authority must undertake every year. The purpose of the review is to ensure your child's needs are being met and the provision on the Statement is still appropriate.

**DARS (Global Mediation):** free and independent service provided by Global Mediation. This service works towards avoiding and resolving disagreements between parents and the EA, or parents and a school, regarding children with SEN.

**Differentiation:** ways in which a teacher may change teaching methods, classroom organisation and practice, or use of resources to meet a child's learning needs

**Education Authority (EA):** The Education Authority is a regional body with responsibility for the provision and delivery of education and youth services.

**Educational Psychologist:** The Education Psychology Service provides information, advice, training and guidance for families, carers and school staff. Each educational setting and school have a named Educational Psychologist, who works with the teachers and staff to identify children and young people who are presenting with a barrier to their learning. They can provide early intervention support and carry out assessments to monitor and review progress and training and development work for staff in educational settings.

**Learning Support Coordinator (LSC):** this is the new name for the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (**SENCo**). The LSC will be responsible for coordinating the preparation and implementation of Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) for those children/young people who require SEN provision. They will guide teaching staff on the creation, monitoring and review of PLPs.

**Named EA Officer:** liaises with parents over arrangements relating to Statutory Assessment & making of a Statement. When the EA contact you to say they are going to carry out a Statutory Assessment you will be given the name of your SEN Link Officer.

**Note in Lieu:** If the EA carry out a Statutory Assessment but decide not to issue a Statement, they may issue a Note in Lieu (NiL) of a Statement. The NiL will explain the reasons why a Statement is not being issued and can outline their recommendations, with supporting evidence from the Statutory Assessment, on how your child's needs will be met.

**Personal Learning Plan (PLP)** – replaces the **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** a document which describes what difficulties a child is having, targets for learning and what the school is doing to support them and help them to make progress. It will outline the type of the provision planned and what it will look like, who will be involved and what special equipment or resources will be used.

**SENDIST:** The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) is an independent body that deals with appeal cases in certain situations where a parent is in disagreement with the EA.

**Medical Register:** Pupils with a medical diagnosis/es will be recorded on the Medical Register. Schools will add a pupil to the Medical Register based on information provided by their parents or carers or from a Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT).

**SEN Register:** This is a list of pupils in a school who need special educational provision. It includes specific information about what their difficulties are. Only the school can decide if a child's name should be placed on the SEN Register. Every child on the SEN register must have a PLP created, maintained and reviewed for them.

A pupil can be recorded on **both** the SEN Register and the Medical Register if they have both a medical need and special educational needs.

**SEN Link Officer:** this will be a named person from the EA who will discuss the content of the Proposed Statement with parents, explain the process including the right of appeal. They will consult with the appropriate school and discuss further options.

**Special Educational Provision:** this is educational provision that is additional to or different from that generally available to children of the same age in an ordinary school. The provision is intended to help children and young people with SEN or disabilities access the curriculum at school.

**EA Statutory Assessment and Review Service (SARS):** The Statutory Assessment and Review Service (SARS) has two main purposes: to consider requests for Statutory Assessment of children and young people's educational needs; and to make and maintain Statements of Special Educational Needs when appropriate.

**EA Transition Plan:** Plan to help with a smooth transition when the young person leaves school. Transition planning meetings take place as part of the Annual Review process with young people aged 14 +.

**EA Transitions Service 14+:** advice and information on possible pathways into training, supported employment, Further Education and employment.





If a child has special educational needs (SEN) the school will take account of the Code of Practice and apply the framework of support set out within the Code to identify, assess, provide for and review the child's needs.

The SEN Code of Practice and the Supplement to the Code outlines how help can be provided in school. This staged process is used to help identify and assess your child's needs and provide support.

Currently children are recorded under a 3 Stage framework set-out within a **new** Code of Practice. However, this new Code of Practice has not yet become operative, and the Education Authority apply the 3-stage framework for recording purposes only. The current 1998 Code of Practice remains the operative statutory guidance for assessing and providing for special educational needs.

**NB: This information on the SEN Framework will be updated when the new Code becomes fully operative.**

### Summary of the 3 Stage SEN Framework as recorded on the SEN Register

#### Stage 1

If a child is identified as having special educational needs and requires SEN provision, they will be recorded on Stage 1 of the SEN Register. This will be decided by the school's Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) who is responsible for maintaining the SEN Register. If a child has identified medical needs, they may also be recorded on the school's Medical Register.

