

# Identifying and assessing your child's needs

This factsheet explains:

- what 'additional support needs' are
- how local authorities, nurseries and schools identify pupils' needs
- the different types of assessments that might be carried out
- how you will be involved in assessing your child's needs
- how to request an assessment of your child's needs
- what happens if your child is found to have additional support needs.

## What are 'additional support needs'?

A pupil has 'additional support needs' if they need extra or different help than what is normally given to other pupils their age.

A pupil might need additional support for many different reasons. Some might need extra help for a short time, and others might need support for the whole time they are in education.

A pupil does not need a diagnosis to be entitled to extra help with their learning. If a pupil is struggling at school or nursery for any reason, their school or nursery should try and find out the reason for this and provide them with the support they need.

All looked after children are assumed to have additional support needs, unless they are assessed as not needing extra help to learn. Under the law, a child is 'looked after' if a local authority has taken on some legal responsibility for their care and wellbeing.

## What responsibilities do the local authority and school have?

Local authorities, through their schools and nurseries, must make arrangements to identify which pupils need additional support, and the particular needs of those pupils<sup>1</sup>.

They should try to identify a pupil's additional support needs early, with as little disruption to their education as possible. You should be involved throughout the process of identifying what kind of help your child might need at school or nursery.

Every local authority must publish information about the arrangements they make for identifying which pupils need extra help. You can find information about your local authority's arrangements on their website.

## How will the school or nursery identify my child's support needs?

As part of daily learning and teaching, schools and nurseries keep track of each pupil's progress. This is an ongoing process of gathering information about a pupil. It happens through their day to day observations of how a pupil is getting on, as well as things like the results of in-class tests.

This helps teachers and other school and nursery staff to:

- get a picture of a pupil's progress, achievements, and any areas where they struggle
- work out the next steps pupils should take in their learning as they move through the curriculum
- identify whether a pupil has additional support needs.

If the school or nursery picks up that your child has (or might have) additional support needs, they might arrange for specific assessments to help them find out:

- the reasons why your child needs support
- what kind of support will help them get the best from their education.

## Assessments of your child's needs

Assessments might mean a one-off appointment or series of appointments for your child, or a longer period of closer observation and monitoring their progress.

<sup>1</sup>Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended

Depending on the nature of your child's needs, some assessments might be done by staff at the school or nursery. For example, a school might arrange for their support for learning teacher to assess whether a pupil has dyslexia.

The school or nursery can also make referrals to other professionals, who can include:

- education professionals from the local authority, like an educational psychologist or visual impairment teacher
- health professionals from the NHS, like a speech and language therapist or a psychologist from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- social workers.

The people assessing your child may observe them in class, speak to them and their teachers and review their work. They may also ask your child to attend appointments in places such as child development centres, hospitals or other medical centres. In some cases, they may ask to observe your child at home to get a full picture of their development and needs.

Your child's support can be adapted as new information comes to light. For example, following an assessment or diagnosis your child's teachers may try new strategies recommended by the specialist involved in the assessment.

## Wellbeing assessments

As well as identifying your child's additional support needs, the professionals involved with them should assess their wellbeing. The Scottish Government has developed an approach called 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) that has eight 'wellbeing indicators' (sometimes called 'SHANARRI indicators'). These help everyone working with a child or young person make sure they are considering the same things and looking at all aspects of their life. The wellbeing indicators help people assess whether your child is:

- Safe
- Healthy
- Achieving
- Nurtured
- Active
- Respected
- Responsible
- Included.

When assessing pupils' wellbeing, schools, nurseries and other professionals should use the following questions:

- What is getting in the way of this child or young person's wellbeing?
- Do I have all the information I need to help this child or young person?
- What can I do now to help this child or young person?
- What can my department do to help this child or young person?
- What additional help, if any, may be needed from others?

Find out more in our factsheet on [Inclusion, equality and wellbeing](#).

## How will I be involved?

If the school or nursery has identified that your child has (or may have) additional support needs, they should contact you to discuss the next steps. This might involve:

- arranging further assessments of your child's needs
- putting in place a plan to monitor your child's progress
- agreeing what support would help your child.

When they are assessing your child's needs, the school, nursery or local authority must ask for your and your child's views. They must take your views and any information you provide about your child into account when they are deciding what your child's needs are. You have knowledge about your child that is valuable to the professionals who work with them. You know your child's strengths, and you will also be aware of areas where they need extra support.

If the school or nursery thinks your child needs a specific assessment of their needs, they should discuss this with you before making any referrals.

You and your child should also be involved in decisions about the support they will receive<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

## What if I want my child's needs to be assessed?

If you think your child may have additional support needs, discuss your concerns first with their school or nursery. They may already be aware of your child's needs and be providing suitable support. If not, you should discuss with them the options available for assessing your child.

You also have the right to ask your local authority, at any time, to:

- assess whether your child has additional support needs
- carry out a specific assessment of your child's needs, such as an educational, psychological or health assessment.

You cannot insist upon a particular kind of assessment (for example, the type of assessment test used) or ask for a particular person to carry it out.

You can ask your GP to make a referral for health assessments and for some services, you can refer your child directly. For example, many speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services take referrals from parents and carers. GPs and health visitors can refer to mental health services.

You can also ask social work services to assess your child's or your family's needs. Social work teams can help you find out what support services may be available, such as befriending services, breaks for you from your caring role, special equipment or adaptations, suitable housing, help at home with personal or domestic care, and welfare benefits advice.

