



UNIT-1

Introduction to Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ *By the end of this unit, the learning will be able to:*
- ✓ Define special educational needs and discuss the potential consequences of SEN for school-age children.
- ✓ Discuss the basics of identifying special educational needs in children.
- ✓ Understand the various parties involved in supporting children with special educational needs.



Unit 1

Introduction to Special Educational Needs (SEN) Teaching

Policies and Codes of Practice

Codes of practice exist to provide teachers and educational authorities with helpful guidance with regard to their activities and responsibilities under Part IV of the 1996 Education Act. Any entity that receives government funding for the provision of early-years education is bound by certain principles and policies, which must be adhered to at all times. It is therefore important for teachers in all educational settings to have an established familiarity with the primary principles and policies of special educational needs (SEN) teaching and how to support those affected by SEN.

The primary purpose of these official codes of practice is to ensure that all children with identified SEN reach their full potential, are fully included in their educational environments and are able to progress successfully on to adulthood. In most instances, children with special educational needs are able to have their needs met in a mainstream educational setting. However, some may need further support from specialist SEN providers, or may need educating in a specialist setting.

Though supporting children with special educational needs can be complex and challenging, it is also one of the most rewarding fields in early-years education for qualified and capable professionals.



Definition of Special Educational Needs

Children have special educational needs if they have a *learning difficulty* which calls for *special educational provision* to be made for them.

Children have a *learning difficulty* if they:

- a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority
- c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them.

Children must not be regarded as having a learning difficulty solely because the language or form of language of their home is different from the language in which they will be taught.

Special educational provision means:

- (a) for children of two or over, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of their age in schools maintained by the LEA, other than special schools, in the area
- (b) for children under two, educational provision of any kind.

See Section 312, Education Act 1996



Definitions in the Children Act 1989 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

A child is disabled if he is blind, deaf or dumb or suffers from a mental disorder of any kind or is substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disability as may be prescribed.

Section 17 (11), Children Act 1989

A person has a disability for the purposes of this Act if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Section 1(1), Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Children with special educational needs may fall within one of these categories or a combination thereof. It is of the utmost importance for those working in early-years education to fully understand and fulfil their obligations to the children they work with.

Primary Principles

All codes of conduct in relation to special educational needs are built upon a series of primary principles, which should be understood and followed at all times by those working in the field:

- The needs of a child with SEN should be understood and met
- Most children with SEN can be educated in a mainstream environment
- The child with special educational needs should have their own views taken into account
- Parents play a role of importance in the education of their children
- All children with SEN should be provided with access to the appropriate curriculum and ensured irrelevant, broad and balanced education

Important Success Factors

- Educational institutions should utilise their resources and establish a culture in such a way as to ensure the needs of *all* children are met
- Schools must work closely with local education authorities to create appropriate programmes of education and devise appropriate interventions
- The views and wishes of the child with special educational needs should be taken into account, in accordance with their age and understanding
- Educators and professionals working with SEN pupils must maintain close partnerships with the parents or guardians of the children



- The views and wishes of the parents of the child with special educational needs must be established and taken into account
- All efforts, activities and interventions are assessed and reviewed on a regular basis, in order to establish their impact and effectiveness
- If the special educational needs of a child are determined by an LEA, the statements are clear, detailed, time limited and reviewed each year

Strategic Partnerships

In order for the requirements of a young person with special educational needs to be successfully met, strategic partnerships must be formed between all entities involved – teachers, schools, pupils, parents, social services, LEAs and so on. Though these partnerships are only successful when all parties involved both understand their responsibilities and have clearly defined and aligned objectives in mind. All of which is fundamentally reliant on policy transparency and good communication.

In all instances, it is the responsibility of the Local Education Authority to collaborate closely with partner agencies, in order to establish policies and protocols for the collection and management of information.

The Role of the LEA

In accordance with the School Relations Code of Practice, it is the responsibility of the Local Education Authority to prioritise the promotion and provision of education of the highest standard for all children across the board, including children with special educational needs.

One of the primary functions of the local education authority is to ensure appropriate SEN arrangements are put in place, which means making sure that:

- Children with special educational needs have their requirements identified and assessed as quickly as possible, in order for subsequent provisions to be made.
- Appropriate support is available for educational institutions within the locality, in order to benefit the education of children with special educational needs.
- Children with special educational needs benefit from the provision of co-ordinated support, by way of collaborative efforts between schools, parents, social services and so on.
- Effective systems for monitoring and accountability in the provision of education for SEN children are developed.
- All SEN efforts, activities, policies and procedures are reviewed and reassessed on a regular basis, in accordance with section 315 of the Education Act 1996.