At Stage 1 a **Personal Learning Plan (PLP)** will be drafted. This is a detailed plan of targets for the child, based on the needs of the child. The learning plan will set out how the targets will be achieved and how they will be monitored. The plan will be reviewed twice a year. The new PLP is a standardised document which will be the same in all schools. In the 5 Stage system this is known as an Individual Learning Plan (IEP).

The school will collect and record information and monitor the child's progress. If your child requires additional support, they will be recorded at Stage 1 while a referral to the EA Support services and/or Educational Psychology Service is made and until the additional support is available.

#### Stage 2

A child will be recorded at Stage 2 once the additional and specialist provision through the EA's Pupil Support Services, or HSCT services are in place. **A child will only be recorded at Stage 2 when they are receiving additional support, or when a child is undergoing a Statutory Assessment of their educational needs.**

If, after school support plus any external support, there is not enough progress, then a Statutory Assessment may be needed. An assessment will allow the EA to decide what further SEN provision is needed for your child.

#### Stage 3

When the Statutory Assessment is completed, the EA may decide to issue a **Statement of Special Educational Needs**. A Statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) is a legal document that sets out your child's needs and the SEN provision that will be put in place to meet those needs.

The EA will issue a Statement if they decide that the help your child needs cannot be provided for from the resources normally available to mainstream schools.

The EA have a legal duty to specify and arrange the provision as it is written in Part 3 of the Statement.

### Requesting a Statutory Assessment

A Statutory Assessment may be started by the EA following a request by the school or from a parent.

As a parent you have the right to request the EA make a Statutory Assessment of your child's special educational needs.

You can make a request for a Statutory Assessment on the EA's website <https://statutoryassessment.eani.org.uk/> or by writing to the SEN Officer in your EA regional office.

If the school have done all they can to support your child and you still believe your child needs more help, or if your child is under school age and you believe they may need extra help or provision when starting school, then you could consider a Statutory Assessment.

If you make the request yourself, you will know exactly when it was made. You should speak to your school first about your concerns and your decision to request a Statutory Assessment.

In your request include any relevant information on your child's special educational needs. Keep a copy of your request and a note of the date it was sent. The Education Authority are required to inform you of their decision within six weeks from the date the request was received.

After the Statutory Assessment is completed the Education Authority will decide if it needs to issue a Statement. If the Education Authority decides **not** to issue a Statement, you have the right to appeal.



## What is an Annual Review?

All Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) are reviewed at least once a year to ensure the Statement and school placement remain appropriate to the child's needs.

## Who carries out the Annual Review?

It is the Education Authority's responsibility to review the Statement and they will inform the school when the review is due. The school will carry out the review on the EA's behalf.

## What is the parent's role in the Annual Review?

When an Annual Review meeting is held it is important for a parent to attend and contribute. It is quite distinct from a parent/teacher meeting because it is the Statement that is under review. Important decisions could be made about your child's needs and the special educational provision.

- Parents will be asked to give a written contribution and receive copies of all other contributions from those involved in the review. This will usually be at least two weeks in advance of the review date.
- If a parent does not attend or provide a contribution this will be recorded on the review report form with any reasons given.
- Currently review meetings are held annually. However, once the new Code of Practice becomes operative meetings will only be held at Transition or Key stages, unless either the school or parent requests a meeting.
- The review meeting will usually take place in the child's school or sometimes online. Parents may wish to bring a friend, relative or advisor to the meeting.
- If there are any major changes in the child's life that may affect their learning, these should be discussed.
- This is an opportunity for parents to raise concerns or questions about the appropriateness of and the provision on the Statement.

After the Annual Review a report, summarising the Review and the educational targets, will be forwarded to the EA including any agreed requests or recommendations. Any decisions the EA make following the review meeting will be forwarded to the parents, the school and all those who took part in the review.

NB: This is a brief overview of the Annual Review process. For further information you should refer to The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, and the EA's 'Annual Review Notes of Guidance' which can be downloaded from their website <https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/annual-review-notes-of-guidance>

## Transition Reviews

The first annual review held after age 14 and each subsequent annual review is referred to as a Transition Review focusing on planning for a young person's move from school into adult life.

## Who might be involved:

- Parents and the young person
- School principal and other relevant school staff
- Representative from the Careers Service
- Representative from the Health and Social Care Trust
- Transitions Coordinator from the EA
- Relevant voluntary organisations.