You should keep your child's school or nursery informed of any referrals you make.

If your child is aged 12-15, they may also have the right to ask for an assessment of their needs. Find out more in our factsheet on [Rights of children aged 12-15](#).

If your child is over 16, they can make the request themselves. If they are not able to understand how to do this, you can make the request on their behalf.

## How do I ask for an assessment of my child's additional support needs?

Your request for an assessment must be in a format that can be kept for future reference. This could be a letter, email, video or audio recording. You should send it to the team responsible for additional support for learning in your local authority. You can find the contact for your area on the local authority section of our website ([www.enquire.org.uk/local-authorities](http://www.enquire.org.uk/local-authorities)) or call our helpline for details.

## What should I include in my request?

You should include:

- your name, address and contact number
- your relationship to the child
- the child's name, address and date of birth
- the nursery or school they currently attend
- your preferred language and form of communication—such as phone, email or letter
- a statement that you are formally asking for a specific assessment or examination
- the reasons for your request.

## What should I include in the reasons for my request?

Depending on your child's situation you may want to include:

- a brief description of your child's difficulties, including how they affect their education, e.g. if they struggle to concentrate, have difficulty communicating, or are falling behind with their schoolwork
- any other relevant assessment reports and the contact details of the organisation or person who prepared it.

## What happens after I make a request for an assessment?

The local authority will look at all requests individually. They will decide if they think your child should have the assessment and let you know their decision.

If they agree, they should tell you when the assessment will happen, and who will carry it out.

## How soon can I expect an answer?

There is no legal timescale for a local authority to respond to a request for an assessment. However, it would be reasonable to expect the local authority to acknowledge your request within a few days and then inform you of their decision whether to proceed with the assessment within four weeks. You should contact the person you sent the request to if you have not heard from them within four weeks.

Other agencies that your local authority may ask to be involved in an assessment, such as NHS Boards or other local authorities, must normally carry out their part of the assessment within ten weeks from the date of receiving the request, although there are exceptions to this<sup>3</sup>. If the local authority or the agency cannot do the assessment within the ten weeks, the local authority should let you know and tell you when the assessment is likely to be carried out.

While there can be long waiting lists for some specialist services, your child does not need a formal assessment or diagnosis to get additional support for learning. If your child is struggling at school or nursery and needs extra help, then even if the underlying reasons for this are still uncertain, they should get the help they need.

## Can a local authority refuse my request for a specific assessment?

Yes. They can refuse if they feel the request is unreasonable. They may say it is unreasonable if:

- they do not think it is relevant, given your child's circumstances
- it is unnecessary as there has not been a significant change in your child's circumstances since an earlier assessment
- the assessment seems badly timed, e.g. it is too soon after a previous request
- the assessment would repeat a previous one.

If the local authority refuses to assess your child, they must tell you why.

If you are unhappy with their decision, you have the right to ask for mediation. You could also request independent adjudication. Find out more in our factsheet on [Avoiding and solving problems](#).

## My child has been assessed privately. Does the local authority have to take account of the results?

Schools, nurseries and local authorities should take account of any information you, your child or other agencies involved with your child provide. They do not have a duty to carry out the recommendations in a private assessment, but they should take them into account when they are planning your child's support.

<sup>3</sup>The Additional Support for Learning (Appropriate Agency Request Period and Exceptions) (Scotland) Regulations 2005

## What happens if my child is found to have additional support needs?

If your child has additional support needs, the local authority must provide 'adequate and efficient' support to help them do the best they can at school or nursery. This support should be based on their individual needs. Find out more in our factsheet [Additional support for learning: key facts](#).

The local authority, school or nursery should discuss the support your child needs with you and your child and agree a plan for putting that support in place. Find out more in our factsheet on [Planning your child's support](#).

## Where can I find out more?

### **Local authority information** [www.enquire.org.uk/local-authorities](http://www.enquire.org.uk/local-authorities)

You can find information about your local authority's arrangements for identifying and assessing pupils' support needs on its website. You can also ask your child's school for a copy. Our website has links to the additional support for learning information on each local authority's website. This includes contact details for the person at your local authority that you should send any assessment requests to.

### **Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)** [www.gov.scot/policies/girfec](http://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec)

This page on the Scottish Government's website has information about GIRFEC and wellbeing assessments. Your local authority or school may also be able to provide you with some information about how they apply GIRFEC.



# How Enquire can help

Enquire can help you understand your child's rights to additional support for learning and how to work in partnership with their school or nursery to make sure your child gets the support they need.

Enquire can:

- explain your child's rights to additional support for learning
- listen to any questions and concerns
- advise you on the way forward
- help you find local education and support services.

You can contact our helpline on **0345 123 2303** or **info@enquire.org.uk**  
Access to interpreters is available.

You can also find lots more information about additional support for learning, including our full range of publications, at **www.enquire.org.uk**

The information on our website is available in over 100 languages and with a range of accessibility tools, such as text-to-speech.

Reach is our website for children and young people. Reach helps pupils to understand their rights to feel supported, included, listened to and involved in decisions at school: **www.reach.scot**

Enquire is also a partner in the My Rights, My Say service. My Rights, My Say supports children aged 12-15 with additional support needs to exercise their rights to be involved in decisions about their support in school:  
**www.myrightsmysay.scot**

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