Another responsibility of the Local Education Authority is to ensure that existing and planned funding arrangements are appropriate, in order to enable the educational facilities in



question to support the needs of children with SEN.

Children with Special Educational Needs

A child is considered to have special educational needs if they have a disability or disorder that affects their ability to learn and progress at the same rate as other children of the same age. Children with special educational needs may struggle with their schoolwork, encounter difficulties communicating with those around them or exhibit behavioural issues of various levels of severity.

'Special educational needs' is a formal legal definition that recognises the educational difficulties encountered by children of all ages. Though parents will always play an important role in the development of children with identified SEN, the criticality of a suitably nurturing, well-equipped and appropriate educational environment cannot be overstated.

When a child is identified as having special educational needs, the teachers, teaching assistants and general support staff they come into contact with will provide the additional support they need on a day to day basis. This may include help with:

- everyday schoolwork and assignments
- organising and completing homework
- reading, writing and arithmetic
- socialising in class ensuring break periods
- working with peers on group tasks
- behaving in the appropriate way at school

The extent of the pupil's physical and/or sensory difficulties will determine the level of support required and who is suitably qualified to provide it.

Identifying Different Kinds of Special Educational Needs

One of the biggest challenges when identifying special educational needs and working with SEN pupils is the way in which each and every case is unique. It's comparatively rare for a child to fit the definition of a condition perfectly – something referred to as a 'classic' case, when it does occur.

Most cases will be much more complex, perhaps combining traits of multiple disabilities. For example, a child with Down's Syndrome who also has ASD, or a child diagnosed with ADD who is also dyslexic.

All of which can make it particularly difficult to make the necessary allowances and adjustments for all children with special educational needs, given how the needs of each individual pupil will be unique.

To put the matter into some kind of context, what follows is a brief summary of just a few of the more common special educational needs that may call for intervention for the benefit of the pupil affected:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ADHD | Behavioural difficulties- | Developmental delay |
| Anxiety | EBD, SEBD, SEMH | Down syndrome |
| Anorexia | Brain Injury | Duane Syndrome |
| Aphasia | Bulimia | Dyscalculia |
| Asperger's syndrome | Cancer | Dysgraphia |
| Auditory processing disorder | Cerebral atrophy | Dyslexia |
| Autistic spectrum disorder | Cerebral palsy | Dyspraxia |
| | Conduct disorder | Echolalia |
| | Cystic fibrosis | Epilepsy |



**Fine and gross motor skill
delay**
Fragile X syndrome
**Global developmental
delay**
Glue Ear
Hearing impairment
High-functioning autism
Irlen Syndrome
Hydrocephalus
Learning difficulties
**Moderate learning
difficulties**
**Multi-sensory
impairment**
Muscular dystrophy
**Obsessive compulsive
disorder**
**Oppositional defiant
disorder**
**Pathological demand
avoidance**
**Pervasive developmental
disorder**
Prader-Willi syndrome
**Profound and multiple
learning disability**
Rett Syndrome
**Semantic pragmatic
disorder**
**Sensory processing
disorder**
**Severe learning
difficulties**
Smith-Magenis syndrome
Spina bifida
Social anxiety disorder
Social skills difficulties
Sotos syndrome
SWAN
Tourette's syndrome
Visual impairment
**Visual processing
disorder**



Though again, the provision of appropriate support is further complicated by the fact that many children with SEN display traits of multiple disabilities.

Detecting the Signs of Special Educational Needs

Exhibiting one or more of the following behaviours in no way confirms that the child in question has special educational needs. However, these are some of the most common signs of SEN in children of school age, which should not be overlooked or ignored:

- A tendency to be easily distracted
- Frequent outbursts or disruptive behaviour
- Children who become angry over trivial things
- Evidence of low confidence and self-esteem
- The inability or unwillingness to socialise
- Signs of stress when presented with simple tasks
- Reluctance or inability to complete homework
- Poor classroom performance compared to peers
- Stress and anxiety when asked to read or write
- Reluctance to read out loud in class
- A strong dislike for school in general
- Issues with organisation and punctuality
- Difficulties remembering more than one instruction
- Indecipherable drawings and paintings
- Reluctance to write and/or poor handwriting
- Awkwardness and physical clumsiness (spatial awareness issues)
- Focussed listening by the inability to understand instructions
- Difficulties building or maintaining friendships
- Reluctance to make or hold eye-contact with others
- Shyness and signs of social anxiety
- A withdrawn and disinterested demeanour
- Regular and/or volatile mood swings
- Difficulties dealing with change or surprises

It's not uncommon for the vast majority of children to go through periods where they may exhibit some of these signs and symptoms, at least to a relatively minor extent. As a general rule of thumb, however, a child should be considered for a specialist SEN assessment if they demonstrate any more than three or four of these behaviours at the same time.