## Transition Plan

A Transition Plan will be put in place incorporating the information provided from all relevant agencies and individuals involved. The purpose of the Plan is to ensure a positive transition which is relevant to the needs of the young person.

When a young person with a Statement of Special Educational Needs leaves school, the final Transition Plan is shared with outside agencies as appropriate.

## Areas addressed by the Plan may include:

- Support and curriculum needs
- Work skills, strengths, needs, opportunities etc.
- Health issues or considerations
- Young person's goals hopes and aspirations etc.
- Development of independence skills
- Identifying any new professionals or services that may need to be involved
- Relevant education provision after the age of 16 years

For further information on Transition Reviews:

- Speak/meet with the school.
- Contact the EA's Transition Service for guidance or clarification at any stage of the process



Parents have a right within the Statutory Special Educational Needs (SEN) Legislation to appeal certain Education Authority (EA) decisions relating to their child's special educational needs. An appeal can be made to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST).

### What is the SENDIST?

This is an independent body which considers a parental appeal on decisions taken by the EA where the parents disagree with the EA decision. SENDIST also consider claims of disability discrimination in relation to a child in school.

### What EA decisions can be appealed?

Under the current statutory SEN system, a parent can appeal to SENDIST if the EA:

- Decide not to carry out a Statutory Assessment of the child's special educational needs, following a request by the parent or child's school, but only if no assessment was carried out in the previous six months.
- Does not issue a Statement of the child's special educational needs following a Statutory Assessment. Or if the EA have issued a Note in Lieu which is a document issued in place of a Statement. The Note sets out the child's needs and how they will be met within the school's resources.

Where the EA has issued a Statement of Special Educational Needs or amended a previous Statement a parent can appeal the following:

- The description of the child's special educational needs in Part 2 of the statement.
- The description of the special educational provision set out in Part 3 of the Statement.
- The school named in Part 4 of the Statement or if the EA decide not to name a school in Part 4 of the Statement.
- If the EA have turned down a parent's request to change the school named in the Statement if the Statement has been in place for a year and the request has been for a grant aided school
- If the EA does not amend a Statement following a re-assessment.
- If the EA ceases to maintain an existing Statement.

### How to Appeal

If you disagree with the EA about how your child's needs should be assessed or met, you can appeal within **two months** of the date of the letter from the EA. Complete the Notice of Appeal and return it to the address provided by the SENDIST. You will need to give your reasons for appealing and provide copies of relevant documents.

We highly recommend downloading the 'How to Appeal' Booklet before appealing.

Once the appeal has been registered at SENDIST the EA will inform SENDIST if they are going to oppose your appeal. A Case Statement must then be provided by both the EA and the parent to SENDIST within 30 working days. SENDIST will send copies of all papers to the parent following the Case Statement period and the appeal may progress to a Hearing. Forms and guidance can be downloaded from here <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/node/31552>

### Get Advice and Help

This resource provides a summary of the process. It is advantageous to get further advice and information when taking an appeal.

### SENAC

You can speak to an adviser on SENAC's Adviceline for initial information or contact SENAC's Tribunal Support and Representation Service. Details can be found on the advice pages of our website <https://senac.co.uk/advice-useful-reading/> see also the downloadable factsheet in the Appeals section

### Special Educational Needs & Disability Tribunal (SENDIST)

SENDIST have produced a 'How to Appeal' booklet, which is a comprehensive guide on all aspects of appealing including the timeline of the process, information on what SENDIST require in terms of content of the Notice of Appeal and Case Statement and the documents required. This booklet also contains the Notice of Appeal form. We recommend downloading this guide before appealing.

**Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal Publications | Department of Justice** (<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/node/31552>)

### DARS – Global Mediation

The Education Authority must inform you of the option of mediation services. This is currently voluntary and does not affect the right of appeal. Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service (DARS) is a free, independent service run by Global Mediation <https://www.globalmediation.co.uk/service/dars/>

This service provides a forum to help resolve disagreements between parents, schools and/or the Education Authority and is not only limited to appealable issues. DARS does not have the authority to influence any decision or outcome of an appeal.

If you have been informed of your right to appeal and you decide to try mediation first, note that the 2-month time limit for the appeal continues to run. In the event of matters not being resolved informally, you may still need to file an appeal within the timeframe. The appeal can be withdrawn at any stage.

**NB: This information will be updated to reflect any future changes to the Special Educational Needs legislation.**

There have been no changes made to the current appeal process or rights of appeal as listed above. However, potential inclusion of young people's right to appeal and new appeal rights



Navigating the complexities of special education provision can be stressful, emotional and confusing. As a parent advocating for your child, there is much that you can do to overcome the challenges involved and gain confidence in your ability to speak on behalf of your child. Hopefully you will have a good relationship with the school and feel supported, listened to and respected. Whether or not this has been your experience, you have the right to be involved and informed.

### Get Informed

Lack of information can be one of the greatest obstacles facing parents. Do not assume that you will be provided with all the information you need. It is important you gather as much information as you can:

- Seek advice and information from the class teacher, the Education Authority (EA), other agencies or voluntary organisations. Speak to the Learning Support Coordinator/SENCO in your school. If your child has a Statement of SEN contact the EA.
- If required, ask to see any relevant school policies including the school's special educational needs policy.
- Talk to those involved with your child.
- Keep a file of all letters/emails you have sent or received, reports and minutes from meetings and any other relevant documents about your child.
- Keep a note of dates of decisions, deadlines for actions or responses, review meetings, meetings with the school etc.
- Familiarise yourself with how the SEN system works by reading the Code of Practice.

### Preparing for Meetings

If you are anxious about a meeting with the school, the EA or any other agency or professional involved with your child or want to get the most out of a meeting, being prepared will help.

#### Before the meeting:

- If you do not know who will attend the meeting, ask who will be involved and what their role is.
- If you did not request the meeting, make sure you know the purpose of the meeting.
- Read over all the reports, letters, documents relevant to the meeting. If you are missing a copy of something you know you might need, ask for another copy before the meeting.
- Think about what outcome you want or what you would like the meeting to achieve.
- Make a note of all the questions you wish to ask and bring them into the meeting with you.

#### At the meeting:

- It may be helpful to take someone along with you for support, to take notes and remind you if you have forgotten to ask something.
- It is easy to become emotional or overwhelmed in a meeting so having notes with you will help to keep you focused and feel more in control.
- Make sure your concerns are recorded in the report or minutes of the meeting. If no minutes are taken, follow up with an email/letter so your concerns are recorded.
- Try to get your views across clearly and calmly.

- Discuss what is possible, make proposals and speak about your concerns. Be prepared to consider and discuss the solutions offered by others involved with your child.
- Do not be afraid to ask for clarification if there are recommendations or decisions in the meeting that you do not understand. Ask for them to be stated again or explained.

**You do not have to agree to anything that you are unsure of or concerned about. Ask for time to consider your decision**

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If you feel you need more information, there are organisations and groups who can offer further support/information. Talking with, and learning from, other parents who have similar experiences is invaluable. See the Useful Links section on SENAC's website for details of more organisations that offer support <https://senac.co.uk/useful-links/>

For Information on a wide range of family support services and registered childcare services across NI visit Family Support NI <https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk>

### Making a Complaint

There may be times when a parent is concerned about the provision their child is getting, or an aspect of their child's education that they are unhappy about. There are several things a parent can do.

- Talk to the school first, ask to meet with the Learning Support Coordinator/SENCO and/or the school principal
- Put your concerns in writing to the school principal and request to meet with them.
- If relevant ask for a copy of the school's complaints procedure.

Hopefully discussions with the school can resolve the concerns. However, if this is not the case a parent can put their concerns in writing to the school's Board of Governors.

If a child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs and you believe that the provision on the Statement is not being carried out or the provision has been reduced without any amendments to the Statement, then contact your SEN Link Officer. If you do not have the name of the Link Officer, call the EA's Sen Helpline 028 9598 5960 – they will provide the name and contact details of the SEN Link Officer allocated to your child's case.

### Appeal

If you decide to file an appeal against a decision that the EA has made, you have 2 months from when you received the decision. The Tribunal is an independent body, which has no connection with the EA. You can continue to speak to the EA to see if the disagreement can be resolved without the need for an appeal hearing.

### Mediation

Parents/carers also have the right to contact the Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service. The service is run independently by Global Mediation <https://www.globalmediation.co.uk/service/dars/>. It is an independent, confidential and informal forum where points of disagreement can be clearly identified. The mediator will attempt to work towards a solution that everyone can agree.



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