



SEN Support vs EHC Plans: Understanding the Differences in the Early Years and Beyond

RANi Need to Know Guides | SEND in Early years and young person Advisory sheet 6

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A Guide for Parents, Carers, and Young People

What is SEN Support?

SEN Support is the help given to children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) **without an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan**. It is available in all mainstream settings, including:

- Nurseries and early years providers
- Schools and colleges

SEN Support is based on need, not diagnosis.

Disclaimer: This resource is intended to provide general information and should not be considered legal advice. While RANi strives to ensure the content is accurate and current at the time of publication, we cannot accept responsibility for any loss, damage, or inconvenience that may result from using or relying on the information provided.

What is an EHC Plan?

An **Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan** is a **legal document** for children and young people with more complex needs that cannot be met through SEN Support alone. It outlines the:

- Child's or young person's **special educational needs**
- The **provision** required to meet those needs
- Educational placement (e.g. nursery, school, college)
- **Health** and **social care** needs (where relevant)

You must apply for an **EHC needs assessment** to obtain one.

SEN Support: The First Level of Help

Every early years setting, school or college must:

- Identify children with SEN early
- Use a **graduated approach**:
Assess → Plan → Do → Review
- Provide **targeted support** that is additional to and different from what most children receive
- Involve the child, parents/carers, and specialists as needed

Support may include:

- Small group or 1:1 teaching
- Speech and language activities

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- Visual aids and alternative communication
- Behaviour or sensory support
- Regular progress reviews

SEN Support is usually led by the **SENCO** (Special Educational Needs Coordinator).

EHC Plans: Legal and Longer-Term

A child or young person **may need an EHC plan** if:

- They **do not make sufficient progress** with SEN Support alone
- Their needs are **complex and long-term**
- They need **specialist provision**, therapy, or equipment
- They require a **special school or setting**

EHC Plans include:

Section	Content
A	Views, interests and aspirations
B	Special educational needs
C	Health needs related to SEN
D	Social care needs
E	Outcomes

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F	Special educational provision
G	Health provision
H	Social care provision
I	Educational placement
J	Personal budget (if applicable)
K	Advice and information gathered

In the Early Years (0–5)

SEN Support:

- Begins with **early identification** by health visitors, nurseries, or parents
- Delivered through the **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework**
- Early Years settings must use a **graduated approach**
- May involve an Early Years SEN Support Plan or Inclusion Fund

EHC Plan:

- Requested if a child's needs are **exceptionally complex**
 - May lead to special school placement or high-level support in a mainstream nursery
 - Helps with **transition planning** into primary school
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For School-Age Children and Young People (5–25)

SEN Support:

- Tailored interventions in class
- Extra support from teaching assistants or specialist teachers
- Termly review meetings with the SENCO and parents

EHC Plan:

- Statutory document with legal protections
- Annual reviews to check progress and needs
- Can continue up to age 25 if the young person remains in **education or training**

Legal Rights and Key Differences

Feature	SEN Support	EHC Plan
Legal status	Not legally binding	Legally enforceable
Level of need	Mild to moderate	Complex, long-term
Process	In-house by setting	Formal assessment via the local authority
Parent appeal rights	Limited	Right to appeal to SEND Tribunal
Support planning	Graduated approach (Assess, Plan, Do, Review)	Statutory plan with specified provision
Monitoring	SENCO and setting	Annual review + local authority oversight

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How to Move from SEN Support to an EHC Plan

If your child is not making progress with SEN Support, you can:

1. Gather evidence of their needs and provision tried so far
2. Ask the setting to support your case
3. Make a **parental request** to the local authority for an EHC needs assessment

The local authority **must consider** your request and reply within 6 weeks.

Key Points for Parents and Young People

- SEN Support should meet the **majority of needs**
 - EHC Plans are for those needing **high levels of specialist support**
 - Both must be **person-centred**, involving the child/young person and family
 - Always keep records of reports, meetings, and plans
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Support and Resources

You can get further support from:

- **RANi** – Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **Local Offer** - Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **SENDIASS** – Local impartial information and advice service for parents and young people www.iasmanchester.org
- **IPSEA** – Independent Provider of Special Education Advice: www.ipsea.org.uk
- **Contact** – A national charity supporting families with disabled children: www.contact.org.uk

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If you'd like help preparing your request or understanding your appeal options, RANi can provide guidance and templates.

Remember:

Always keep a copy of all correspondence you send, along with proof of postage or delivery. If you send documents by post, we recommend using a **signed-for** service. If sending by email, request a **read receipt** if possible.

Get in Touch

If you need more information or have a question, we're here to help.

Email us: info@rani.org.uk

Please include:

- Your name
- Your child's name
- Your child's date of birth
- Your query

Or, if you prefer, you can fill out our online **contact form** and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

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