Though again, this is far from a formal rule – any indication whatsoever that a child may be struggling with their education is just cause for further investigation.

Irrespective of whether you work as a teacher, a teaching assistant or a member of support staff, it is *your* responsibility to ensure any potential signs or symptoms of special educational needs are noted and acted upon accordingly. You must never waste time waiting for others to spot and flag up potential difficulties, or assume it is someone else's responsibility to set the wheels in motion.

In almost all instances, children benefit from the identification of educational and developmental difficulties at the earliest possible stage – not at a later date.

Who is Involved in Supporting Children with SEN?

The unique requirements of each child with special educational needs will need to be met by an appropriate support network and the development of a suitable educational programme. Along with teachers, teaching assistants and parents, other professionals involved in supporting children with SEN include the following:

- **Special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs)**, who work closely with schools and specialist educational environments.
- **Speech and language therapists**, where children with special educational needs encounter communication difficulties.
- **Physiotherapists** play an essential role in supporting children with a wide range of physical disabilities that may affect the quality of their education.
- **Occupational therapists** may be brought in to assist children who encounter difficulties with coordination, motor skills and general everyday functioning.
- **Specialist psychologists** will often be asked to perform a variety of assessments and tests on children with SEN, to help paint a clearer picture of their difficulties and requirements.

A collective decision will usually be made by the pupil's parents and teachers with regard to who else should be involved in their education. Though formal recommendations may also be made by the Local Education Authority, after a statutory assessment of the child is carried out.

Working in SEN Education – Tips for New Starters

Starting out in an SEN educational role for the first time can be exciting and unnerving in equal measures. Even if you already have experience working with children, the challenges that accompany SEN teaching are unique. One of the core requirements for working in an SEN setting being the ability to expect the unexpected and deal with any contingency that may come your way, at all times with the benefit of the pupils you work with at heart.

Though every educational environment and SEN pupil is unique, there are several good practice guidelines for new starters that apply universally. So, whether starting out as a newly qualified teaching assistant or moving into SEN pupil support for the first time, here are a few basic guidelines to help you get started:

1. Take things slowly at first

During the early stages of your new post in particular, it is essential to take things slowly. This is for two reasons – the first of which being to avoid overloading yourself with more than you can comfortably or competently handle. Secondly, working closely with SEN pupils means first taking the time to get to know them, focusing more on social interaction than conventional education. Introduce yourself, explain who you are, tell them about yourself, ask them questions and build a sense of trust and familiarity, prior to moving onto more academic matters.

2. Watch for signs of discomfort or frustration

It's important to remember that many SEN pupils encounter extreme difficulties communicating frustration, anger, upset and discomfort in what could be called a 'conventional' way. Nevertheless, they may give off a variety of non-verbal signals as to how they are feeling, even if they are deliberately avoiding discussing their feelings out loud. This is where the attentiveness of teachers and teaching assistants is invaluable, who must be on the lookout for these kinds of early signs and signals at all times. Offering support before the



situation deteriorates and potentially becomes disruptive is always the preferable approach.

3. Remain positive and optimistic at all times

This is important as it isn't only *your* positivity and optimism you should be concerned with. Working with SEN pupils, you will be expected to serve as a role model, setting the best possible example for every pupil you come into contact with. In addition, you also need to acknowledge and accept the fact that when things go wrong, it isn't your fault. Dealing with upset, angry, confrontational or downright distraught pupils can make it difficult to stay calm and positive, but you must – for *their* benefit.

4. Be flexible and open minded

Something to remember when working with SEN pupils is that what works for one child may be ineffective (or even counterproductive) for another. You cannot realistically expect one tactic or strategy to work for *all* the SEN pupils you work with. Working in a special educational needs environment is a constant learning experience in its own right, highlighting the importance of being flexible and open minded at all times. The more flexible and accommodating you are with your approach, the bigger the benefits for the pupils you support.

5. Establish a routine and stick to it

Again, this is important for two reasons. The first of which being the obvious benefit of getting into an effective routine when balancing a complex and busy workload. Though perhaps more importantly, SEN pupils are often far more confident and comfortable when there is a consistent routine and a sense of predictability in the classroom environment. Plan ahead and let them know exactly what's to come and when, rather than springing surprises on them out of the blue.

Further Reading: